

**Tuesday  
31 January 2023**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**Tuesday 31 January 2023**

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# House of Commons

*Tuesday 31 January 2023*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Nagorno-Karabakh

1. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Ind): What diplomatic steps his Department is taking to help support the re-opening of the Lachin corridor and alleviation of the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. [903363]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Leo Docherty):** We seek a return to negotiation and a peaceful settlement to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. I spoke to Armenian Foreign Minister Mirzoyan on 18 January regarding the humanitarian situation there, and I met the Azerbaijani ambassador yesterday and noted the urgent need to reopen the Lachin corridor immediately. The Start Fund, to which the United Kingdom is a significant donor, has activated a £350,000 response to support those affected by the developing situation.

**Dr Huq:** This blockade has now run for 50 days and is placing children at risk of malnutrition because of the lack of food and medicine getting through. We have also seen human rights organisations making claims of extrajudicial killings and abuse of prisoners in Nagorno-Karabakh. Yet, when the Minister wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) to answer her concerns, he bafflingly talked about an expectation that the internal investigation by the Azerbaijan Prosecutor's Office would produce meaningful results. Surely it cannot be right for the same judge and jury to be marking their own homework? Why can we not press for international, independent solutions to this terrible tragedy?

**Leo Docherty:** What we are pressing for is a return to negotiations and a peaceful settlement to this conflict; I will travel to the region in the coming months and I will make that point.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): Is the Minister aware that last week at the Council of Europe we held a debate on this very subject? The benefit of that debate was that both the Azeris and the Armenians were present and participating. It was a tense diplomatic stand-off, because there are other, bigger powers involved in the situation. Does he agree that the situation must be approached very carefully?

**Leo Docherty:** Indeed I do. I am aware of that debate and I applaud my hon. Friend's work on the Council of Europe. We hope that both sides will return to the negotiating table and we will use all the tools at our disposal to ensure that there are no destabilising influences from outside the region.

#### Iran: Nuclear Capability

2. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of Iran's nuclear capabilities. [903364]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly):** Iran's nuclear programme has, sadly, never been more advanced than it is today. Iran continues to escalate its nuclear activities and in doing so threatens international peace and security. We continue to work closely with our international friends and allies to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. The option of engaging more usefully with the joint comprehensive plan of action is in the hands of the Iranians, but they have spectacularly failed to grasp that opportunity.

**Michael Fabricant:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that clear and helpful answer. As he rightly says, Iran is deliberately seeking to breach the JCPOA agreement by enriching uranium. Just as we have led the world in helping Ukraine, I ask that we be the main country now to initiate the snapback, to use the technical term, of the JCPOA agreement, to show that Iran cannot get away without having sanctions applied.

**James Cleverly:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. The future of Iran is in the hands of the Iranians, but the leadership of that country, on this as in so many areas, has demonstrated a spectacular failure of judgment. It is in their gift to alleviate the sanctions imposed upon them through their actions, but they have spectacularly failed to do so. We reserve the right to take further such actions if they do not desist from their attempt to acquire nuclear weapons.

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Can the Foreign Secretary explain how the Government are dealing with the military threat to our allies from Iran through its proxies and through its arms trade and arms sales? What are the Government doing to counter the flow of Iranian drones to Russia to support its illegal war against Ukraine?

**James Cleverly:** Iran's actions, both through militia proxies in the region and through the supply of military weapons to Russia that are then used in Ukraine, are completely unacceptable. We have implemented more than 50 new sanctions designations in recent months in response to Iranian human rights abuses and its military support to Russia. We will continue to work closely with our international partners to take further actions to make it clear that that behaviour is unacceptable.

#### Access to Education for Women

3. **Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help women across the world access education. [903365]

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell):** Britain is leading the campaign to secure education for girls and women across the developing world. This is not, of course, just about the numbers entering school, but about ratcheting up the quality of education overall.

**Wendy Morton:** I very much welcome the support that my right hon. Friend's Department continues to provide to educate women around the world, but can he confirm that he will continue to work with our G7 allies to ensure that they play their part in helping us to get an additional 40 million girls into school by 2026?

**Mr Mitchell:** I hardly dare answer my right hon. Friend's question such is her expertise in this matter. I can tell her that the UK has committed to tackling the global education crisis through the girls' education action plan, which was set up in 2021, and through two G7-endorsed global objectives to get 40 million more girls into school and 20 million more girls reading by the age of 10 by 2026.

**Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab):** In Afghanistan, women are locked out of learning and girls are shut out of school, and the recent ban on aid workers has made the situation much worse. I think that we should stand with women and girls in Afghanistan, so will the Minister confirm that there will not be any cuts to the official development assistance going to Afghanistan?

**Mr Mitchell:** The hon. and gallant Gentleman knows a great deal about Afghanistan from his deep experience. He is absolutely right to say that the violation of women's rights in Afghanistan—particularly girls' schooling—is absolutely outrageous. We are doing everything that we can in terms of expertise, money and influence around the world to ensure that we stop it.

### Myanmar

4. **Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the adequacy of the time taken by his Department to impose sanctions on the Myanmar military regime. [903366]

23. **Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of the human rights situation in Myanmar. [903386]

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan):** The human rights situation in Myanmar is appalling. The regime has cracked down on any dissent. The security forces continue to commit atrocities, including acts of sexual violence and village burnings. The UK has worked quickly, in close co-ordination with partners, to impose 13 tranches of sanctions to target the regime's credibility and its access to finance, weapons and equipment.

**Rushanara Ali:** This week marks the second anniversary of the military coup against Myanmar's civilian Government, who were internationally recognised. There remain many sources of revenue for the military, such as the No. 1 Mining Enterprise and the No. 2 Mining Enterprise. Many Russian and Burmese companies continue to supply arms and equipment to the military but are

yet to be sanctioned. Although I welcome the actions that the Government have taken, can the Minister assure us that the Government will put in the resources needed by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to ensure that those companies are sanctioned, and that consideration will be given to sanctioning aviation fuel, which is being used for airstrikes by the regime in Myanmar, killing civilians in that country?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** The UK Government continue to condemn the military coup in Myanmar, the violence against the people, and the arbitrary detention of members of the Government and civil society. In 2021-22, we provided £49.4 million in aid to Myanmar, including £24 million of lifesaving assistance for 600,000 people. We are committed to preventing the flow of arms to Myanmar, so we continue to impose targeted sanctions to undermine the regime's credibility and to target its access to finance and arms. As the hon. Lady knows, we continue to monitor all issues around future sanctions.

**Liz Twist:** Two years on from the military coup, and despite the implementation of an arms embargo and targeted sanctions, components for weapons are still getting to Myanmar. What steps are the Government taking with regional partners to crack down on that?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** As I have said, we are committed to preventing the flow of arms to Myanmar, and we continue to impose those targeted sanctions. We can use those tools to undermine the regime's credibility and to target its access to finance and arms. Most recently, we issued a new suite of sanctions to mark Human Rights Day in December 2022.

**Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con):** Can my right hon. Friend tell me what we are doing to support those highlighting the atrocious actions of the Myanmar junta?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** The challenge of being able to know what those atrocities are is difficult, and we rely on those who are brave enough to share their information. We established the Myanmar Witness programme, run by the Centre for Information Resilience, which gathers and reports on open-source information on serious human rights violations. Incredibly brave people are working with our teams to make sure that we understand more of what is going on.

**Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con):** Burma is ranked No. 14 on the Open Doors "World watch list" for countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution. Only a matter of weeks ago, Myanmar's military destroyed the 129-year-old Church of Our Lady of the Assumption in the village of Chan Thar. It is considered one of the most historic Christian sites in the country and is where the first Bishop of Burma was baptised. The military gave no explanation for this assault. With Christians making up about 8% of the population of Burma, what are the Government doing to ensure that Christians are protected and allowed to thrive?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** My hon. Friend knows that the UK is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief for all, and we absolutely condemn any instances

of discrimination or attempts to destroy places of worship. We continue to work with our international partners to make those points, and we continue to review sanctions on those causing that sort of destruction.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): As we all know, the UK is the penholder on Myanmar at the United Nations. Which members of British industry has the Minister met to discuss the inadvertent use of shipping or other forms of industry to allow or somehow facilitate the Tatmadaw to get components, fuel or weapons to persecute its dreadful crimes? Which members of British industry has she met to challenge them and to ask whether there are perhaps inadvertent ways that those components are getting through?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** I will be visiting the region next week, and I will be meeting a number of organisations to hear some of the issues they are concerned about. The hon. Lady raises the important question of those businesses that are still supporting, and there are some things we need to look at closely. We use our sanctions where we can, but I will be continuing to meet and hear from all those who can help us to understand how we can most effectively use our tools to stop anything that supports the junta.

### **Pakistan: Flooding**

5. **Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): What support his Department has provided to Pakistan in response to floods in that country. [903367]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Leo Docherty):** UK aid continues to save lives in Pakistan. The UK has pledged a total of £36 million of aid for flood relief efforts in Pakistan. More than £25 million of that has been disbursed, supporting aid agencies to meet the immediate needs of those affected through the provision of water, sanitation, shelter and protection services for women and girls. The impact of that was seen at first hand by Lord Ahmad when he visited at the end of last year.

**Rob Butler:** Many people in my constituency have family and friends in Pakistan, and I know that, like me, they welcome the continued support my hon. Friend's Department has provided to help Pakistan recover from the recent terrible floods. They were a dreadful natural disaster, but yesterday we saw the most appalling outrage at human hands in Pakistan with the grotesque terrorist attack on a mosque in Peshawar. Can he assure me and my constituents that the UK is doing everything we can to support Pakistan in the face of both natural disasters and human atrocities?

**Leo Docherty:** I can assure my hon. Friend that that is the case. Our thoughts are of course with the families and friends of those tragically killed and injured in yesterday's abhorrent attack. My noble Friend Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon passed on his condolences yesterday to Pakistan's Minister for Human Rights, Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada, and the UK continues to work closely with the Government of Pakistan to tackle the many security challenges facing that country.

### **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps**

7. **Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' role in Iran's activities in the region. [903370]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly):** The Government wholly condemn the destabilising activity of the IRGC in the region and beyond. That includes support for military proxies and attacks and threats against Iran's regional neighbours. We have put in place more than 300 sanctions against Iranian individuals and entities, including the sanctioning of the IRGC in its entirety.

**Greg Smith:** I welcome my right hon. Friend's answer, but there has been a major groundswell in calls for the UK to proscribe the IRGC in recent months. This terror organisation's record speaks for itself, whether that is arming and financing its terror proxies, assisting Putin's murderous assault on Ukraine, intensifying involvement in the international drugs trade and now brazenly increasing its activities right here in the United Kingdom. Will my right hon. Friend heed these urgent calls for proscription and commit to curtailing the IRGC's ever-growing threat?

**James Cleverly:** My hon. Friend speaks with accuracy and passion about the malign impact of the IRGC around the world and in the region, and its attempts to intimidate and injure journalists here in the UK. I will not comment specifically on what further actions we might take—he will understand the reasons we choose not to do so—but I can assure him that we do not limit ourselves to the actions that I have announced when it comes to ensuring that the IRGC's regional and international activities are curtailed.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My constituent Hamid Bahrami is one of a number of Iranian constituents who are deeply frightened by the activities of the IRGC here in the UK. Can the Secretary of State tell me more about what he is doing to protect Iranians who have come here for sanctuary but find themselves still threatened by IRGC agents?

**James Cleverly:** My Department works closely with the Home Office to ensure that people who live here in the UK, irrespective of their heritage or birthplace, feel the umbrella of protection that they deserve. We will continue to work closely on threats against Iranians here in the UK.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is responsible for 10 kidnap and death plots on British soil, the execution of Alireza Akbari, the unjust imprisonment of British nationals, supporting violent militia across the middle east and the brutal crackdown on courageous Iranian protesters. Labour has been clear, and I wonder if we might get clarity from the Foreign Secretary. We would proscribe the IRGC, either by using existing terrorism legislation or by creating a new process of proscription for hostile state actors. When will the Foreign Secretary act?



**James Cleverly:** I am tempted to refer the right hon. Gentleman to my previous answer. We have already sanctioned more than 300 individuals and entities because of the crackdown on protesters and the brave women in Iran standing up for their rights. We have sanctioned members of the judiciary who have abused their own legal system to persecute those women. We have sanctioned individuals and entities who have been involved in supplying drones that Russia uses to attack Ukraine. We have sanctioned the prosecutor general, who was responsible for passing down the judgment on Mr Akbari. We will continue to take action to curtail the IRGC's ability to do those things. As I have said, we do not limit ourselves to the responses that I have announced. We always keep our options under review.

### **Palestinian Territories: Israeli Settlements**

8. **Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Ind): Whether it remains the Government's policy that Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories are illegal. [903371]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly):** Yes.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** If the Israeli Government settlements are illegal, why did the UK Government vote against referring them to the International Court of Justice at the United Nations? What sanctions are being applied to Israel for supplying arms and trading with illegally produced settlement products? If those settlements are completely illegal, as the Government say, why are we having anything to do with them at all? Why did we change our stance at the United Nations?

**James Cleverly:** The United Kingdom opposes unilateral resolutions that damage efforts to advance dialogue and therefore damage the prospects of a two-state solution. The UK's position on settlements has been clear, consistent and unambiguous. We continue to work towards a negotiated two-state solution. We strongly believe that that is in the best interests of Israelis and Palestinians. That will remain our policy.

**Mr Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk) (Con): Having recently had the opportunity to visit the west bank with the International Development Committee, I was able to understand just how much worse conditions have become in the past 10 years or so for Palestinian families wishing to see one another within the west bank. What steps have the Government taken to impress upon the Israeli Government how poorly we regard moves to balkanise the west bank itself? What further can be done?

**James Cleverly:** We enjoy a close and professional working relationship with the Government of Israel, which allows us to raise areas of co-ordination and co-operation but also issues where we disagree. Our position on the west bank and settlements is clear, and we have highlighted the importance for not just the Palestinian people but for Israel and Israelis of maintaining a credible route to a viable Palestinian state. We strongly believe that is in Israel's best interests, and therefore we do speak out—we have done in the past, and we will do again—if decisions are made that we believe jeopardise the credible option of a viable two-state solution.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): We are deeply concerned by the escalating violence in Israel and the west bank, and Labour joins the international community in condemning the recent attacks and deploring the deaths of civilians. In response to my letter about forced evictions and demolitions in Masafer Yatta, the Minister for the Middle East said that the Government were

"clear that in all but the most exceptional of circumstances, demolitions and forced evictions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law... and harmful to efforts to promote peace."

Can the Secretary of State tell us what steps are being taken to ensure that Israel stops the eviction of Palestinians from their homes and what efforts are being made to support negotiations to keep alive the prospect of a two-state solution, with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestine?

**James Cleverly:** I had a telephone conversation with the recently appointed Israeli Foreign Minister, in which I congratulated him on his appointment and also made it clear that the UK's long-standing position on peace in the region remains as passionate now as it ever was. We always encourage calm responses by the Israeli Government and restraint and professionalism while they pursue their own legitimate attempts at self-defence. We look at the deaths that are happening in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, which of course are deeply distressing. We will continue working directly with the Israeli Government, partners in the region and other interested countries around the world to pursue peace and de-escalation and to try to make real our collective desire for a peaceful, sustainable two-state solution.

### **The Arctic**

9. **James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): When he plans to publish his Department's Arctic strategy. [903372]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (David Rutley):** We are looking to publish a refreshed UK Arctic policy framework in the coming weeks. It will be an evolution of the existing 2018 framework, "Beyond the Ice", integrated with the UK's contribution to Arctic security, as set out in the Ministry of Defence's "The UK's Defence Contribution in the High North", published in March 2022.

**James Gray:** A glance at the retreating ice in the Arctic amply demonstrates the realities of climate change. When this report comes out, which I very much hope it will, will it highlight the outstanding excellence of British science and the contribution that British science—both the British Antarctic Survey and the superb university scientific departments—can make to halting and reversing climate change?

**David Rutley:** I can confirm to my hon. Friend, who is the esteemed chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the polar regions and sits on the Environmental Audit Committee, which held an inquiry into this area, that the refreshed UK Arctic policy will showcase the UK's significant contribution to Arctic science, with a particular focus on understanding the implications of climate change, where we have a leading position.

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): The Minister will be acutely aware that Russia poses a huge threat, and Norway, in particular, is in tune with what that threat might mean. What co-operation is taking place between Norway and the United Kingdom to ensure that the Russian threat is not made a reality?

**David Rutley:** We work very closely with Norway, not through the report that we are talking about but through other bodies, and we will continue to do so because, as the hon. Member says—it is a very important point—Russia is increasingly militarising its Arctic territory. We expect Russia to comply with international law, and we will collaborate with our partners and allies to protect our interests and theirs.

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

**Alyn Smith** (Stirling) (SNP): I am glad to hear that the report is forthcoming, and I hope it takes good note of the Scottish Government's 2019 Arctic strategy. For the reasons we have heard from Members on both sides of the House—there is a lot of agreement on this—the Scottish Government recognise the significance of the High North and the Arctic to us; it is our backyard, and we are a willing partner to work with the UK. We have different views on Scotland's best constitutional future, but it is our High North, it is our backyard, and it needs a lot more attention. The Scottish Government are working on it, and I urge the Minister to redouble his efforts.

**David Rutley:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his points, of which we will of course take note. I reassure him that the Foreign Secretary for the United Kingdom—the whole of the United Kingdom—is taking an active interest in that subject.

#### UK Pensioners: Commonwealth Countries

10. **Ruth Jones** (Newport West) (Lab): What steps he is taking to provide consular support for UK pensioners in Commonwealth countries. [903373]

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan):** We provide support to British pensioners in Commonwealth countries on the same basis as we do for any British national in foreign or Commonwealth countries. Our consular staff are contactable 24/7, 365 days a year and strive to provide the right tailored assistance to those who request our help, doing more for those who need more help.

**Ruth Jones:** Newport West is home to people from across the globe, many of whom have family living in other parts of the world. Those relatives are some of the 1.2 million UK pensioners living abroad, about half of whom do not receive the annual increases in their pensions related to inflation. Will the Minister answer Labour's call to right that wrong?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** I will take note of the particular issues and raise them with the Department for Work and Pensions, which is responsible for those policy areas.

**Sir James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): Co-ordination on all Commonwealth issues is assisted by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's international branch, which is located in London. It is about to move, because the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is not bringing forward legislation to change its status. Will my right hon. Friend speak to other Ministers to resolve the situation as quickly as possible, before we lose that important asset?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** My hon. Friend will, I hope, be aware that there was a meeting a couple of weeks ago with my fellow Minister Lord Goldsmith to discuss the issue in more detail. Officials are working closely with him to find a resolution.

#### Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: Women and Girls

11. **Mrs Paulette Hamilton** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): What recent steps his Department has taken to improve access to water, sanitation and hygiene for women and girls across the world. [903374]

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell):** Britain is working to improve access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene in 37 developing countries.

**Mrs Hamilton:** I refer the House to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. A third of women around the world do not have access to clean water. In December, I visited Ghana and saw how water, sanitation and hygiene projects funded by UK aid can be life-changing for women and girls. The Government's international development strategy commits to "empowering women and girls" around the world, but it does not go far enough. Can the Minister assure me that his Department will prioritise funding for WASH projects for women and girls?

**Mr Mitchell:** I thank the hon. Lady, my constituency neighbour, for flagging up an extremely important area of development policy. Over the last three years, Britain has trained 460,000 health and other key workers in the science of hygiene, and has supported 14,800 healthcare facilities. As she will have seen from her visit to Ghana, that is highly prioritised by the British Government.

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Research by Open Doors for its world watch list indicates that there is a worrying tendency for Christian communities to be deprived of access to vital aid programmes. Will the Minister ensure that all UK-funded aid programmes are open to Christians, where needed, and other ethnic minorities?

**Mr Mitchell:** My right hon. Friend makes an extremely good point, and the answer is yes.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): We have now passed the halfway mark to the 2030 deadline for meeting the sustainable development goals that we and 192 UN countries signed up to. On our current trajectory, however, we are set to miss every single one. Does the Minister agree that WASH is a cornerstone of the global goals and, to meet his targets

on girls' education and ending preventable deaths, schools and hospitals need clean water and sanitation? Will he restore the official development assistance for WASH, which has dropped by two thirds, as part of the women and girls strategy?

**Mr Mitchell:** The hon. Lady makes an extremely important point. Since the programmes were renewed in 2015, 63 million people in the poorest countries now have access to clean water and a lavatory, thanks to the UK taxpayer. Specifically, support for the Sanitation and Water for All partnership, which promotes access to sustainable water resources, is a high priority for the Government.

#### Alaa Abd El-Fattah

12. **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to provide consular support for Alaa Abd El-Fattah. [903375]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (David Rutley):** We are deeply concerned about the continued detention of Alaa Abd El-Fattah and are committed to supporting Mr El-Fattah and his family. Since Mr El-Fattah's sentencing in December 2021, His Majesty's Government have made numerous representations concerning his imprisonment, welfare and lack of consular access. This includes through successive interventions by Prime Ministers with President Sisi and engagement with senior Egyptian Government figures led by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and other Ministers.

**Vicky Foxcroft:** We know from the Minister and the Prime Minister that the Government have been in discussions with Egypt about ensuring the release of British national Alaa Abd El-Fattah from prison, but little progress seems to have been made. Members of Alaa's family are in the Gallery today hoping for good news, so will the Minister commit to a meeting with Alaa's family to discuss at greater length what the UK Government are doing to place diplomatic pressure on Egypt on this matter?

**David Rutley:** I thank the hon. Member for her follow-up question, and I know through my conversations with her that she feels very strongly about this. We have been providing regular consular support to Mr El-Fattah's family and recognise that they are here today, but my noble Friend Lord Ahmad, the Minister for the Middle East, has met family members previously. He will continue to closely engage with the family, keep them informed of developments and work with the Egyptian authorities on this case. It is an important case for us, absolutely.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Fabian Hamilton** (Leeds North East) (Lab): Alaa Abd El-Fattah is a British citizen, as we know, and one of Egypt's leading democracy campaigners who still remains in jail. The Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister have previously raised his case on numerous occasions, but Egypt still continues to prevent consular access and Alaa is no closer to being released. What is the diplomatic cost to that Government for denying consular access to a British citizen, and what precedent does it set when that access is denied without consequence?

**David Rutley:** As I said previously, the FCDO has been supporting Mr El-Fattah and his family, and it is a case that we have been supporting. We have long advocated for the release of Mr El-Fattah and other defendants, along with international partners. The issue is that, as the Egyptian authorities have not recognised his dual nationality, consular staff have been unable to visit him in prison. However, we are in regular contact through his lawyer and his family, and we are continuing to press for action in this case, including his release.

#### UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement

13. **Richard Thomson** (Gordon) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on the implementation of the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement. [903376]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly):** The UK is fully committed to implementing the TCA for the benefit of all UK citizens and businesses. Specifically on engagement, I have had calls or meetings with Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič since being appointed in September, including on 30 September, 17 and 27 October, 1 December 2022, and 9 and 16 January 2023, and I will be having further such meetings in due course.

**Richard Thomson:** I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but it is quite remarkable, is it not, that three years after the exit from the European Union, this Government are still in protracted negotiations—not just with the EU, but with themselves—about the terms on which we are finally going to get Brexit done. With today's publication of a report by the International Monetary Fund showing not only that the size of the UK economy will shrink over the coming 12 months, but that it will perform more poorly than major competitor economies, can the Secretary of State tell us whether there is a single aspect of prosperity or standing in the world he can think of that has been enhanced in any way by the terms on which we have left?

**James Cleverly:** I can assure the hon. Gentleman that if he is suggesting our exit from the European Union has been tricky, I think that is probably a fair assessment. I would just mildly make the point that if he thinks that is tough, imagine what extricating Scotland from one of the longest and most successful Unions in human history would be like. I have absolutely no doubt that our good, professional and strong working relationship with Maroš Šefčovič and his officials and other members of the European Commission will ultimately be successfully. However, I would strongly urge him to learn lessons when it comes to the ease with which one can extricate oneself from Unions, whether they be European or—

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

**Alyn Smith** (Stirling) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker—a well-timed riposte if ever I heard one. The difference between the UK leaving the European Union and Scotland leaving the UK and joining the EU is that we are clear about what we want and how to do it. Within the trade and co-operation agreement, UK in a Changing Europe did us all a favour by highlighting the various deadlines that exist for further clarity for further sectors. I would offer my support. Brexit has happened. I am not interested in fighting old battles, and I want to get a result for us



all. On 31 December this year, arrangements for financial services passporting will come to an end. How is progress going on ensuring that that industry, which is vital for us all, has clarity going forward?

**James Cleverly:** We want to provide clarity for all UK industries, and ensure that we have a good and close economic relationship, as well as a social relationship with our near neighbours and good partners. Reinforcing the point I made to the hon. Member for Gordon (Richard Thomson), I think that the pipe dream about the ease with which a Scotland separated from the UK could join the EU requires a bit closer analysis, and what Scotland would do for money, and to bring the budget deficit in line with the membership criteria of the EU, would be interesting. We will, of course, ensure that the UK financial services sector remains internationally competitive.

### Ukraine: Humanitarian Support

14. **Samantha Dixon** (City of Chester) (Lab): What recent steps he has taken to provide humanitarian support for Ukraine. [903377]

16. **Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): What assessment he has made of the impact of his Department's humanitarian support for Ukraine. [903379]

21. **Aaron Bell** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): What diplomatic steps his Department is taking to strengthen the international response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. [903384]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly):** The UK has committed £220 million of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and the region, enabling the provision of essential services and protection for the most vulnerable. A review of humanitarian spend will be published later this year. The UK is working closely with our international partners, including those in the G7, to accelerate efforts to secure a just and sustainable peace for the people of Ukraine.

**Samantha Dixon:** Britain continues to be united in providing support to Ukraine, and the generosity shown up and down the country has been inspiring, particularly in my constituency where the wonderful charity SHARE—Supporting Homeless, Assisting Refugees Everywhere—was instrumental in supplying hundreds of lorryloads of support to the frontline. Sadly, the illegal war continues, and key areas of infrastructure in Ukraine have been decimated. What long-term commercial links are the Government building with Ukraine, to ensure that reconstruction efforts are successful and sustainable?

**James Cleverly:** The hon. Lady makes an incredibly important point. We are proud of the role that the UK has played in helping Ukraine to defend itself against the initial attack by Russia, and increasingly it is pushing Russian forces back in the east and south of the country as it successfully repulses the illegal invasion. She is right to say that we should be thinking about what happens next, and the reconstruction and reform programme. We will be hosting an event in June this year where the international community will come together to discuss the long-term relationship with Ukraine, to ensure its safety and economic rebound.

**Vicky Ford:** It is vital that we continue to support the people of Ukraine. I would have liked to reiterate my call to proscribe the evil Wagner group, but I know the Foreign Secretary cannot answer that question. I therefore ask him for an update on what is being done to ensure that Russia pays for the damage it is causing, and specifically for his thoughts on the Canadian model that is targeting frozen assets of oligarchs. I encourage him to consider whether income generated by frozen Russian state assets could be deployed urgently.

**James Cleverly:** It is the most obvious tenet of natural justice that those individuals and entities who funded the brutality that is being directed at Ukraine and the Ukrainian people are ultimately those who should go on to carry the heaviest burden for the payment, and the cost of the reconstruction and rebuilding of that country. We work closely with our Canadian allies. I discussed this matter with the Canadian Prime Minister on my recent visit to Canada, and we will look closely and learn lessons from their activities on this issue.

**Aaron Bell:** North Staffordshire MPs recently held an event at Alton Towers to welcome all the new Ukrainian refugees in the area and their host families. We were addressed very movingly by the Ukrainian MP Olga Stefanishyna, who lost her husband in the early stages of the war, as the Foreign Secretary may know. Her children are in London on the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and she addressed us so movingly. She stressed the importance of the international community getting aid and military equipment to the frontline as quickly as possible, because every day is costing more and more Ukrainian lives. What diplomatic steps is my right hon. Friend taking to ensure that our allies also hear that message?

**James Cleverly:** My hon. Friend speaks about the compassion and support of his constituents in Newcastle-under-Lyme for Ukrainian refugees. Other families in the region and across the UK have offered that, too. That is their important contribution to Ukraine's war effort. Our contribution is that military aid, the economic aid and reconstruction aid, but also to ensure that we rouse our friends in the international community to provide the Ukrainians with the tools that they need to liberate themselves from Russian aggression. We were there at the start and will be there at the finish. We will continue to support the Ukrainians in their self-defence.

**Richard Foord** (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): Russia is seeking to expand its sphere of influence in Africa and Asia. Ukraine is seeking for partners such as the UK to persuade other Governments of the justice of Ukraine's course. How much more difficult is it for the British Government to exercise such influence since their decision to cut total international development spending?

**James Cleverly:** The hon. and gallant Gentleman is right to say that Russia has made a concerted effort to fracture the international coalition of condemnation, particularly in the global south and in Africa. My ministerial colleagues and I, and in particular the Development Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), have been doing very focused work on countering Russian disinformation

in the global south about the war in Ukraine, highlighting that it is Russian aggression that is limiting food supplies to the global south. We know that will be an enduring piece of work, and I assure him and the House that we will continue to make people understand who is genuinely at fault in this.

### **Iran: Human Rights and Other International Obligations**

15. **Sarah Green** (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): What steps he is taking to tackle human rights violations in Iran. [903378]

18. **Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): What diplomatic steps he is taking to encourage the Iranian Government to comply with its (a) human rights and (b) other obligations under international law. [903381]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly):** The brutal repression of protests in Iran shows the regime's systematic disregard for human rights. Since October 2022, the UK has implemented 50 new sanctions for human rights violations in Iran. I have summoned Iran's most senior diplomat in the UK five times to highlight the UK's opposition to the actions that it is taking. With partners, we have expelled Iran from the UN Commission on the Status of Women, and we will not rest in our endeavours to hold the Iranian regime to account.

**Sarah Green:** Where human rights abuses are rife, such as in Iran right now, maintaining access to an independent media is vital. Last year, the Government rightly provided emergency funding for the BBC World Service in Ukraine. Will the Secretary of State commit to providing similar funding to BBC Persian radio to save it from closure at the very moment when it is most needed?

**James Cleverly:** The funding arrangements for the BBC World Service are held jointly between the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Ultimately, the funding is through the BBC licence fee. I have spoken with the leadership of the BBC about the importance of maintaining foreign language services such as BBC Persian. Ultimately, the decisions on its structures are for the BBC, but of course we have an input. The hon. Member makes the incredibly important point that we maintain support to independent voices in Iran and elsewhere. One of the functions of the British embassy in Iran is to ensure that those Iranians who are standing up and shouting loud about the abuses of their Government are listened to on the international stage.

**Sammy Wilson:** Since September, the Iranian regime has murdered 700 of its own citizens, gunning them down in the streets, arrested and imprisoned 30,000—many of them were tortured in prison—executed two, with another 57 due to be executed, and carried out acts of terror, including in this country, through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Is it not time that the Government made it clear to the Iranian regime that, first, we will not negotiate any deals with them—nuclear or otherwise—to lift sanctions; secondly, we will refer members of the regime to the International Court of Justice; and, thirdly, we will proscribe the IRGC?

**James Cleverly:** The right hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the scale of the abuses the Iranian regime is perpetrating against its own people, purely in response to their demands for the freedoms we enjoy in other parts of the world. As I said, we have sanctioned entities and individuals, including members of the judiciary and the Prosecutor General, specifically in response to death penalties they have handed out. It is incredibly important that those involved in those atrocities are held to account. I can assure him that we work with our international friends and partners to pursue that aim.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Reports suggest that 56 people have been executed in Tehran for the mere crime of protesting against the regime. Yesterday, the Azerbaijan embassy was attacked and one security guard was murdered. So will my right hon. Friend examine the security for our embassy over there, encourage our nationals to leave Iran as quickly as possible, close our embassy down, and close down the Iranian embassy in London and all the other facilities it runs?

**James Cleverly:** I have expressed condolences directly to the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry for the loss of one of its employees in the attack in Tehran. I spoke recently with His Majesty's ambassador to Iran when I temporarily recalled him a couple of weeks ago. We discussed the security of the embassy and the people working on that platform. However, I believe it is incredibly important that we maintain our embassy in Tehran. The House should understand that diplomatic relations are not some bonus, prize or award to the host nation; they are to protect our people and our interests. But we always keep a very close eye on the security of the embassy and those members of staff working within it.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Select Committee, Alicia Kearns.

### **Western Balkans**

17. **Alicia Kearns** (Rutland and Melton) (Con): What steps he is taking to help support peace and stability in the western Balkans. [903380]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Leo Docherty):** We continue to work for peace and stability in the western Balkans. The Foreign Secretary and I are in regular contact with our counterparts in the region to encourage steps that promote peace and stability, to support Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity and to encourage progress towards normalised relations between Serbia and Kosovo.

**Alicia Kearns:** I am gravely concerned by Franco-German proposals to create a Republika Srpska-style enclave in Kosovo. Can the Government confirm that they have objected to this entrenchment of ethno-nationalism in the Balkans? Will we block Republika Srpska from raising money on the London stock exchange because it is solely to fund its secessionist plans and ambitions?

**Leo Docherty:** We share my hon. Friend's concern. There can be no question of a Serbian enclave in north Kosovo. We continue to work closely with partners to support the normalisation of relations. I made that point in Belgrade and in Kosovo when I visited at the

end of last year. The Financial Conduct Authority regulates the London stock exchange, but we are happy to correspond on that issue.

### Topical Questions

T1. [903388] **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly):** Since the last oral questions, I have hosted my German counterpart in London, travelled to the United States and Canada, and hosted the Georgian Foreign Minister for bilateral meetings. In those meetings, I discussed the UK's contributions to Ukraine's war effort, including the decision to send tanks. Consequently, I am delighted that the US, Germany and others have now committed to send tanks to Ukraine.

Last December, I set out my vision for a far-sighted strategic approach to UK foreign policy. Over the next 25 years, we will invest even more in our relationships with the world's rising powers. We will continue with our Indo-Pacific tilt. On Wednesday and Thursday this week, the Defence Secretary and I will be hosting our Australian counterparts at the AUKMIN meetings.

**Wera Hobhouse:** The Afghan citizens resettlement scheme is heavily backlogged. Just four people have been resettled under pathway 2 and no one under pathway 3. The schemes do not even support female NGO workers who are banned from working in Afghanistan. What are the Government doing to support these women in desperate need who seek refuge in the UK?

**James Cleverly:** The plight of women in Afghanistan and the reprisal attacks the Taliban are perpetrating are disturbing to us all. We are very proud of the fact that we evacuated 15,000 people during Operation Pitting and a further 6,000 since. The administration of the schemes the hon. Member has raised is a matter for the Home Office, but we continue to liaise very closely on operationalising the commitments we have made to the Afghan people.

T2. [903389] **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): We all condemn the violence that has led to the death of so many Palestinians and Israelis this month. Can the Foreign Secretary confirm that the UK still regards Israeli settlements as a flagrant breach of international law, as specified in Security Council resolution 2334, which I understand was largely written by the United Kingdom? If that remains the case, what is the penalty for those continued breaches?

**James Cleverly:** I can assure my hon. Friend that our position on the illegality of those settlements remains unchanged. We raise the matter with Israel. As I have said, in my initial call with the Israeli Foreign Minister, I raised our desire for a meaningful, peaceful two-state solution. We will always speak out when we believe that something is happening with which we disagree, but we will always seek to provide a route to reconciliation, to dialogue, to de-escalation and ultimately to the delivery of that peaceful, sustainable two-state solution.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): Last week, in response to my urgent question, the Government admitted that there was no ministerial oversight when they granted a sanctions waiver to Putin warlord Yevgeny Prigozhin enabling him to launch a legal attack on a British journalist. The Treasury conceded that it would consider changing the rules. What is the Foreign Office doing to ensure that the sanctions regime is never undermined in that way again?

**James Cleverly:** The House will understand why I do not speak in detail about that specific case, but I know that a Treasury Minister responded to the right hon. Gentleman's urgent question. More broadly, the whole point of sanctions is that they deter and change behaviour. That is why the enforcement of sanctions is so important. It is done predominantly through the Treasury, working very closely with my Department and in close co-ordination with our international partners. Enforcing sanctions is just as important as issuing them, so we will continue to work closely internationally to ensure that they are robust.

T8. [903395] **Gary Sambrook** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): Last month, the Prime Minister heralded the international fund for Israeli-Palestinian peace as an exciting new way of empowering peaceful co-existence. Does the Foreign Secretary share my passionate support for this groundbreaking initiative? Will he commit the UK to being at the heart of the effort to prepare for the much sought-after two-state solution as we deepen the Abraham accords?

**James Cleverly:** The Abraham accords were groundbreaking. The UK supported them at the time, and we continue to support them. We will explore opportunities to make the most of that normalisation of relationships, particularly at the moment, when there is a real desire to de-escalate the current tensions that we are seeing in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I can assure my hon. Friend that I personally and the ministerial team put a huge amount of effort into ensuring that.

T3. [903390] **Taiwo Owatemi** (Coventry North West) (Lab): Foreign Governments are requiring British workers to certify their covid status before taking employment in their countries. That leaves people who are medically exempt from vaccination, like my constituent Mr Hussain-Khan, in limbo. Without any formal documentation, their employment is at risk. Will the Foreign Secretary explain exactly what is being done to ensure that medically exempt people can get their status certified so that they can take employment?

**James Cleverly:** If I have understood the hon. Lady's question correctly, it is about the employment of British nationals in other countries. Obviously, each country is responsible for its own employment practices, rules and regulations. I was not aware of the circumstances of the case that she raises, but if she writes to me I will be more than happy to look into the details and see whether there is something we can do domestically, within the UK, to facilitate the actions of other Governments in relation to employment.



**Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that the glorification of martyrdom within Palestinian society remains a key obstacle to any future lasting peace agreements? That includes the payment of salaries to convicted terrorists by the Palestinian Authority, with higher salaries going to those who have killed more Israelis.

**James Cleverly:** If there is to be any chance of a sustainable peace in Israel and the OPTs, it is incredibly important that people recognise the importance of tolerance and of working and living together. When I first became a Minister in the Department, I raised with the then Palestinian Education Minister the situation relating to textbooks being used in Palestinian schools. We will continue to work to encourage greater understanding and co-operation, rather than allowing this divisive narrative to be imposed on young Palestinian children.

T4. [903391] **Stephen Farry** (North Down) (Alliance): Most people and businesses in Northern Ireland accept the need for the Northern Ireland protocol, but they want to see pragmatic solutions to the various challenges involved, and I am therefore encouraged by the progress that is being made in negotiations with the European Union. However, while I am conscious of the sensitivities, may I ask the Foreign Secretary to deepen his engagement with the Northern Ireland business community, particularly the Northern Ireland Business Brexit Working Group, in order to better road-test emerging solutions to ensure that whatever comes out of the talks will work on the ground?

**James Cleverly:** I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's positive comments about the tone of the current conversations with the EU: I feel vindicated in my belief that professional but discreet negotiations are the route to success. As for Northern Ireland businesses, I met a group of them during my trip to Northern Ireland at the beginning of the year, when they raised a series of specific concerns that they wanted to be addressed. We took careful note of those concerns, and I assure the hon. Gentleman, the House and those businesses that we have them at the forefront of our minds during our negotiations with European Commission.

**Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): The Monserrat port development project, which is being funded by the UK, is essential to the driving of Montserrat's economic development following the devastation caused by volcanic eruptions and hurricanes in recent decades. Will my hon. Friend confirm the Government's commitment to funding this much-needed project until its completion, and does he agree that it is a tangible demonstration of the UK's commitment to the overseas territories and, more specifically, to Montserrat?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (David Rutley):** I recognise my right hon. Friend's sterling work for overseas territories when she served in the FCDO. We are absolutely committed to supporting economic development in Montserrat, and we are providing £28.3 million for the new port. I am pleased to say that construction work is due to begin shortly.

T5. [903392] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary spoke earlier about the malign impact of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran, and said that we were not limited to the current sanctions. However, he did not answer the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) about when we might see some action. What more will it take—this is, perhaps, a more important question—to persuade the Government to prescribe the IRGC?

**James Cleverly:** I do not know whether my microphone is not working properly, but I listed the actions that we have taken. We have imposed a series of new sanctions in the last couple of months, specifically in response to the Iranian regime's persecution of its own people and in response to its supply of drone weapons to Russia for use against Ukraine, and in relation to the executions of protesters, the execution of Mr Akbari, and to the regime's malign activities in the region. I am willing to do more, but what I have said is that I will not speculate about what that might be. I can put something in the Library if it will help, just to make sure that the actions we have taken are fully understood by the House.

**Sir Alok Sharma** (Reading West) (Con): Can the Foreign Secretary confirm that the Government remain fully committed to deploying £11.6 billion of international climate finance up to March 2026? Will he also commit to setting out the annual projections for ICF spending over the next three years and, if possible, a breakdown between mitigation and adaptation finance?

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell):** My right hon. Friend knows a great deal about this subject, and has done an enormous amount. The Prime Minister announced at COP that Britain would stand by the commitment to spend £11,600 million on climate finance through the ICF, and yesterday there was a cross-Whitehall meeting with Ministers involved in the programme to discuss how that would be done. I will try to establish how much we can put into the public domain about those plans, as my right hon. Friend suggests, but I should emphasise that the pipeline of high-quality eligible projects is extremely important.

T6. [903393] **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Thousands remain unjustly imprisoned in Egypt, including many lawyers. As well as doing all that it can to secure the release of the British-Egyptian dual national Alaa Abd el-Fattah, will the FCDO ensure that it continues to make representations for the release of Alaa's lawyer and human rights defender, Mohamed el-Baqer?

**David Rutley:** As I said earlier, we are working closely on this particular case. I will ensure that the hon. Lady's views are relayed to Lord Ahmad, and we will continue to work on those issues.

**James Sunderland** (Bracknell) (Con): A recent poll of 33 countries found that people around the world are now more likely to believe that the UK is a positive influence than in 2016. Given our fantastic soft power and our fantastic global presence around the world, does my right hon. Friend agree that Opposition claims of reputational decline might be premature?



**James Cleverly:** It is noteworthy that 92% of Ukrainians believe that the UK has had a positive influence on world affairs, second only to Canada, that 86% of Americans have a favourable opinion of the UK and that 34% of Americans have a very favourable opinion of the UK, which is up 4% since Labour left power. My hon. Friend is right to say that 69% of the 33 countries surveyed in the poll he mentioned said that they had an improved opinion of the UK. I suspect that the criticisms the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) deploys indicate that he spends a little too long on Twitter and radio phone-ins and not quite long enough going around the world listening to people what actually think about our fantastic country.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Can I just say, we are going to be here a while because although these are topical questions, they are not being treated as topical questions in the answers. If the Foreign Secretary does not want to be here a long time, he needs to look at the length of his answers.

T7. [903394] **Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): [R] As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for crypto and digital assets, I have been reading about the success of Oxfam's UnBlocked Cash project. It uses blockchain technology to ensure the digital identity of recipients, and it has won the European Horizon prize and the World Summit award. What progress has the Department made on maximising UK aid reaching the most vulnerable via blockchain and distributed ledger technology?

**Mr Mitchell** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Just a minute, Minister. When I said to the Foreign Secretary that he was taking too long, that did not mean that Back Benchers could take up all the time instead.

**Mr Mitchell:** The hon. Lady raises an important point, and she specifically mentions Oxfam. Anything that Oxfam is involved with is well worth pursuing and I will look into it.

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Meon Valley) (Con): FSO Safer, the oil tanker off the coast of Yemen, continues to deteriorate. Funding has been raised, so can my right hon. Friend update the House on when the oil will be offloaded and the tanker made safe?

**James Cleverly:** The Safer oil tanker has been an issue of international concern for quite some time and I am glad that funds have now been made available. I have spoken to the Yemeni Government, the Saudi Government and even representatives of the Houthis about this to try to get the matter resolved, and we will continue to push to prevent what would be an ecological disaster on an unprecedented scale if that tanker were breached.

T9. [903396] **Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Ind): Four million Yemeni people have been forced from their homes, thousands have died and Britain has sold billions of pounds-worth of arms to Saudi Arabia,

which have been used to bomb Yemen. When will we stop supplying Saudi Arabia in order to bring about peace in Yemen?

**James Cleverly:** When will the right hon. Gentleman condemn Iran for providing weapons to the Houthis that have been used against both Saudi and the United Arab Emirates? We have been instrumental in facilitating talks, which have brought temporary periods of peace, and we will continue to work with the Yemeni Government and with the other countries in the region to bring about a sustainable peace in Yemen. That should be our aim, and that is what we will continue to do.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): In the horn of Africa, millions of people are facing starvation due to the worst drought in 40 years. We know that local non-governmental organisations can play a vital role in reaching the local groups of people affected, so what proportion of our £156 million of promised aid is going to people through local NGOs?

**Mr Mitchell:** We take an absolutely pragmatic approach to this and we use the best possible vehicle for getting the humanitarian aid through. I can tell my right hon. Friend that we will meet the target of £156 million that we budgeted for by the end of the financial year.

T10. [903397] **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): A UK Treasury official recently said of Japan's attempt to co-ordinate a G7 response to China's economic coercion that it is "more words than results". Does the Minister agree with Japan's Economy, Trade and Industry Minister that effective responses to economic coercion should be a major focus of this year's G7 summit?

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan):** I was in Japan just a couple of weeks ago, and I spoke to Foreign Ministers. The focus they are bringing to their G7 presidency will ensure that economic security and all that falls from it are at the heart of discussions.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Following the anti-India propaganda recently broadcast by the BBC, there were widespread protests outside the BBC's headquarters on Sunday. What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with the Indian high commissioner to reassure our Commonwealth partner that this propaganda is not the policy of this Government?

**James Cleverly:** I recently had the opportunity to speak to the Indian high commissioner on this and a number of other issues. We recognise how this portrayal of the Indian Government has played out in India. I made it clear that the BBC is independent in its output, that the UK regards India as an incredibly important international partner and that we will be investing heavily in that relationship in the coming decades.

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): During Colombia's national strike and protests of 2021, gender-based violence was used as a tool of repression by the national police to punish those who dared to speak out. This included the rape and torture of girls who were detained and the targeting of LGBTQ people. With a new Government in Colombia who are committed to

the peace process, will the Minister do everything he can to support them to ensure the police never again use these tactics?

**David Rutley:** The short answer is, yes, we are working very hard on that issue, which I know is important to the hon. Lady. We are committed to working to tackle these atrocities, particularly against women. When I went to Colombia, I was privileged to meet victims of sexual violence. Our recent conference on the preventing sexual violence in conflict initiative illustrates our commitment to tackling this horrendous crime.

**Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): Can the Minister explain why the percentage of UK official development assistance marked as significant against the OECD Development Assistance Committee's disability marker fell by 10% between 2019 and 2021? What steps is he taking to reverse that?

**Mr Mitchell:** I thank the Chair of the International Development Committee for raising this important point. We have put disability at the centre of what we do. I met the Bond Disability and Development Group, a group of experts, yesterday to consider what more we can do on education, climate and humanitarian crises. More than a third of all development programmes now contain disability-inclusive activities.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): My constituent Daniel Gadsden is in prison in the Philippines, facing drugs charges that he strenuously denies. After 17 months in custody, in appalling conditions, his mental and physical health is very poor. He has an untreated eye condition and is now almost blind. His parents,

Helen and Nick, are terrified that they will never see their son again. Will the Foreign Secretary meet me and them to discuss what more can be done to ensure that Daniel is treated with decency and humanity, and that he receives a fair trial?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** We regularly raise the poor prison conditions of British nationals detained in the Philippines, and we appreciate how difficult and distressing the situation is for Daniel. Officials are working very closely with his family, and I am happy to meet the hon. Lady and her constituents if that would be useful.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Contrary to the Foreign Secretary's response to the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), the Government's website says that pathway 3 of the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme is administered by the Foreign Office. Will he correct the record and say exactly what he is doing to support women whose lives are at risk, including 70 female judges, or are we going to see more cases like that of Mursal Nabizada, the former MP who was murdered?

**James Cleverly:** The scheme is administered across a range of Departments, including the FCDO, which identified the initial list of individuals who are eligible. We work closely with the Home Office to ensure that all the relevant checks and administration are done so that those people can come to the UK. As I said, I am very pleased that we were able to resettle so many people so quickly through Operation Pitting, and we have resettled 6,000 people since Operation Pitting. We will continue to ensure we do right by the people who supported us in Afghanistan.

## IMF Economic Outlook

12.45 pm

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the International Monetary Fund world economic outlook.

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (James Cartlidge):** This Government have three economic priorities; our plan for this year is to halve inflation, grow the economy and get debt falling. It is a plan that will alleviate the pressure on businesses and families today, and equip us to become one of the most prosperous countries in Europe. As the International Monetary Fund said in its press conference today, it thinks that the UK is “on the right track”. It also said that the UK had done well in the last year, with growth revised upwards to 4.1%, which is one of the highest growth rates in Europe for 2022. Since 2010, the UK has grown faster than France, Japan and Italy. Since the European Union referendum, we have grown at about the same rate as Germany. Our cumulative growth over the 2022 to 2024 period is predicted to be higher than that of Germany and Japan, and at a similar rate to that of the United States of America. The Governor of the Bank of England has said that any UK recession this year is likely to be shallower than previously predicted.

The actions we are taking, from unleashing innovation across artificial intelligence, financial services and a host of other sectors, to improving technical education and protecting infrastructure investment, will spur and fuel economic growth in the years to come, benefiting industry and communities alike. However, the figures from the IMF confirm that we are not immune to the pressures hitting nearly all advanced economies. We agree with the IMF’s focus on the high level of inflation in our country, which is why this is our first priority. Inflation is the most insidious tax rise there is, and so the best tax cut now is reducing inflation. That will help families across the country with the cost of living. As the Chancellor has said, short-term challenges, especially ones we are focused on tackling, should not obscure our long-term forecasts. If we stick to our plan to halve inflation, the UK is still predicted to grow faster than Germany and Japan over the coming years. That will help us deliver a stronger economy, one that is growing faster and where everywhere across our country people have opportunities for better-paying, good jobs. That is what the people in this country expect and what we are working tirelessly to deliver.

**Rachel Reeves:** Britain has huge potential, but 13 years of Tory failure has been a drag anchor on our prosperity. Today’s IMF assessment holds a mirror up to the wasted opportunities, and it is not a pretty sight: the UK is the only major economy forecast to shrink this year, with weaker growth compared with our competitors for both of the next two years. The world upgraded, but Britain downgraded, with growth even worse than sanctions-hit Russia. The IMF chief economist singles out higher mortgage rates as a reason for Britain’s poor performance. The Tory mortgage penalty is devastating family finances and holding back our economy. British businesses are paying the price for the gaping holes in the Tories’ Brexit deal. It will fall to Labour to clean up this mess.

If the Chancellor had ideas, answers or courage, he would be here today, but he is not. The question the people of our country are now asking is: are me and my family better off after 13 years of Conservative government? The answer is no and, as the IMF showed today, it does not have to be this way. I am sure the Minister will clutch at straws and say that everything is fine or that the IMF forecasts are just wrong, but can he explain why the UK is still the only G7 economy that is smaller now than it was before the pandemic? Why is the UK the only G7 economy with its growth forecast downgraded this year? Why are we at the bottom of the league table both this year and next year? Can the Minister answer this: why should anyone trust the Conservatives with the economy ever again?

**James Cartlidge:** The right hon. Lady talks about 13 years of failure. Let me just repeat the facts of the matter. Since 2010, the UK has grown faster than France, Japan and Italy. She talks about the next two years. As I have said, the forecast from the IMF says:

“Cumulative growth over the 2022-24 period is predicted to be higher—

in the UK—

“than in Germany and Japan, and at a similar rate to the US.”

I am grateful to the shadow Chancellor for quoting the IMF, because I, too, wish to quote the IMF. Let us go to the IMF press conference at about 3am this morning, which, Mr Speaker, I am sure you were eagerly watching, and quote the economic counsellor Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas who said:

“Let’s start with the good news: the UK economy has actually done relatively well in the last year. We’ve revised—

growth—

“upwards to 4.1%...that’s one of the highest growth rates in Europe, in that region, for that year”—

2022.

The shadow Chancellor did make a passing reference to the pandemic, but it is usually Labour’s habit to airbrush out of history completely the fact that we as a Government have overseen two of the greatest challenges in the country’s history: a pandemic followed by the invasion of Ukraine. [*Interruption.*] I know why the shadow Chancellor does not want to talk about the pandemic. Back in December 2021, when the Labour Welsh Administration wanted to lock down in the face of omicron, we took the brave decision as a Government not to lock down in England. Let us remember what the shadow Health and Social Care Secretary said at the time. He said that plan B was “insufficient” and that there were additional measures that were “necessary”. Labour would have kept us locked down for longer. We took the decision to keep our country open. We did so because of the vaccine that we brought forward, which is something that Labour would not have done.

The crucial issue, as I said, is bearing down on inflation, which will give us the best chance of restoring sustainable growth. A key facet of dealing with inflation is fiscal discipline. We have heard from the shadow Chancellor recently that Labour is suddenly the party of sound money. Since the speech—I think it was two weeks ago—in which the leader of the Labour party promised to put away the great big Government cheque book, Labour has made £45 billion of unfunded spending commitments. We all know where that ends. Labour



[James Cartlidge]

starts writing blank cheques, and it ends with a letter from its Chief Secretary to the Treasury to the rest of the country saying, “There’s no money left.”

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Treasury Committee.

**Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): Will the Minister take this opportunity to reflect on last year when, despite the headwinds of the coronavirus, the invasion of Ukraine, huge hikes in energy costs, rising interest rates and high inflation in this country, UK businesses managed to generate more than 4.1% of economic growth—twice that of the United States, 25% higher than China, and higher than the eurozone?

**James Cartlidge:** The Chair of the Select Committee is spot on. Instead of talking down our economy, she makes the key point that, despite all those challenges, we had strong growth last year because of British enterprise. That is why, on Friday, the Chancellor, himself a former entrepreneur—there are not many of those on the Opposition Benches—said that we will back advanced manufacturing in the high-growth sectors to ensure that we continue to live with that level of growth in the future.

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

**Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP): I suppose that it is apposite that there is an urgent question on a potential recession on the third anniversary of Brexit.

The IMF has said that the economy of the UK—the only G7 country facing recession—would face a downgrade reflecting, it says, tighter fiscal and monetary policies and the still high energy retail prices weighing on household budgets. There is no getting away from it: with even sanctioned Russia forecast to grow, that is a gloomy prognosis. Given that the Government expect to meet their own new fiscal rule on public sector net debt by a paltry £9 billion in 2027-28, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility, the Government’s own strictures mean that there is no fiscal headroom to provide more support. Is this not the time, therefore, to reduce the energy companies’ investment allowance, which allows them to reduce the tax that they pay by 91p in the pound, to start to generate a meaningful windfall tax that is required to further support households and small and medium-sized enterprises—two of the main drivers of the IMF forecast for the economy—which will otherwise see their energy costs rocket this year?

**James Cartlidge:** The right hon. Gentleman talks about tight fiscal monetary policy. We are faced with inflation; it is higher in the UK than in 14 countries in the EU. Inflation is a global challenge, so he is right: we do need to have that stance. Obviously, we want to get inflation down. The cost of energy bills is precisely why, this winter, a typical household in the United Kingdom will have received £1,300 of support, £1,400 in cost of living payments, and the energy price guarantee, estimated by the OBR to be worth £900 for the typical household. That support is provided to every single part of the United Kingdom.

The right hon. Gentleman’s specific suggestion—to be fair, he is making a specific fiscal proposal in relation to the allowance—will hurt one particular sector: the

North sea and investment in UK energy. Does he know what the long-term answer to this is? It is not supporting families—we are doing that very generously at the moment—but energy security, investing in nuclear and in the North sea as part of our transition to net zero.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): If the Minister is not able to share with the House the advice he has received from the Opposition on how they will reduce public spending and taxation if they ever form a Government, will he at least accept my advice that the message from successful enterprise economies is that we must have a credible plan to reduce corporation tax and regulation on business?

**James Cartlidge:** With great respect to my right hon. Friend, who is very consistent on such points, I am bound to point out that, even with the forecast increases, corporation tax will still be the lowest in the G7 headline rates, and, of course, roughly 70% of businesses do not pay that higher rate because of the small business rate that pertains. I have not received any representations from the Opposition, other than a pledge for sound money from a party, which, since promising to put away the great big Government cheque book, has announced almost £50 billion of unfunded spending commitments.

**Dame Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): Despite the Minister’s bluster, the Government Benches are empty. Conservative Members have not come to the Chamber in large numbers to defend the Government’s economic results, because the IMF forecast is devastating, as it lays bare the economic incompetence of this Government. Sanctioned Russia is still doing better than we are. This Government are unfit to run the economy, as unfit as those on the Treasury Bench are to be in the Treasury.

**James Cartlidge:** I am pleased to say that there is very colourful support on our Back Benches today. I am sure that there will further pertinent and brilliant questions to come. The hon. Lady quotes the IMF, but I simply reiterate what its economic counsellor said this morning about the UK. He said:

“Let’s start with the good news: the UK economy has actually done relatively well in the last year. We’ve revised”—

growth—  
“upwards to 4.1%...that’s one of the highest growth rates in Europe”.

That is exactly what the IMF said.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What should the IMF make of our burgeoning £65 billion trade surplus in financial services?

**James Cartlidge:** The IMF always stresses the importance of sustainable growth. It is sustainable growth that matters, and, of course, my right hon. Friend is absolutely right: exports are crucial to that. The City and financial services are a massive UK success story. We want to build on that, which is why we have announced the Edinburgh reforms and further measures to strengthen UK financial services. We are quite clear that the future for this country is optimistic and we will get there by backing brilliant British business.

**Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The Minister talks about covid as if we were the only country to experience the pandemic. He talks about the



Ukraine crisis as if the fuel costs are affecting only this country, but he fails to mention that the former Prime Minister and her Chancellor crashed the economy, and that that came on top of the uncertainties of the previous years, including the failure to get a decent deal after Brexit, which led to a 4% hit on UK output. That is £55 billion of fiscal consolidation because of the failure of his Government. When will he admit to that and face up to reality instead of misleading the British people?

**James Cartlidge:** On the contrary, the whole point of why we mention the pandemic is not to say that we are the only country affected, but to explain the global headwinds that we face as a country. The hon. Lady talks about energy costs, but the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast is that the energy price guarantee will reduce the peak of inflation in this country by 2.5%. Inflation is an issue and it is global, but we are taking strong measures to ensure we deliver the Prime Minister's target of halving it.

**Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con):** Is it not right that the IMF welcomed the autumn statement and said it struck

"the right balance between fiscal responsibility and protecting growth and vulnerable households"?

Given that the IMF has also said that cumulative UK growth over 2022 to 2024 is predicted to be higher than in Germany and Japan and similar to the USA, is that not exactly why we should stick to the measures set out in the autumn statement?

**James Cartlidge:** My hon. Friend makes a brilliant point and reminds us that not only did the IMF talk this morning about our strong performance in 2022, but at the autumn statement it welcomed those measures and recognised that a balance must be struck between fiscal consolidation and supporting the most vulnerable. The best example I can give is that from April, far from support with high energy costs being withdrawn, there will be a new £900 payment for families on benefits. That shows we are getting the balance right between the fiscal discipline necessary to work with the Bank of England to reduce inflation and ensuring that families are supported through these challenging times.

**Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab):** Today the Government's response to the IMF forecast has been simply to say that forecast is wrong. If the Government will not look at the forecast, let us look at the facts. The UK is the only G7 economy smaller now than it was at the start of the pandemic, and growth has been lower under the Conservatives than it was under the last Labour Government. Can the Minister tell us whether the Government have any respect for our international economic institutions?

**James Cartlidge:** I did not question the IMF forecast—that is not correct. I simply quoted what the IMF said, that cumulative growth over the 2022 to 2024 period is predicted to be higher than in Germany and Japan and at a similar rate to the US.

**Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con):** I remind the Minister and the shadow Chancellor that forecasts are just that. They are subject to substantial revision. I remember in 2012 the IMF downgraded the forecast,

only substantially to upgrade it the following year. The key thing is to have a long-term approach. Will the Minister confirm that the Government will build on the Prime Minister's Mais lecture and the Chancellor's excellent speech on Friday and complement that with a clear industrial strategy so that investors can have a clear view of the Government's business policy, as countries such as the US, Japan and South Korea are doing?

**James Cartlidge:** My right hon. Friend speaks with great expertise as both a former Secretary of State and a Select Committee Chair, and he is absolutely right. Whatever forecasts say, we have a clear strategy for long-term growth in this country that comes from supporting high-growth sectors. I am glad he mentioned the Chancellor's speech on Friday, which spoke about the fact that we are only the third economy in the world with \$1 trillion tech sector—I know the shadow Chancellor does not like that fact, but we are—and we should be proud of that. Of course we want to build further on that. That is how we will deliver strong, sustainable growth in every part of the United Kingdom.

**Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD):** The UK economy has faced a triple whammy in recent days: the IMF forecast saying that the UK is the only major economy that will slide into recession this year, an Office for National Statistics survey setting out the true horror of this winter of discontent, and insolvency figures out today showing that more companies are going bust than at any point since the 2009 crisis. Can the Minister tell me when and where the Brexit benefits will begin?

**James Cartlidge:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady, as ever. Of course she misses out the fact that we have the lowest unemployment for the best part of 50 years. We should all be very proud of that. We know the scars caused by high unemployment and we know that when the pandemic started, unemployment was predicted to finish 2 million higher than it ended up because of the measures taken by this Government and by the Prime Minister when he was Chancellor, with furlough and so on. We will continue to support households. The hon. Lady talks about a winter of discontent, but, as I said, we are providing £1,300 of support for a typical family with their energy bills this winter. That shows we are on their side, but we need to go further, and we do that by delivering on the target to halve inflation.

**Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con):** The shadow Chancellor mentions that our growth rate is not as great as Russia's. What she does not mention is that the IMF said that of Germany too, because both Germany and the United Kingdom are dependent on gas. My question to my hon. Friend the Minister is this: how many times over the last 10 years has the IMF had to revise its economic forecast? If he does not know the answer, will he please write to me?

**James Cartlidge:** It would be a pleasure, as ever, to write to my hon. Friend. He mentions countries dependent on gas, but we should be very proud that last year more than 40% of our electricity was generated from renewables and just 1.5% from coal. We have had the fastest-falling emissions in the G7, and a recent report in *The Times* confirmed that we can get those lower emissions with higher growth. The report said that jobs in net zero

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sectors pay £10,000 more than the national average, and that south Yorkshire, north Derbyshire, Tyneside and Teesside are all hotspots for net zero jobs. That shows we can deliver on net zero and economic growth.

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): Does the Minister think that Tory austerity, Tory Brexit or the Tory Truss Budget is responsible for the unique mess our economy is in? Or is it all of the above?

**James Cartlidge:** It is very far from a unique mess when 14 European Union countries have a higher rate of inflation than we do. That is why we are focused on reducing inflation, which, to be clear, will take some difficult decisions. It would help in that regard if Labour Members, instead of living in a parallel universe where their leadership and their shadow Chancellor talk about sound money but not a single one of them even ventures to understand it, started showing what difficult decisions they would actually take. That is how you run the country.

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Meon Valley) (Con): Getting the economy moving forward more quickly will depend on supporting investment in research and development. Will my hon. Friend look at ensuring that R&D continues to be incentivised as a means to boosting our growth?

**James Cartlidge:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I spoke about high-growth sectors; one of the ways those sectors drive up sustainable growth is through R&D. That is incredibly important. The Government are on track to spend £20 billion in public expenditure by 2024-25. We are also committed to a competitive regime of R&D tax credits to ensure that the private sector does its part to enable the highest possible level of R&D so that we can deliver investment and research into the industries of the future.

**Carla Lockhart** (Upper Bann) (DUP): The forecast is concerning for every corner of the United Kingdom. However, in Northern Ireland, there is an added uncertainty owing to the protocol and the internal barriers to trade that it places within the United Kingdom. Investment to drive growth is now being stalled as we await a new agreement. Do the Government recognise the need to urgently restore the integrity of the UK's internal market to assist economic growth in Northern Ireland, and does the Minister commit to doing that?

**James Cartlidge:** We must deliver growth in every part of the United Kingdom. The hon. Lady knows the work that is happening across Departments on the protocol. I have already mentioned energy support; she knows that there are specific conditions that pertain to the Northern Ireland energy market, but we have still put huge support in place, including the recent £600 payment. That shows that we are on the side of families in every part of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland.

**Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Con): I am pleased the Minister is focusing on the facts rather than the forecasts, which have proven time and again to be incorrect. The fact of the matter is that, according to the IMF, last year we had the highest rate of growth of

any nation in the G7, nearly double that of the US and higher than that of the whole eurozone—a pretty good record, would he not agree?

**James Cartlidge:** My hon. Friend is an absolute champion. He talks up this country and he is right: the facts back that up and show that we should be optimistic. Of course there are challenges, and we want to get on top of them, which is why we must work hard to support our independent Bank of England in getting inflation down. But, like him, I am optimistic that if we do that, we can see the sort of growth we had last year. That is what the IMF shows; its cumulative forecast is that over 2022 to 2024 we are predicted to have higher growth than Germany and Japan and at a similar rate to the US.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister seems to be walking away from the question of what role Brexit has played in this economic outlook. I can understand why, since half his own constituents think Brexit was a mistake. The benefits of Brexit seem to be like a toddler's imaginary friend—Ministers keep talking about them, but only they can see them. The Prime Minister's spokesman today told us we are now seeing "significant benefits from Brexit." Will the Minister set the record straight? Can he explain to the small businesses in our constituencies, which used to be able to export with ease to the European Union, a single market where they now face a better deal than they did before?

**James Cartlidge:** I am happy to stress, for example, the hugely important Solvency II reforms that we will undertake, which will free up enormous amounts of investment in infrastructure. Of course, infrastructure is crucial to future growth. As the Minister with responsibility for alcohol duty, I am pleased to say that we will have reform in August, meaning that we could have a duty differential between pubs and supermarkets. That is only possible because of Brexit. I think the most important thing by far is that when we faced the pandemic—the greatest challenge outside war time—this country was able to move fast with an amazing vaccine programme because of its independence, which reduced deaths, freed up our economy and allowed us to reopen and get growing again.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): Today, the Bloomberg UK scorecard reports that, relative to London, life has got worse in areas that voted to leave the EU. That includes Ynys Môn, where the 2 Sisters factory has announced that it is closing in March, with 730 people losing their jobs—many of them from my Arfon constituency. There is no point in the Minister blustering with excuses about covid and Russia; that company says plainly that Brexit is partly to blame. No more excuses and apologies; what is the Minister going to do about it?

**James Cartlidge:** I am sorry to hear that. I do not know the specific circumstances. Obviously, we want to see strong investment and growth in this country, particularly in manufacturing. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that, as he is aware, unemployment is about the lowest it has been for decades in this country—we are very proud of that fact. But where there are challenges, we want to look at them, and if he writes to me with the details of that case I will happily look into it.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is it not time that the Minister told the truth to my constituents? The truth is that the Government have hollowed out not only our defence capacity but our economy. Will he explain to my constituents why, on the ship of shame that is the Government Benches, where there is no captain, first mate or crew, the captain's cabin boy has been sent to answer questions on this, the most vital topic at the moment?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman is an elder statesman of this House. I am sure he can be pleasant if he really tries. I do not think that kind of question does this Chamber any good.

**James Cartlidge:** The hon. Gentleman mentions defence, but he might want to explain to his constituents why, at the last general election, he backed the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), whose policy would have had us leave NATO and undermine the nuclear deterrent.

We have stood by the people of Ukraine in the face of a real war. We have not deployed into the theatre, but we have done everything possible short of that, including training the Ukrainian army since 2015. So yes, I will tell the hon. Gentleman's constituents the truth: they should be proud of what this country is doing for the people of Ukraine.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): I wonder whether the Minister thinks that the sanctions against Russia are having the desired effect. If he thinks that they are, as I suspect he does, can he explain why the IMF predicts that Russia will fare much better than us?

**James Cartlidge:** I am happy, once again, to refer to what the IMF said. At this morning's press conference, Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, the IMF's economic counsellor, confirmed

"the good news: the UK economy has actually done relatively well in the last year. We've revised"

growth

"upwards to 4.1%...that's one of the highest growth rates in Europe".

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Minister talks about other countries, but the reason why things are so bad in the UK is squarely down to the impact that Brexit is having on the economy—a Brexit that Scotland did not vote for. Can he tell me how piling austerity on top of the austerity that has already taken place over the past decade will help us out of this economic crisis that the Tories have created?

**James Cartlidge:** It is astonishing that the hon. Lady would say that all our problems are solely down the Brexit. We have record energy bills. In the last year, as a country, we have had to find an additional £150 billion to fund energy because of the invasion of an independent sovereign country by Russia. That was not our fault, and nor was the pandemic—[*Interruption.*] She talks about austerity. We put in place £400 billion of support during the pandemic, and almost £100 billion of cost of living support and help with energy bills. That is not austerity. I will tell the House what it is: the United Kingdom Treasury backing every single part of the United Kingdom.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Wages in the north-east are 3% lower than when Labour left office, and households have lost £11,000 in wage growth under the Conservatives. Now, according to the IMF forecast, we will get poorer still, as prices rise and the economy contracts because the Conservatives have crashed it. Did the Minister come into politics to make people poorer? If not, is it not time for a Labour Government to deliver prosperity for the British people?

**James Cartlidge:** I am not sure whether the hon. Lady was here for my maiden speech—I entirely recognise that she may not have been—but I said:

"I am a one nation Conservative,"

because I believe in

"not going back to dark and divisive days of high unemployment."—[*Official Report*, 3 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 636.]

And here we are, with the lowest unemployment in almost 50 years.

On regional earnings specifically, I can confirm that pay has grown faster in every region outside London since 2010. That shows that we are succeeding in our levelling-up agenda.

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): The IMF chief economist highlighted rising mortgage costs as a central issue facing the UK economy. I have heard from countless constituents who are fearful of losing their homes when their fixed rates come to an end, and others whose dreams of getting on the property ladder have been snatched away. What guarantees can the Minister provide that interest rates will get back to the levels seen before the disastrous mini-Budget?

**James Cartlidge:** The hon. Lady is an experienced colleague. She is well aware that we have an independent Bank of England, and interest rates are its responsibility. The crucial thing is that we need to work in partnership with the Bank, and we do that by ensuring that fiscal policy does everything possible to support a stable framework in which inflation falls. That is why we have set a target to halve inflation, and if we do that, interest rates will be lower than they would otherwise have been.

**Ruth Jones** (Newport West) (Lab): The news from the IMF this morning is deeply concerning. Small businesses are at the heart of the local economy in my constituency. Why does the Minister think the Federation of Small Businesses is reporting that confidence of small business is at its third lowest level since the federation started tracking it?

**James Cartlidge:** The hon. Lady is right to mention small businesses, which make such an important contribution to our economy. My message to small businesses is that we have put in an enormous amount of support to help them with energy costs, including the £18 billion energy bill relief scheme over the past six months, and we will continue to support them from April onwards. Of course, the best way to support them is to provide a stable platform for growth, and that means keeping inflation under control. That is the great challenge that we face, and it is why, as the Chancellor said on Friday, the greatest tax cut we can provide is reducing inflation. That is what we are committed to doing.



**Claire Hanna** (Belfast South) (SDLP): The UK's economic decline, which was started by Brexit but exacerbated by the mini-Budget, is genuinely sad, and it hurts millions of ordinary, blameless people. At the moment in Northern Ireland, we have some protection through the protocol, which, although imperfect, has economic benefits, including dual market access, offering the potential to transform our traditionally sluggish economy. Many businesses are already benefiting from that, and more investment will follow if the UK Government commit to supporting the protocol and that is accompanied by a responsible devolved Government focused on skills and infrastructure.

Will the Minister commit to advocating in Cabinet for a pragmatic EU-UK deal? If not, will he acknowledge that if the protection of the protocol is removed, more and more people in the centre ground in Northern Ireland will ask, "When can we leave this Brexit madness through an agreed, dynamic and inclusive new Ireland?"

**James Cartlidge:** Of course, the hon. Lady knows about the work that is happening across Government in respect of the protocol. She talks about our "economic decline", but let me be absolutely clear: since 2010, the UK has grown faster than France, Japan and Italy. She knows that, as I said earlier, 14 EU countries have higher inflation than we face at the moment. These are global challenges that we face, but we have the strengths to get through them. One example, as the Chancellor pointed out on Friday, is that there are only three economies in the world with a £1 trillion tech sector. Tech is a huge part of our future economic growth. One of those countries is China, one is the United States, and the other, I am pleased to say, is the United Kingdom.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): There is a popular café not far from here on Regency Street. This morning, a sign in the window said: "Breakfast only today. Sorry, we are badly understaffed". That seems to chime with the findings of UK in a Changing Europe that there is a shortfall of 300,000 workers as a result of Brexit and the end of freedom of movement. It seems that Brexit really does mean breakfast. Will the Government admit that their Brexit has taken the UK economy out of the frying pan and into the fire?

**James Cartlidge:** I do not know the specific circumstances of why the café the hon. Gentleman refers to is struggling to recruit; I have no specific knowledge of it. I am sure it offers a wonderful breakfast when it is able to do so. What I can say is, talking in aggregate, and as is our slogan, we are proud to have almost the lowest unemployment for the best part of 50 years. It does present challenges when we have a tight labour market. That is why we think the best way forward is to ensure that we have the apprenticeships, skills and training to deliver the workforce to meet our growth ambitions.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Minister continues the Tory playbook of excuses—global headwinds, global challenges, other countries having high inflation, Putin's illegal war and the pandemic—but the reality is that the UK is the only G7 country facing a recession this year. Is that due to Tory incompetence, or is it the Brexit dividend?

**James Cartlidge:** I was clear about the challenges this year in respect of inflation, which is why we need to have fiscal discipline. That is not something the Scottish National party has the slightest understanding of, because I only ever hear SNP Members ask for more spending and more tax cuts—all unfunded. Meanwhile, their fundamental policy, were they to be independent, is to have a currency without a lender of last resort. That is an extraordinary proposition for economic instability, so we take no lectures from them. We have done everything possible to support people in every part of the United Kingdom, including Scotland.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): I suspect there is not much hope of significantly boosting overall productivity unless we deal with the huge geographical wealth imbalances across the UK. What consideration has been given to using the so-called Brexit freedoms? In the case of Wales, that could involve devolving VAT and corporation tax to empower the Welsh Government to get on with the job of boosting the Welsh economy. If these powers—the so-called Brexit freedoms—are not going to be used, is the Welsh economy not far better off back in the European single market and the customs union?

**James Cartlidge:** The hon. Gentleman knows there is enormous benefit to Wales from being part of the United Kingdom. I have set out the many ways that we are boosting this country, and I gave the example of the changes to Solvency II regulations. They will hopefully see a significant increase in infrastructure investment, which will be of massive benefit to every part of the United Kingdom, including Wales.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Often it is the retail and hospitality sectors that are hit the hardest during economic slowdown, particularly companies trading in non-essential goods and services. What specific support is being considered for such businesses to ensure that redundancies are minimised and jobs are protected?

**James Cartlidge:** The hon. Lady makes a very good substantive economic point, which is that when inflationary pressures are higher, as they are at the moment, it is discretionary consumption that comes under pressure—and that means, for example, demand in pubs and shops and so on. I can confirm that we have taken huge steps to support hospitality, as we did in the pandemic. We recently announced that the 50% reduction in business rates would be extended by another year and go up to 75%. I announced in December a six-month extension to the freeze in alcohol duty, but hospitality is an important sector that is creating jobs, and we want to see what more we can do to support it.

**Mr Speaker:** To complete the urgent question, I call Jim Shannon.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his answers to the urgent question. Being the only G7 country, according to the forecast, to have an economy set to shrink this year, will the Minister consider increasing spending power in the United Kingdom by focusing on help for SMEs, which are the backbone of our economy and the job creators, and in particular businesses in Northern Ireland, which are hit harder by the costs associated with the reprehensible Northern Ireland protocol?



**James Cartlidge:** As ever, the best is saved for last. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to continue to be a stalwart champion of SMEs and small businesses in his constituency and, indeed, in Northern Ireland. That is why we are focused on growth in the whole United Kingdom. Underpinning that, however, has to be fiscal stability and, ultimately, falling inflation. That is why the Prime Minister has set the target to halve inflation. To get that down would be the best thing for consumers, for small businesses and for our whole country.

## BILL PRESENTED

### SEAT BELTS (PENALTY POINTS) BILL

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

Mr Barry Sheerman, supported by Mr Ben Bradshaw, presented a Bill to make the offence of driving or riding in a motor vehicle on a road without a seat belt an endorsable offence; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 238).*

## Clean Air

*Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)*

1.24 pm

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish the right to breathe clean air; to make provision for the purpose of reducing indoor and outdoor air pollution, including greenhouse gases; to set minimum standards for air quality in workplaces, homes and public spaces; to require the monitoring of air quality; to require the Secretary of State to publish a strategy for reducing air pollution, including setting targets and measures for air quality, and to report to Parliament annually on the implementation of that strategy; to give powers to the Office for Environmental Protection to enforce legislation relating to air quality and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; to make provision for the purpose of reducing pollution from vehicles; to place a duty on the Secretary of State to encourage and facilitate forms of active travel and to publish a strategy for reducing emissions from transport; to require the Secretary of State to promote public awareness of the impact of air pollution on public health; to place restrictions on the use of wood-burning stoves in urban areas; and for connected purposes.

I first moved a Clean Air Bill on 1 November 2016 to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the Clean Air Act 1956. Since then, I have been the chair of the all-party group, so I am pleased to present this Bill, 70 years on from the great London smog that incited that 1956 Act. My Bill comes hot on the heels of another clean air Bill, the Clean Air (Human Rights) Bill, which I wholly support. We should have a right to life, to a healthy environment and to clean air, as set out by the United Nations.

I am pleased we have in our presence Rosamund Adoo-Kissi-Debrah, who has pioneered the clean air issue. This month, tragically, is the 10th anniversary of the death of her daughter, Ella, who was the first person whose cause of death was recorded as air pollution on a death certificate. The coroner said it was crucial that we enforce World Health Organisation air quality standards and have greater awareness of the public health risks among GPs and the public. Those provisions need to be in any clean air Bill or Act as Ella's law.

Globally, some 9 million people are dying prematurely from dirty air. In Britain, the figures are around 64,000, at a cost of £24 billion to the economy and the NHS, particularly through productivity loss. We are looking at lung cancer, heart disease, strokes, diabetes and obesity. Babies, children and old people are being affected in their physical and mental health through their lives. These are avoidable risks. We have a situation where *The Lancet* is saying that 41 of 52 cities breach the 2014 World Health Organisation standards of 10 micrograms per cubic metre for PM<sub>2.5</sub>, which is unacceptable.

Pollution provokes allergies, and something like 21 million people in Britain have allergies. We are in the top three nations in the world for allergies. We have 5.4 million people with asthma. We know that air pollution provokes childhood asthma and sometimes, tragically, death. According to Harvard and the Max Planck Institute, the death rate from covid in more polluted areas is 8% to 12% higher than otherwise. That is particularly the case for poorer and more diverse polluted areas, which accounts a great deal for such discrepancies in death rates and infection rates among different groups during the pandemic. Those were avoidable.

[Geraint Davies]

The focus naturally has tended to be on outdoor air pollution—the so-called natural environment that the Environment Act 2021 dealt with, talking about such things as the transport industry, agriculture and so on—forgetting that we spend 90% of our time indoors. Something like 900 dangerous chemicals have been found indoors that impact on people's health, ranging from building materials to volatile organic compounds, cleaning agents and flame retardants. Cooking, mould and damp can generate asthma. Candles are very unhealthy as well. We have a cocktail of poisonous chemicals indoors then mixing up with what is outdoors, which is causing major problems. We have seen some reduction in nitrogen oxides but, ironically, that will generate more ozone, which will generate more indoor air pollution.

We also have the growth of wood burners. Something like 1.5 million people have wood burners, and they are often middle-class people in urban environments who have central heating. They are polluting themselves and their communities, because wood burners are six times worse than HGVs for generating particulates. The Government need to be brave on that and take action to restrict the use and sale of wood burners.

The Government's ambitions and targets are frankly hopeless in comparison with the EU. The Government have said, "We will achieve 10 micrograms of PM<sub>2.5</sub> by 2040", while the EU is saying it will achieve that target by 2030, which is 10 years earlier. That will mean thousands of unnecessary deaths in Britain. Ten micrograms is not anywhere near the current WHO guideline of five micrograms. The report commissioned by the chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, into indoor air pollution found that we need better ventilation and filtration—better indoor air quality—to ensure that we can save an estimated £1.3 trillion over the next 60 years. The chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, has written a report to highlight that there is much greater infection from poorly ventilated environments, and recommended improving that in work, home and transport infrastructure, as well as focusing on wood burners.

We need greater awareness, so that people who take their children to school know that they are being polluted in the school and the playground, and to generate political pressure on local authorities, Members of Parliament and other representatives for change. We need a holistic view. It is all very well that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has some targets and the NHS picks up increasing numbers of people with all sorts of conditions, including dementia and lung, brain and heart conditions, as I have mentioned. We need the transport team involved. We need a fiscal strategy from the Treasury. We need a holistic approach that brings together all Departments in a way that takes this issue seriously.

We talk the talk on net zero, but the truth is that both air pollution and net zero are generated by one thing: burning fossil fuels. Reducing air pollution should be seen as a driver for delivering net zero rather than a helpful by-product, but that is not how it is seen. We could have new innovation by generating hydrogen from off-peak renewables and feeding that into the gas grid, so when you boil an egg there is less of a carbon footprint and much less toxicity in what you breathe, particularly if you do not ventilate. We need proper enforcement. Under the EU, ClientEarth was able to take the Government to court and have fines imposed. The Office for Environmental Protection needs teeth, which it currently does not have.

The Government's first duty should be to protect their citizens. Citizens have the right to clean air and health. A Labour Government will bring in a clean air Act, but in the meantime it is imperative that we all do everything we can now to save as many lives as possible—for Ella, for all our children, and for all our tomorrows.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Geraint Davies, John Mc Nally, Layla Moran, Ben Lake, Rosie Duffield, Ian Byrne, Debbie Abrahams, Dawn Butler, Mr Virendra Sharma, Dan Jarvis, Caroline Lucas and Christine Jardine present the Bill.

Geraint Davies accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 239).*

# Opposition Day

[12TH ALLOTTED DAY]

## Crime and Neighbourhood Policing

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** I advise the House that Mr. Speaker has selected amendment (a) in the name of the Prime Minister.

1.33 pm

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House condemns the Government's destruction of neighbourhood policing, noting a drop in the number of neighbourhood police officers by 6,000 and of Police Community Support Officers by 8,500; notes with concern the collapse in charges and prosecutions across all types of crime and an overall charge rate of just 5.5 per cent; is extremely concerned by the record levels of recorded rapes and knife-enabled threats to kill and that more than twenty million people witnessed or experienced antisocial behaviour last year; and calls on the Government to protect communities across the UK by increasing neighbourhood policing, including by ringfencing a proportion of the Police Uplift Programme to deliver neighbourhood officers for every local authority in England and Wales.

The motion is to restore and renew neighbourhood policing, which has been decimated by 13 years of Conservative Government. Before I talk about what is happening in our towns on policing and crime, may I first briefly say something about today's publication of the police response to the Hillsborough inquiry? Ninety seven people lost their lives as a result of what happened at Hillsborough 34 years ago. Families had to fight for decades against smears, lies and obfuscation to get to the truth, but they still do not have justice 34 years on.

The fulsome apology from the police today is welcome, and so too is their acceptance of some of the bishop's recommendations about a duty of candour—something the Government have previously voted against—as well as support for families at inquests. But this comes five years after the bishop's report, and 34 years after Hillsborough. Where is the Government's response? They promised nearly 18 months ago that we would have a response by the end of 2021, but the months and years keep rolling by. We need a commitment to a Hillsborough law to address this.

The Home Secretary's predecessor but four, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), took this matter seriously and we welcomed that. To have no response right now shows a lack of respect for the families who have endured so much and the communities who have supported and fought for them. I will happily give way to the Home Secretary if she wants to tell us when the Government response to the Hillsborough report will be published.

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman):** I will address that in my response to the right hon. Lady.

**Yvette Cooper:** I thank the Home Secretary and look forward to her response. She will know how important that is.

I turn to neighbourhood policing. The number of people who say that they never see the police on patrol on the streets has almost doubled since the Conservatives took office, from around a quarter of the population to

half. Half the country say that they never or hardly ever see a police officer patrolling the streets, according to the national crime survey. That is what 13 years of the Conservatives have done.

At the same time, the number of criminals being caught or punished has plummeted. Since 2010, arrests have halved; prosecutions have almost halved; community penalties have halved; and crimes solved have halved. The proportion of cases that collapse because victims give up and drop out has trebled. More crimes are reported and recorded, but hundreds of thousands fewer crimes are solved, hundreds of thousands fewer victims are getting justice, and more criminals are getting away with it.

Every one of us will have these cases in their surgeries: the residents who have complained about drug dealers on the corner, and nothing is done; the street drinkers who make them feel unsafe, and nothing is done; the broken windows and shop break-ins that go ignored; the antisocial behaviour that escalates; the kids who have been expelled from school who just wander the streets and get drawn into gang violence instead, and nothing is done; the repeat offender back out of prison who nobody is following up on; and the domestic abuse victim who has no one to turn to because the police are overstretched and the court delays are so long. More victims are giving up on the whole thing and walking away.

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): I understand that the right hon. Lady's mission today is to paint a dystopian picture of crime, but before she elaborates, will she take the opportunity to congratulate the police on the significant falls we have seen not just in specific crimes such as burglary, robbery and knife crime, but in overall crime? She will know that the recently published crime survey of England and Wales shows that, in the year to September, overall crime was down 10% on pre-pandemic levels. Surely she wants to congratulate the police on that before enumerating their sometimes obvious but none the less difficult failings.

**Yvette Cooper:** Let me be very clear. I welcome the huge amount of work that police officers do every single day of the week to keep our communities safe—the police officers and police community support officers who are overstretched; and the detectives juggling huge caseloads, which they struggle to keep up with because of huge shortages of detectives, because there has been no workforce planning by the Government year after year.

I welcome some the long-term trends in crime that started 25 years ago, but the Government's amendment eliminates online crime, despite it having soared over the past few years. That is where we have seen some of the big increases in crime. Government Ministers may want to dismiss the huge fraud against pensioners who have lost their savings, the online scams or the grooming of children online, but we should take those sorts of online crimes and fraud immensely seriously, because they devastate and ruin people's lives.

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): The right hon. Lady is making a powerful speech, and I wholeheartedly agree with what she says about uninvestigated non-violent crime causing people to lose hope. I keep hearing of people who do not bother reporting crime at all any more. Will she elaborate on



[Layla Moran]

Labour's plans for online crime and, in particular, ID theft? A constituent of mine recently had her ID stolen, and it has cost thousands of pounds and caused consternation for her and her family. The police want to investigate but just do not have the resources.

**Yvette Cooper:** The hon. Member is completely right. We have seen changing patterns of crime as criminals make the most of new technology, and the problem is that the police have not been equipped to keep up. That, ultimately, is the responsibility of the Government, so it is no use Ministers or Conservative Back Benchers blaming the police for the situation that the Home Office has put our police forces in and the fact that they have been unable to keep up with changing crime and the changing pressures on them.

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): We know that crime varies across the country. My right hon. Friend will share my horror that knife crime in north-east England has increased by 104%, from 1,077 incidents in 2015 to 2,203 last year. That is hundreds more lives impacted by the Government's failure to get on top of serious crime in our region. We had some so-called extra money in Cleveland but still have hundreds fewer police officers than we did in 2010. Does she agree that a long-term, sustainable plan—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** Order. A lot of Members want to take part in this debate. Using an intervention to make a speech when you have not indicated your intention to make a speech is, frankly, not in order.

**Yvette Cooper:** My hon. Friend is right that what has happened on serious violent crime is among the most troubling. Since 2015 there has been a huge increase in knife crime and serious violence, and we have seen some criminal gangs change their model to be able to groom more children and draw young people into crime and, as a result, into violence. It is our young people who we see paying the price for the way in which criminal gangs have been operating. That is why we put forward proposals to strengthen the law by outlawing child criminal exploitation, to make it easier to crack down on criminal gangs. I urge Ministers who voted against that proposal to accept it and to take a much tougher line on the criminal gangs who are exploiting our children.

The problem is that from policing to courts, our NHS, social care, our trains and our economy, after 13 years of the Tories it just feels like nothing in Britain is working any more—that is the damage they have done.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The Welsh Labour Government's Commission on Justice in Wales recommended that policing and crime policy be devolved to Wales, to be aligned with social and health policy, but some Labour MPs resist that, even though it is Mark Drakeford's policy. Policing is devolved to Scotland, to Northern Ireland and even to Manchester. Could the right hon. Lady tell me whether it is likely that a Labour Government or Labour in Westminster would ever recommend the devolution of policing to Wales?

**Yvette Cooper:** The Welsh Government already do take a different approach in a significant way: the Welsh Government have worked with police and crime commissioners in Wales to support and fund additional PCSOs, and that has made a difference in terms of neighbourhood policing on Welsh streets.

The Government have tabled an amendment to our motion so that they can vote against Labour's plan to increase neighbourhood policing. That is what Government Members are voting for tonight—they are voting against Labour's plan to increase neighbourhood policing. Instead, they want us to welcome their efforts to increase police numbers, but who cut them in the first place? It was Tory MPs and Tory Ministers who voted to cut 20,000 police officers from forces right across the country—from our neighbourhoods, from detective work and from response teams—and now they expect everyone to be grateful because they are trying to put some of them back. Twenty thousand experienced police officers gone. The Tories claim that they are on track to reverse the cuts. Actually, they are not, because the number of officers leaving policing has been increasing. For example, North Yorkshire police have said today that they are leaving 120 vacancies unfilled so that they can make their budget add up.

The police are not ending up on the streets, either. More of them are now behind desks because police staff have been cut and bureaucracy has gone up. More of them are dealing with mental health crises and missing persons. After 13 years of Tory government, the NHS and social care cannot cope, and the police are having to pick up the pieces, and there is a huge shortage of detectives, because there has been no national workforce plan, and everyone is having to try to plug the gaps.

There are 6,000 fewer neighbourhood officers and 8,000 fewer PCSOs, with the number of PCSOs having halved since 2010. Neighbourhood teams have been decimated. People say they do not see the police on the street any more—that is because, across the country, they are not on the street any more. No wonder it feels like Britain is not working. Communities are being let down.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Ind): My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. There are 3,500 fewer PCSOs now than in 2010, but it is not just the numbers; the estate is vanishing as well. She talked about people behind desks. In Ealing we used to have four police stations: Greenford, Hanwell, Ealing and Acton. Now there is only one. Does she agree that police need places to do their paperwork as well?

**Yvette Cooper:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. Right across the country, over the last 13 years, police forces have closed police stations. Some of them are now houses in multiple occupation with problems with antisocial behaviour—you could not make it up! That is a result of decisions that Conservative Ministers have made.

It is good to see the Home Secretary here today, because we do not see her that much. If I am honest, I do not really know what she does. The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has been put in charge of dealing with antisocial behaviour. The Prime Minister has taken charge on small boats. The Navy has been in charge of patrolling the channel.

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** Not any more.

**Yvette Cooper:** It did not work, did it? No. That much-vaunted policy that they announced a year ago has ended up with record high levels of dangerous boat crossings.

The DLUHC Secretary is also deciding on the Prevent review and running Homes for Ukraine, while the Education Secretary, the Work and Pensions Secretary and the Treasury have taken over deciding legal migration policy and have cancelled the Home Secretary's plan to bring back the net migration target and cut student numbers. The Immigration Minister has taken over asylum accommodation, because when the Home Secretary was in charge, she broke the law. The Security Minister has taken over security policy because she cannot be trusted not to leak. She is not charging criminals, because that has got worse. In fact, the number of prosecutions fell by 20% when the Home Secretary was the Attorney General. She is not sorting out the Windrush scandal because she has cancelled all that. She is not doing work on police standards or tackling misogyny, racism or violence against women and girls because she thinks all of that is woke.

There was all that fuss about the sacking this week of the right hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) as the Tory party chair and Minister without Portfolio. The real Minister without Portfolio is still in office! But she does not get let out much. She does not even do TV or radio interviews. I do not think we have heard her in the morning or on a Sunday for months. She is the shadow of a Home Secretary. She is a shadow shadow Home Secretary, so why does she not just get out of the way and let somebody else do the job?

An absentee Tory Home Secretary is not new: successive Tory Home Secretaries have walked away from taking action to get justice for victims, to catch criminals or to keep communities safe. Knife crime is therefore 71% higher than seven years ago, stabbings are up 63%, and knife-enabled rape is at a record high.

**Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The charge rate for rape is just 1.6%. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is down to the large-scale cuts to policing and the Crown Prosecution Service budget that conviction rates are so low and the overwhelming majority of victims are not getting the justice they deserve? After 13 years of Conservative Governments, they are allowing rapists to get off scot-free while victims suffer.

**Yvette Cooper:** My hon. Friend makes an important point because more criminals are getting off under the Tories. As a result of 13 years of Conservative Governments, criminals are not paying the price. About 7,000 people will be the victim of theft today. Of those thefts, just over 4,000 will be reported to the police, but only 180 will face court. For thousands more victims, there will be no justice.

The worst figures of all are on rape. The Conservatives' amendment to the motion shows how low they have fallen and how out of touch they are. The proportion of rape cases reaching charge is still two thirds lower than six or seven years ago, and it was too low then, but their amendment effectively boasts about an increase of a third in the number of adult rape convictions in the last

year. The number of convictions in a year that they are talking about is 532, which is the equivalent of about one and a half convictions a day. That figure may be up from just over one conviction a day during the covid crisis the year before, but let us think about the estimated 300 women who are raped every day. Are we supposed to be grateful and applaud the fact that there might be a conviction in perhaps one and a half rather than one of those cases? What kind of justice does it provide for the other 298 women if just one or two of those rapists are locked up? What kind of shameless, failing Government think that they should boast about that appalling failure in justice for women and girls? I say to Government Members, "That is the motion that you will be voting for this afternoon." They will vote against an increase in neighbourhood policing and vote to boast about a truly dismal record in tackling violence against women and girls.

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): Despite unprecedented levels of recorded rape and sexual offences, local authorities and charities are having to fight to keep open victim support services, such as women's centres. Meanwhile, the long-promised victims Bill is nowhere to be seen. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, alongside ending violence against women and girls, we must prioritise supporting the victims of crime?

**Yvette Cooper:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right: where is the victims Bill? Where is the opportunity to provide proper support for victims of crime, not just of domestic abuse and sexual violence, but more widely? They need support but, too often, the Government have turned their back on them and they have been badly let down.

Where, too, is the action to get specialist rape investigation units in all our police forces? Again, too often, the Government have turned their back. For all their talk about powers and sentencing, the reality is that they voted against Labour's policy for new powers to clamp down on the criminal gangs that are exploiting and grooming children; they voted against Labour's policy to increase sentences for rape and set minimum sentences; and they voted against Labour's policy for increased monitoring and powers on repeat domestic abuse perpetrators.

**Chris Philp:** Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Yvette Cooper:** I will give way to the Minister, if he can defend his Government's decision not to make specialist rape investigation units mandatory and not to vote for minimum sentences in rape cases.

**Chris Philp:** The right hon. Lady asks about sentencing in rape cases. I point out that the average rape sentence is now nearly two years higher than after the last Labour Government. She talks about voting on rape sentencing. Extraordinarily, in Committee of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill in 2022, the Opposition voted against a specific clause that saw people convicted of rape spending two thirds of their sentence in prison, rather than one third.

**Yvette Cooper indicated dissent.**

**Chris Philp:** Yes, they did—I was extremely surprised. Perhaps she can explain to the House why Labour voted against keeping rapists in prison for longer.

**Yvette Cooper:** The Labour party voted for minimum sentences for rape—to increase sentencing for rape. It does not matter what the sentencing powers are, however, if nobody is being prosecuted and sentenced in the first place; the number of people who are being prosecuted and sentenced has plummeted. Victims are not getting justice and record numbers of victims are giving up on the criminal justice system, because they have been so badly let down after 13 years of Conservative Governments. How can a prosecution rate of 1.6% be anything other than a total shame and dereliction of duty by the Conservative Government, Conservative Home Office and Conservative Ministers?

Let us remember, too, that the Conservatives voted to cut Labour's counter-terror powers and ended control orders so that the terrorism prevention and investigation measures that replaced them are barely used. They also voted to cut Labour's antisocial behaviour powers, so what is left is barely used. We hear that they now want to do something more on antisocial behaviour, because they are fed up with nuisance neighbours holding loud parties or with risky behaviour in the streets or in our cars, and they are thinking about bringing in more fixed penalty notices.

Well, the Prime Minister certainly knows all about fixed penalty notices. He is the first ever Prime Minister to ratchet up not just one but two penalties for law breaking in the space of 12 months. He is surrounded at the Cabinet table by multiple rule breakers and other repeat offenders, and he chose to ignore warnings about rule breaking by four of the Cabinet Ministers he appointed. As his Home Secretary and Justice Secretary—the two jobs most responsible for establishing respect for the rules and enforcing the law—he has chosen two people who he was warned in the autumn were under suspicion for breaking Ministers' rules.

**Anna Firth** (Southend West) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. What has this got to do with the matter that we are debating?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** If I believed that the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) was out of order, I would have said so.

**Yvette Cooper:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

If the hon. Member for Southend West (Anna Firth) does not see a connection between establishing respect in our communities for the rule of law and the rules and a sense of enforcement, and the behaviour of Government Ministers, including fixed penalty notices and law breaking by the Prime Minister, then she reflects the same problem. There is a culture across those in the Conservative party that there is one rule for them and another for everyone else. It is no wonder that no one takes them seriously on law and order any more.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. I said that I would decide when the line has been crossed; the right hon. Lady is in grave danger of crossing it.

**Yvette Cooper:** With respect for the rules and the rule of law, Mr Deputy Speaker, I turn to the need for a new approach, because this situation is not fair for our communities. The collapse in neighbourhood policing

and in justice for victims is not just making people feel less safe, but undermining our town centres and local economies, as well as undermining respect for the rule of law and the crucial trust that lies at the heart of the British policing model of policing by consent.

**Wendy Chamberlain** (North East Fife) (LD): The right hon. Member is talking about respect and we are also talking about trust, and I think we have to acknowledge that trust in the police has been significantly eroded of late. Does she agree with me that neighbourhood policing is actually critical to rebuilding that trust? It is much better to see a police officer on the street who knows their local community and is known by the community, as opposed to one at a distance.

**Yvette Cooper:** The hon. Member is exactly right. It is having police officers and PCSOs rooted in communities, who know their communities and can also respond to communities and community concerns, that helps to gather intelligence about offenders and perpetrators, helps to prevent crime in the first place and helps to build trust so that people feel more confident about reporting to the police. I agree with her that it is crucial, alongside the other reforms I was about to mention.

We would also introduce a new law on police standards, making vetting compulsory and being clear on mandatory standards on training and misconduct, with the very basic idea that, if a police officer faces allegations of rape or domestic abuse, they should be suspended, not just put behind a desk. Raising standards and increasing the community connections of the police is a really important way to support policing as well as to support communities.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the shadow Home Secretary for her discussion of what she is proposing. I very much support community policing. Just Monday—yesterday—we had a meeting with the chief inspector back in Northern Ireland on the cutbacks in the police, and one thing he told us was that community policing will be central to any policing going forward. That is what we are doing in Northern Ireland. Does the right hon. Lady agree that that is what should happen here?

**Yvette Cooper:** I do agree that that is what should happen here, and at the moment it is not happening. At the moment, we still have 6,000 fewer police officers and 8,000 fewer PCSOs, with rumours that PCSOs may face further cuts over the next 12 months, just at a time when we should be supporting and working with communities, instead of fearing that things may actually be going further backwards.

That is why Labour has set out plans for 13,000 additional police officers and PCSOs, funded by requiring forces to sign up for joint procurement and ringfencing some of the new recruits, to go alongside the new law on police standards. Police officers across the country are doing some phenomenal work, such as those remaining police officers who are based in our communities, the PCSOs who work very hard every single day of the week, and the officers who are attempting to solve crimes with huge case loads and facing real pressure and trouble. However, those officers need our support, and they need the additional neighbourhood policing teams in place to rebuild such connections.



**Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con):** Clearly, increasing numbers is very important, but does the right hon. Lady agree that, in addition, we need to give police officers the power they need to take a zero-tolerance approach where they need to, in being robust in tackling people who blight our town centres and make life a misery for so many?

**Yvette Cooper:** I do agree that the police need to have the powers to tackle serious abuse, antisocial behaviour and problems in our town centres. At the moment, there are not police officers there; too often, they are not on patrol and they are not there. I would just gently remind the hon. Member that it was his Government and Conservative MPs who all voted to cut antisocial behaviour powers, leaving powers that just are not being used at all. Nobody is using even the antisocial behaviour powers they have, and it was Ministers and Tory MPs who voted to cut those powers in the first place.

**Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab):** My right hon. Friend is making a fantastic speech. I just want to refer to hate crime. We have seen a massive increase in hate crime over the last 10 years from about 40,000 cases up to about 155,000 cases last year. Although we are seeing improvements in prosecutions, the figure is still less than 10% of cases. This makes a huge difference to our communities and to making sure that everybody feels safe. What are her comments on that?

**Yvette Cooper:** My hon. Friend is right, and these are also the kinds of crimes—for example, homophobic assaults or racist threats—that can be hugely damaging, and these serious crimes also undermine community cohesion. It is really important that the police are able to respond and have the neighbourhood officers to do so, and also that they do the work on prevention—including, frankly, in our national health service and in our social services—to ease the pressures that the police currently face in dealing with missing persons or mental health crises.

We are calling on the Government to make a proper commitment to neighbourhood policing. What Labour would do and what a Labour Government will do is to have additional police officers and PCSOs back in our neighbourhood teams, supported to work with the communities. That goes back to the core Peel principle that the police are the public and the public are the police. The police are part of our communities in standing up for communities, but also in getting justice for them—getting the prosecutions and the justice that victims need and that they have been denied for too long. That is what Labour believes in. The Tories have shown that they are weak on crime, weak on justice and weak on law and order, and that is why we need a Labour Government now.

2.5 pm

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman):** I beg to move amendment (a), to leave out from “House” to end and add:

“welcomes the Government’s efforts to increase police numbers, with 16,743 so far recruited and on track to meet the Government’s 20,000 target by March; notes that there will be more officers than ever before in England and Wales; recognises that, excluding online crime, overall crime is down by 50 per cent since 2010; notes with concern that the Labour Mayor of London has

overseen a 9 per cent increase in knife crime while the number of young people assaulted with sharp objects is down nationally by 23 per cent since 2019; notes that adult rape convictions are up by a third in the last recorded year; notes that the Safer Streets Fund rounds have funded 270 projects designed to cut neighbourhood crimes such as theft, burglary, anti-social behaviour, and violence against women and girls; and welcomes the Government’s determination to back the police in giving them the powers they need to crack down on dangerous criminals and protests that wreak havoc on ordinary people’s lives.”

First, let me address the issue of the Hillsborough report. The Hillsborough disaster was a devastating tragedy, and we recognise the significant impact that it continues to have on those affected, their families and their communities. The timing of the Government’s response has been impacted by the need to avoid the risk of prejudice during any criminal proceedings related to Hillsborough. None the less, work has been under way, and has been undertaken across all relevant Government Departments and organisations to carefully consider and address the points of learning included and directed to them in the bishop’s report.

As the National Police Chiefs’ Council is independent of Government, it is for it to publish its own response independently of Government, and that is a step I welcome, but the Government remain absolutely committed to responding to the bishop’s report as soon as practicable. Our focus now is on engaging in a meaningful way with the bereaved families of the Hillsborough disaster prior to publishing the Government’s overarching response. It is critical that lessons can be learned from their experience and that they are not lost as we move forward.

**Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab):** Today’s apology from the police is welcome, but long overdue. Will the Home Secretary take this opportunity to commit to a Hillsborough law that would give victims of state-related death or disaster parity of legal representation?

**Suella Braverman:** I pay tribute to the indefatigable work by the campaigners, who have worked for many years to ensure that the truth is known and that justice is done. I am supportive of all work to help them ensure that their voice is heard in the process, but let me take that away and consider it fully before I give a meaningful response.

We have heard from the shadow Home Secretary, and—we are in the awards season—her performance is really worthy of an Oscar. She is strong on alarmism and strong on hysteria, but a little weak on facts. This Government are proud of our record on crime and policing. Since 2010—indeed, since 2019—we have delivered more police and less crime. Thanks to Government funding, our streets are safer and there are fewer victims of crime. I am not complacent, however, and I know that there remain many challenges. I will not rest until we restore confidence in the police and until everyone feels safer in their communities. So let us go through the facts.

**Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab):** Will the Home Secretary give way?

**Suella Braverman:** I want to make some progress, and I will take some interventions later.

The first fact—achievement No. 1—is that this Government are on track to deliver the most police officers in the history of policing in England and Wales.

[*Suella Braverman*]

We are on track to deliver 20,000 new police officers by March 2023, and in that regard I want to pay tribute to my right hon. Friends the Members for Witham (Priti Patel), for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse)—he was in the Chamber earlier—for their leadership of that mission.

**Ruth Edwards** (Rushcliffe) (Con): In Nottinghamshire we have 405 more police officers as a result of the policing uplift. Many have gone into the neighbourhood policing team, so we have newbie officers in villages such as Keyworth and Ruddington. Will the Home Secretary join me in thanking Inspector Rob Lawton and his neighbourhood team for the brilliant work they do in Rushcliffe, and will she tell the House when the long-awaited review into the police funding formula will begin, so that great forces such as Nottinghamshire police can get the resources they deserve?

**Suella Braverman**: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I join her in paying tribute to the police leadership in her county and her force. It is thanks to strong leaders in her police force that we have higher police numbers, more bobbies on the beat, and more visible, responsive policing at the heart of our local communities. We will begin consulting on police funding soon, so we can ensure that the resources and money reach the front line where they are needed.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): The 231 new police officers in the West Mercia region are very welcome indeed. But this is not just about numbers; it is also about innovation, and West Mercia police has been very innovative with Shifnal Town Council, and potentially other town councils such as Newport, by having a community hub where there can be a permanent police presence. The capital and revenue costs are shared across the community, and there is a one-stop shop for a lot of public services. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that model is worth looking at in more detail, perhaps to roll it out across the whole of Shropshire and the west midlands?

**Suella Braverman**: My right hon. Friend is right—there is huge innovation and good practice around the country when it comes to local policing. Police forces are using powers that the Government have given them, and using the numbers and resources we have given them, to be a bit more responsive and more visible, and to ensure that people feel safer and that crime is falling.

**Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary give way?

**Suella Braverman**: I will carry on and come back to the hon. Lady. From Greater Manchester to Kent, and from the Thames valley to the west midlands, on my visits around the country I have seen so many brave men and women join the police, coming forward in their droves to protect the public. On behalf of the British people, I thank them. Nineteen forces have already hit record levels, and the Met, Kent, Norfolk, South Wales, Suffolk, Warwickshire and West Yorkshire police all have the highest numbers of police officers in their

history—higher than in 2019, higher than in 2015, higher than in 2010, and higher than the years when Labour was in charge.

**Tahir Ali** (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary explain why in the west midlands we will still have 1,000 fewer police officers this year than we did in 2010?

**Suella Braverman**: The hon. Gentleman is just not right. As of 31 December, our police uplift programme has recruited an additional 16,000 new officers, bringing us to a total of over 145,000 nationwide, with more—in a welcome sense—female and ethnic minority officers than ever before. That is no accident. That all took planning and funding by this Government. What did Labour Members do? They voted against it.

**Yvette Cooper**: The Home Secretary is just sort of inventing things there. The police workforce statistics—her own workforce statistics—show that there are 6,000 fewer neighbourhood police officers, and 8,000 fewer PCSOs. Half the country say that they do not see police officers on patrol. How does she explain that shocking decimation of neighbourhood police?

**Suella Braverman**: I disagree with the right hon. Lady's characterisation, but it is obviously helpful for her to play with the figures. If we look at how we are classifying roles in policing, we see that when it comes to incident and response management, numbers are up. On local policing, the 2022 figures were greater than those from 2015. She can move around the deckchairs and play with the figures all she likes, but the reality is that we are on track to have a record number of police officers.

Let me get back to the facts. Achievement No. 2: crime is down. Despite the naysayers on the Opposition Benches, since 2010, according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales—the most authoritative evidence about crime compiled by the Office for National Statistics—burglary is down by 50%, robbery is down by 45%, and violence is down by 46%. That is 500,000 fewer burglaries, 180,000 fewer robberies, and 700,000 fewer victims of violence than in 2010. Crucially, overall crime, excluding fraud and online crime, is down by 48% compared with 2010. I hope that Labour Members take this chance to reflect and apologise to the British people for the disgraceful state in which they left this country, and for objecting to our measures to fix the mess that they left.

**Lee Anderson** (Ashfield) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for giving way—she is generous with her time. Here in Labour controlled lawless London, crime is up, knife crime is up, burglary is up, and violent crime is up. Does she think it a good idea for us to take advice from the Labour party on how to clear up crime in our country, because I don't?

**Suella Braverman**: I am afraid that Labour's Sadiq Khan, who has overall responsibility for London's crime and policing, has a woeful track record. When overall crime is falling, it is rising in London. When people are feeling safer around the country, they are facing more crime in London. I urge Labour MPs here today—there are some, but I think some of them have left out of embarrassment—to get on to Sadiq Khan, get on to their man in London, and tell him to start fighting crime.

**Chris Clarkson** (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): The Home Secretary is being generous with her time. Obviously, the north does not like to be left out, so I point out that the second largest force in England, Greater Manchester police, also went into special measures under Andy Burnham's mismanagement. Is that a more accurate reflection of what happens when the Labour party is running police forces than the drivel that we heard from the Front Bench?

**Suella Braverman:** I could not have put it better myself. My hon. Friend makes the point very powerfully. This is about empowering our police and crime commissioners around the country so that they can hold chief constables to account. We know that Labour is more interested in gimmicks and political correctness, rather than common sense, back-to-basics policing, and getting the basics right for people in our communities.

Of course there is more to do and we will keep fighting. Since I became Home Secretary, I have ensured that all forces are committed to attending every residential burglary. I have introduced legislation for tackling disruptive protests, and I have begun a package of work to improve police efficiency, with new counting rules, focusing the police away from non-crime hate incidents. I have introduced new disciplinary processes, plans for better vetting, support for non-degree entry routes, and the clear, hold, build strategy to take on serious and organised crime. I am reviewing the police's approach to equality and diversity. It is clear for everybody to see—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members can carp from the sidelines all they like, but they have no plan whatsoever to help the law-abiding majority, while this Government are getting on with the job of delivering common-sense policing.

I believe in the police. I am in awe of their everyday bravery, and I am grateful for their sacrifice. But I want them to focus on getting the basics right. That means the highest professional standards and a relentless focus on cutting crime, with no politically correct distractions. It means common-sense policing.

**Alex Cunningham:** The Home Secretary mentioned disciplinary issues in the police, and police and crime commissioners. Last week the other place debated the lack of action to progress the disciplinary case against former Chief Constable Mike Veale for alleged gross misconduct. The Government say that the issue lies with the PCC, and the PCC says that his hands are tied. Which is it, and what is the Foreign Secretary going to do about it?

**Suella Braverman:** When it comes to decisions and investigations by the Independent Office for Police Conduct, that is an independent process in which I cannot intervene. What it comes down to is empowering chief constables to be able properly to discipline those police officers who fall short. That is why I am engaging in a programme of work to ensure that they have greater powers to take the right action to root out the poor officers in their ranks.

It is essential that the police work to win back public confidence and serve the law-abiding majority. We need visible, responsive policing treating victims with respect and care. That is why I called for the police to turn up to every single burglary—it makes a difference to victims and to the investigation. It is also right that all forces

have now committed that officers will visit every victim after a crime such as domestic burglary. People should expect nothing less.

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Will the right hon. and learned Lady commit to the police going out to every single incident of domestic abuse here today?

**Suella Braverman:** I will get on to what we are doing for women and girls. I am incredibly proud of the landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which the Government pioneered and led and is providing a huge amount of resource and powers to those supporting victims of domestic abuse. People want to feel safe—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** Order. Opposition Front-Bench Members know how to behave.

**Suella Braverman:** People want to feel safe in their villages, their towns and their cities. The purpose of the police is to fight crime, not to engage in symbolic gestures on social media. That is common-sense policing. That is what the best officers want to do, and they need to be liberated to do their real jobs. We should not be afraid of the term “old-fashioned policing”. That is why I want everybody who has a passion to serve their country or community to feel welcome in the police, whether they have a degree or not. Policing needs the best, the bravest and the brightest to sign up, and not necessarily those who have or need a degree. That is why I asked the College of Policing to introduce a new non-degree entry route for recruits: common-sense policing by the people, for the people.

We are on the side of the British public, who want to go about their business in peace. That is why we introduced and passed the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which came into force last year. It increased powers for our brave policemen and women and increased sentences for some of the most violent offences. What did Labour Members do? They voted against it.

That is also why we are delivering our Public Order Bill this year. We respect the right to protest, of course, but selfish and disruptive extremists have caused havoc for thousands of ordinary working people—people trying to get to work, to school or to hospital. Just last night, I introduced measures that would have made it easier for the police to take swifter action against groups such as Just Stop Oil. What did Labour Members do? They voted against them. Why? Because they are on the side of the eco-zealots and in the pockets of the militants. They do not care about the law-abiding majority.

We need to ensure that the police have all the tools to keep people safe. Stop and search is important in fighting crime, reducing violence and saving lives. The Met Police Commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, and the chief constable of Greater Manchester police, Stephen Watson, have both said as much. That is why we have relaxed restrictions and are empowering the police to stop and challenge known knife carriers. It is why I am bringing in serious violence disruption orders imminently. In 2021, stop and search removed nearly 15,000 weapons and firearms from our streets and led to almost 67,000 arrests.



**Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State aware that when stop and search is not done well, it has a huge negative impact on children, parents and the community? Too often, when the police have done stop and search incorrectly, that has gone on to affect communities negatively.

**Suella Braverman:** When we speak to frontline police officers and those who are affected because family members have been victims of knife crime or violent crime, we understand that stop and search is a vital tool not only in reducing violent crime, but in saving lives. The proportionate and targeted use of stop and search is an essential tool that I support the police using.

Let us not forget London. Knife crime is a problem in London and, under Labour's Sadiq Khan, rates are up by 11%. So, instead of carping from the sidelines, Labour MPs would be far better off using their time by encouraging their Labour man in London to demand that the police get back to getting weapons off our streets. On serious violence, the Government have backed the police with investment and support to reduce violence.

**Yvette Cooper:** On that point, in London, knife crime is down by 16% over the last four years, whereas on average over the rest of the country it has gone up. Will the Home Secretary withdraw the point she just made?

**Suella Braverman:** The data I have is that knife crime has gone up in London, and there are really serious challenges when it comes to Labour's management of policing in London.

**Paul Holmes** (Eastleigh) (Con): Despite what the shadow Home Secretary said, knife crime in London has risen by 11%. That is proven by "Crime in England and Wales" from the Office for National Statistics, dated 26 January 2023.

**Suella Braverman:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that clarification. We have made £130 million available over the financial year 2022-23 to tackle serious violence, including murder and knife crime. Take our violence reduction units, which have reached over 260,000 young people who are vulnerable, preventing them from falling into a life of crime in the first place. Our Grip police enforcement programme is supporting the police in the crime hotspots most affected by serious violence. Together, Grip and violence reduction units have prevented an estimated 136,000 violent offences.

We went further. Our Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act introduced the serious violence duty: a new legal requirement for agencies to work together to prevent and reduce serious violence locally. What did Labour Members do? They voted against it.

Everybody deserves to feel safe everywhere. I am proud of our safer streets fund, which was launched in 2020 by the Government and has supported 270 projects around the country designed to cut neighbourhood crimes such as theft, burglary and antisocial behaviour as well as violence against women and girls. In Humberside, improved communal entrances to flats are helping to prevent drug dealing, and new storage units are stopping bike and motorbike theft. In Northampton, funding has supported improvements to the security of thousands

of homes that were vulnerable to burglary with alleyway gates installed to prevent an easy escape for offenders. In Essex, the use of public space protection orders has resulted in a significant reduction in nuisance and antisocial behaviour.

**Rachel Hopkins** (Luton South) (Lab): I am conscious that the responsibility for antisocial behaviour has been moved across to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Does the Home Secretary think that is because the Prime Minister has no confidence in her ability to take that forward?

**Suella Braverman:** The hon. Lady is wrong. Antisocial behaviour is about a criminal and policing response to behaviour that blights communities. The Home Office leads on antisocial behaviour, but of course we work in partnership. Those who know about tackling antisocial behaviour will tell her that it requires a policing response and a heavy local authority response. That is why, working as a team, we need policing and local authority partners to work in partnership, and that is what my colleague, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and I are doing as a team.

Countless projects across the country have set up neighbourhood watch groups, increased CCTV and introduced wardens to improve community engagement, all to help the law-abiding majority. The crime survey for England and Wales estimates that there has been a decrease of 24% in neighbourhood crime since December 2019. However, let me be clear: drugs are an underlying cause of antisocial behaviour, which blights communities. The illegal drug trade wrecks lives and also requires a targeted approach. Our strategy on illicit drugs will cut off supply and give addicts a route to a productive and drug-free life, while reducing the recreational use of drugs. The Home Office has invested £130 million in that effort. Through our flagship county lines programme, we have closed down 2,500 county lines and made 8,000 arrests. We have safeguarded thousands more people, preventing them from falling into this wicked, destructive business. Border Force has made major seizures and Project ADDER—addiction, diversion, disruption, enforcement and recovery—is another success. That is all targeting the supply and use of drugs. We will continue, because this is so closely related to antisocial behaviour. That will include restricting access to nitrous oxide.

Tackling violence against women and girls is a priority not just for the Government but for me. Every woman in the Chamber will know that feeling—on the street, on public transport, at work or school, online, and sometimes, tragically, in the home—of feeling unsafe, on guard and threatened. That has to change. Deputy Chief Constable Maggie Blyth is the first national policing lead on violence against women and girls. Addressing the issue is now a strategic policing requirement just like tackling terrorism, serious and organised crime and child abuse. I am proud of the action we have taken since 2010. Of course, there is more to do, but let us not ignore the huge and important progress made so far.

The Government have criminalised forced marriage, revenge porn, failing to protect a girl from female genital mutilation and virginity testing. We introduced Clare's law, new stalking offences and stalking protection orders, and the offence of controlling and coercive

behaviour. We passed the landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and we are now backing a new law on street harassment. That is a track record of which I am proud.

Let me just say this to the Opposition Front Benchers. Labour, frankly, is in no fit state to lecture the Government about protecting women after the Scottish Labour party voted in favour of the SNP's gender recognition Bill. If enacted, the Bill would allow predatory men to access women-only spaces. It would allow sexual offenders to more easily harm women, an obvious and serious risk to women's safety.

The shadow Home Secretary was asked last year to define a woman—she likes touring the media studios. She just could not do it, saying it was a rabbit hole she did not need to go down. Let me help her. The answer is an adult human female. How can the right hon. Lady even begin to fight for the safety of women when she cannot even define one?

**Jess Phillips:** I think a woman is an adult human female. I wonder whether the Home Secretary will commit that, when one is beaten up by her husband, every single call to the police on domestic abuse will receive a response?

**Suella Braverman:** I will just get back to the point I was making: the shadow Home Secretary does not have any legitimacy on fighting for the safety of women when she cannot even define one.

Rape and sexual violence are devastating crimes that can have a long-lasting impact on victims.

**Yvette Cooper:** I thank the Home Secretary for giving way, but she has not answered the question that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) asked. We have been very clear: women are adult females, and when they are abused, and when they are raped, they are not getting justice. Hundreds of women every day are being denied justice and denied the protection of the courts because no rapists are being prosecuted. The Home Secretary is refusing to commit to having police officers go to the homes of those adult females, those women, who are being abused every single day. Will she now commit to saying that the police will go to every single domestic abuse case—yes or no?

**Suella Braverman:** Let me get on to what we are doing on rape and serious sexual offences, and on domestic abuse. I am very glad that more victims and survivors are coming forward and reporting these crimes to the police. More needs to be done by the whole of the criminal justice system. Through the rape review, the Government took a hard and honest look at how the entire criminal justice system dealt with rape. In too many instances, it simply had not been good enough. In December we published a rape review progress report, setting out the progress made in the 18 months since the publication of the action plan. The number of cases referred by the police to the Crown Prosecution Service was up by 95, the volume of cases charged was up by two thirds, and the number of cases reaching the Crown court was up 91% compared to 2019 averages.

**Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The wealth of evidence to the Home Affairs Committee is that specialist rape and serious sexual assault units in police forces mean that more investigations go better, with more prosecutions and victims being

treated better. So why is it that not all our police forces have those specialist units? If the Home Secretary is really serious about being on the side of women, why does she not make all police forces have those units?

**Suella Braverman:** I am absolutely committed to getting better outcomes for victims of rape and serious sexual offences, and that does require more specialism. That is why Operation Soteria, which we initiated and we have driven forward, is focused on ensuring that there is much better collaboration between the police and the CPS, more specialism in the system, and better practice on the ground when it comes to supporting victims of rape and serious sexual offences through the investigative process.

The increase in the number of independent sexual violence advisers and independent domestic violence advisers has been hugely beneficial for victims going through the process, which I am incredibly proud of. It has made a massive and significant difference to the timeliness of investigations and to outcomes. The big challenge we face is ensuring that victims of rape and serious sexual offences continue their support for investigations. We need to reduce victim attrition and increase the participation in, timeliness and progress of these very important investigations and prosecutions.

We cannot shy away for one moment from the fact that some police officers have behaved atrociously. That is why we are taking action to ensure that our police forces deliver the highest professional standards. I have made it clear to chief constables that they must take immediate action to get rid of anybody in their ranks who is not fit to wear the uniform. I have led the work for better vetting and better standards within the police. I am pleased that police chiefs have agreed to urgently check their officers and staff against the police database, so that they are better able to root out anybody who is unfit who may have slipped through the net. I am also reviewing the police dismissals process, because it needs to be easier to sack officers who behave in such a way. Police vetting guidance is being strengthened so that staff are clear about what is required and know they have a legal duty to go by the book. Lastly, the Angiolini inquiry will now cover wider vetting issues and toxic cultures within the police, as well as the cases of Couzens and Carrick. I back the police to raise their standards and restore confidence in their integrity.

In conclusion, it is a well-worn phrase but it bears repetition: keeping the people safe is the first duty of any Government. This Government have achieved a huge amount. I am proud of our track record of delivering more police and less crime, but we will never lose sight of the need to go further and of the greater work we need to put in. We stand unequivocally and unapologetically on the side of the law-abiding majority.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** Order. There are, as we can see, a significant number of hon. Members who wish to participate. I am not going to put on a fixed time limit at the moment, but my estimate is that if everybody adheres to about six minutes, everybody on both sides of the House should be accommodated. It is up to Members whether they choose to squeeze their colleagues out.

2.39 pm

**Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): I will bear in mind what you have said, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I welcome the opportunity to participate in today's debate on crime and policing. As the Home Secretary has just explained, there are few issues as important as protecting the public and ensuring that our streets, communities and residents are safe. Indeed, it is the first duty of any Government to keep their citizens safe, yet successive Tory Governments seem to have failed in that primary duty over the past 13 years.

As we have heard today, the Conservatives' record on crime and justice is simply dreadful. Crime rates are appallingly high, while charge rates and prosecutions have collapsed. That is not being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime; it is the exact opposite. This Government are letting criminals off and leaving victims and entire communities feeling abandoned. Not only have their policies failed to keep my constituents safe or to tackle crime in Coventry North East, but they have constantly focused on the wrong priorities and completely ignored the real issues that affect our communities daily.

The Government appear to have no policy, no plan and no strategy to deal with the problems in my constituency. My constituents have told me time and again about problems such as serious violent crime, knife crime, gang culture, drug dealing, domestic abuse, sexual violence and persistent antisocial behaviour. Over the past 13 years, our police force's ability to tackle those problems has been diminished by successive Tory Governments as they have ruthlessly cut funding to the bone, dismantled neighbourhood policing and slashed officer numbers. After more than a decade of police cuts, the west midlands is finally getting more police officers through the uplift programme, but still nowhere near as many as are needed or as have been lost on this Government's watch.

Consequently, as our police force has become more overstretched and as demand for its services continues to grow, I have heard complaints from constituents that there is no visible police presence in their area. They say that the police have been unable to physically attend the scene of a crime; that all they have received is a crime number and they are not sure what comes next; or that they have reported a crime but heard nothing more. I have also heard from police officers, who say that they simply do not have the resources to investigate every crime.

Let us be clear: my constituents deserve so much better, and so do our dedicated police officers, who do such a fantastic job in extremely difficult circumstances. They deserve a Government who will give our police force the resources it needs—a Government who will restore neighbourhood policing, keep our streets safer and ensure that more criminals are arrested and prosecuted. They deserve a Labour Government. Sadly, while this Tory Government remain in place, I fear that our police force will continue to be hamstrung, residents will continue to be let down and the streets of Coventry will continue to be less safe than they could and should be.

2.43 pm

**Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): I find an immense irony in the Opposition motion. It is not lost on me, and it certainly is not lost on the residents of

Rother Valley, that Labour's position on crime is very confusing. The main thing that comes out of it is inaction and neglect, because crime and policing in South Yorkshire are the responsibility of the Labour party through the elected Labour police and crime commissioner.

We in Rother Valley have been at the sharp end of Labour's low prioritisation of crime for years and years. Labour Members speak about a drop in police officer numbers, but it is this Conservative Government who are funding 20,000 new police officers across England and Wales, including by providing the Labour police and crime commissioner with funding for new police officers in South Yorkshire. So far, we have had an extra 1,763 officers across Yorkshire and the Humber, and we are on track for 20,000, which means that will be more police officers by the end of this Parliament than there were in 2010.

There are increased numbers, but the problem is that the Labour police and crime commissioner decides where police officers are deployed and what their priorities are. It is clear that the focus will be on urban areas such as Sheffield and Doncaster, while Rother Valley, as usual, will not get a look in. That mirrors investment by Labour-run Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, which always seems to take a "central Rotherham first" approach rather than sharing wealth and resources with areas such as Rother Valley.

We have a fantastic neighbourhood policing team across my area who do a great job with the resources available, but they are hamstrung by the "Sheffield first" approach in the PCC's priorities. We are clearly being failed by Labour. Labour speaks about high levels of antisocial behaviour; I agree that there is too much antisocial behaviour, so why is it not a priority for the South Yorkshire Labour police and crime commissioner?

When challenged about his neglect of Rother Valley, the Labour police and crime commissioner claims that he does not make strategic decisions, nor does he make operational decisions, and nor does he set the budget. In that case, the people of Rother Valley would like to know what exactly he does. If he is not responsible, who is? In our country, police and crime commissioners have those powers. They are in charge—that is the whole point—yet he has chosen to leave Rother Valley out in the cold. That is just not acceptable. It shows that although Labour is quite good at talking the talk, when it comes to action it completely and utterly fails my constituents in Rother Valley.

To add insult to injury, the Labour police and crime commissioner for South Yorkshire wishes to increase the police precept on local people. We all know that times are tough, so putting an extra burden on the good burghers of Rother Valley without a clear plan for where the money will go is just not good enough. We have heard from Opposition Members today about cuts, but what is especially galling is that not long ago the police and crime commissioner underspent his budget by £2 million. That was £2 million that could have been used to protect and serve the people of Rother Valley. It could have been used to reopen the much-needed police bases on Dinnington or Maltby high streets.

We all know that the increase in the precept will go to Sheffield or Doncaster, not to our area, which will see little benefit. My constituents have not forgotten that a previous superintendent promised two mobile police



stations for Rother Valley, both of which were kiboshed by the present Labour police and crime commissioner. The people of Rother Valley will remember those empty promises and that softness on crime. *[Interruption.]* I hear an attempt at a sedentary intervention from somebody who is not technically sitting in the Chamber. If he wishes to join the debate, will he please come and join it? That really sums up Labour's approach: Labour Members chunter from the sidelines, but when they are given powers, like the Labour police and crime commissioner, they abrogate responsibility. They talk the talk from the sidelines, but they do not walk the walk. I say, "Come to Rother Valley, walk the walk down Maltby or Dinnington high streets, and see the crime and neglect that is happening because of the Labour police and crime commissioner's failure in our area."

**Stephanie Peacock** *rose*—

**Alexander Stafford:** I give way to my South Yorkshire neighbour.

**Stephanie Peacock:** The Labour police and crime commissioner obviously has to work with the resources given by national Government. It is absolutely true that there are still fewer police on the streets of South Yorkshire than in 2010.

**Alexander Stafford:** I thank the hon. Lady for making that point. That is great, because it lets me reiterate that the Labour police and crime commissioner deals with the resources given to him. So why did he underspend the police budget by £2 million? Now he wants to increase the precept, as he did last year. Why does he not use the money? I am a great fan of people using the resources given to them. The hon. Lady is right that we need to increase police numbers. That is why, by the end of the 2024 Parliament, there will be more police officers on the street than in 2010. We know that, and it is a good thing. We are ahead of schedule on improvements in South Yorkshire because people want to join the police force and want to do good in their communities.

Despite the clearly poor leadership in South Yorkshire—not just police leadership, but local leadership—this Conservative Government are delivering for my constituents. We are on target, with 16,743 police officers already, and we will meet the 20,000 target. On top of this Government's no-nonsense, tough crackdown on crime, there will be more officers than ever before in England and Wales. Overall crime is down by 50% since 2010. Furthermore, the safer streets fund rounds have funded 270 projects designed to cut neighbourhood crimes such as theft and burglary, antisocial behaviour, and violence against women and girls. *[Interruption.]* I keep hearing chuntering on the Opposition Front Bench, but no interventions. Does the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) want to intervene? Once again, we hear Labour chuntering but taking no action.

**Sarah Jones** (Croydon Central) (Lab): May I just point out that 20 million people experienced antisocial behaviour last year? Will these 200 tiny little projects really make much difference to those 20 million people who had suffered the consequences of years of cuts from this Conservative Government?

**Alexander Stafford:** That was an interesting intervention, belittling work that has been done. Something is better than nothing and, as I have said, that £2 million in the

budget could have added a lot more, but it was not spent by the Labour police and crime commissioner—never mind; we will move forward. It is this Government who are backing the police and giving them the powers they need to crack down on dangerous criminals who prey on ordinary people.

My constituents are sick and tired of these political games that are being played when it comes to crime and punishment. They are fed up with Labour's neglect of Rother Valley, and South Yorkshire in general, in favour of other areas. I call on the police and crime commissioner and on Labour to step up to the plate, get behind this Government's crime-busting mission and work with us to reduce crime for my constituents, for Britons, and of course for Rother Valley, so that together we can support our police, crack down on crime, and make our country a better place still.

2.50 pm

**Alex Davies-Jones** (Pontypridd) (Lab): It is an honour to speak in this really important debate.

As colleagues will be aware, recent YouGov polling suggests that an astonishing 66% of Britons think the UK Government are handling the issue of crime badly. Given that more than 14 million people's lives are blighted by graffiti, drug dealing and noise issues each year, is it any wonder that people across the UK are now concluding what we have known for some time: that the Tories have been too weak and too soft on crime and antisocial behaviour? While the Tory Government remain asleep at the wheel, it is only right that we use today's debate to set out Labour's plan to crack down on crime and pursue serial perpetrators of antisocial behaviour—and my constituents in Pontypridd and Taff Ely know all too well how much of a blight antisocial behaviour can be.

In recent years, communities across my constituency have been subjected to bouts of antisocial behaviour, particularly when cars with illegally modified exhausts are racing up and down main routes such as the A4119. Colleagues may recall that I have raised this issue before during similar debates, but it is such a concern to so many residents that I feel I must make the point once again today. Back in 2021, local news reported that residents of Talbot Green and Llantrisant in my constituency were left "unable to sleep" and afraid to use public areas because these modified exhausts, designed to backfire, could be heard echoing across the valleys so loudly that the sound was like a shotgun going off.

South Wales police must be commended for the work they have been doing to tackle this, particularly via Operation Buena, and of course I welcome the UK Government's announcement last year that they would trial-launch "noise camera" technology in a number of spots across the UK, but the fact is that although South Wales police are doing excellent work with the very limited resources they have available, small one-off investments from the UK Government are simply not enough.

While petty crime and antisocial behaviour may be the most common type of crime that residents report to me, today's debate is about far more than that. I am immensely proud that the previous Labour Government established neighbourhood policing, but across the UK since 2015 neighbourhood police officers have been cut

[Alex Davies-Jones]

in their thousands by the Tories. This may seem a distant memory now, but I remind Members that the previous Tory Prime Minister promised us 20,000 new police officers on our streets. We are all used to Tories breaking their promises, but even if the Government had stuck to that pledge, it would simply have returned officer numbers to the level that we saw before they cut so many in the first place.

The impact of these sweeping cuts cannot be understated. It matters because neighbourhood policing should be playing a vital preventative and proactive role in our communities, on issues such as petty crime and antisocial nuisance, but also on preventing some of the most serious criminal offences. As colleagues will know, I have argued—both as a shadow Minister for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and as an MP—that our policing and criminal justice system is currently failing thousands of women and girls. I do not need to remind Members that just 1.3% of rape cases result in charges being brought against the alleged perpetrators. Commenting on that shambolic and shameful statistic, the director of the End Violence Against Women Coalition said recently:

“Women and girls are...being systematically failed by a system that’s meant to protect them”.

Of course, improved neighbourhood policing will not fix these issues overnight—the entire system needs to be overhauled—but the fact remains that everyone deserves to feel safe in their own communities, and the police must play a central role in that.

Ultimately, no discussion of how we can better equip the police to tackle crime is complete without our acknowledging that the Government have a significant role to play in rebuilding public trust. In recent weeks we have heard disturbing reports of serious failures by police to tackle the scourge of misogyny and violent attitudes against women and girls among their own ranks. I wish to put on record my own thanks to Inspector Leigh Parfitt and all the local police in my area of south Wales, who have provided immense support for me in recent weeks after I spoke out about Andrew Tate’s horrendous behaviour and abuse online. My inbox and my office have been bombarded with death threats and rape threats, and the police have been brilliant. Sadly, however, that is not the case for everyone who experiences the same.

Given the cases in London alone, from the rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving officer to the strip-searching of young children such as Child Q, we must be able to hold Ministers accountable if we are to properly tackle violence against women and girls. After decades of neglect from the Tories, it is time for a Labour Government who will take crime seriously and reintroduce proper neighbourhood policing that residents can trust.

Finally, I want to touch on something that was mentioned by both the shadow Secretary of State and the Secretary of State. It is a topic close to my heart. A total of 12,344 days have passed since 97 people were killed at Hillsborough, but it was only today that the police acknowledged that there had been profound failings and they had got it “badly wrong”. As my right hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State has said, the Labour party is committed to introducing a specific Hillsborough law and enabling those victims finally to have justice. Why will the Secretary of State not pledge the same?

2.55 pm

**Tom Hunt** (Ipswich) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak for the first time under your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Let me begin by saying, as many other Members have done, that crime is currently a huge issue in my constituency. Only a few weeks ago there was a tragic incident in which an 18-year-old man was stabbed and killed in Westgate Street at 3.55 pm. My prayers go out to him and to his family and friends, but also to all the Ipswich residents who will have experienced that. As is so often the case, this incident appears to have involved violence from members of one gang towards those attached to another gang, which so often erupts in broad daylight and is witnessed by unsuspecting members of the public. That has a chilling effect on our communities and is an issue of great concern to me.

It is important to acknowledge that since 2019 Suffolk has had 137 more police officers. We have made successful bids to the safer streets fund, and we recently made a successful bid to the shared prosperity fund, resulting in three new officers dedicated to patrolling the town centre during daylight hours. That is to be welcomed, although I should add that the national police funding formula needs to be looked at. If Suffolk were funded in a fair way, we would have more than 137 extra officers. I have been campaigning for that ever since I became a Member of Parliament, and Suffolk’s police and crime commissioner has been campaigning for it for about 10 years.

Fundamentally, my constituents want to see a high police presence in the town centre, and they also want to see it in their communities. More often than not, the police I talk to say they want to be out in the communities—there is an alignment between what they want to do as professionals and what their constituents want to see. Of course funding is part of this, but bureaucracy can also stand in the way of police officers getting out on the street. I recently met members of the Suffolk Police Federation to discuss their DG6 campaign, which I think also needs to be looked at.

When I talk to my constituents, one of the most common things I hear is that they no longer go to the town centre, the principal reason being that they do not feel safe. I say that cautiously, because I would never want to be accused of talking down the wonderful town that I represent. Indeed, I want to push back and say, “No, you should go and spend money and support our brilliant independent businesses in the town centre.” I would always encourage people to go into our town centre, but I think I would be doing a disservice to the—probably—thousands of constituents who have told me, in emails or directly, that they will not go into the town centre because they do not feel safe.

I think that part of the answer is a permanent increase in the police presence in the town centre, particularly at certain times of day, but another part is a zero-tolerance approach to crime and antisocial behaviour. If it is the case that groups of young men are hanging around, drinking alcohol and behaving in a way that puts people off and makes them feel uncomfortable, I would have no problem with a much more hands-on approach to moving those people on, and being less apologetic about doing so. We have no-drinking zones, but I do not think they are always enforced. When I look at the Labour approach locally to tackling these problems, I have spoken quite frankly about some of these issues.

I have also said that, if it is the case that certain crimes in the town are disproportionately committed by members of certain communities, we should be open and honest about that and not ignore it. We are a diverse town, and we should not seek to brand anyone as being more predisposed to committing certain crimes because they come from a certain community, but if there is an issue with one group acting in a way that is having a detrimental effect on the wider community, we should be open and honest about it.

Labour's contribution to my comment, which reflects what thousands of my constituents have said, was to report me for—get this—a non-crime hate incident. I was reported on the database for having committed a non-crime hate incident because I made the comment that, if it is the case that certain crimes are disproportionately committed by certain communities, we should be open and honest about that. I do not think it is that controversial a view. It is also a view that is shared by millions of people in this country. We need to be careful and sensitive with the comments we make, but frankly if the stats and facts are there in front of us, we are not helping anyone by ignoring that data. This is an incredibly important point.

I do not think I would get the support of the local Labour party for having that zero-tolerance approach to tackling antisocial behaviour. I simply do not think I would get it. This is of course the Labour party that voted against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which I thought was the wrong thing to do. Whenever we talk about giving the police more powers—often the powers they have asked for, for example in the Public Order Bill—the Labour party votes against them. We also had the situation in which Labour actively tried to make a man Prime Minister who wanted to get rid of all prison sentences below six months. This is clearly not a party that is serious about being tough on crime. I think it would be hard to find somebody who is more likely to be calling for robust measures.

I guess my plea to the Government is that, although I welcome the increased investment and the fact that we are getting that increased police presence, at the end of the day, despite the increase in numbers, many of my constituents do not feel the police presence is high enough in their communities and their town centre. We have seen a significant increase following the tragic murder, but that needs to be made permanent. We have to support Suffolk constabulary in going after the gangs who are blighting the lives of thousands of my constituents. Yes, we believe in policing by consent, but I believe in a zero-tolerance approach to antisocial behaviour.

We have a situation where we have groups of young men hanging around the town centre, and thousands of my constituents are telling me that that is why they do not go in, because they do not feel safe. We have women going about their business, often in the evening, who will not go into the town because they would be made to feel uncomfortable. Recently, a constituent was stalked by a group of young men who followed her. Fortunately, she was supported by some other women and she got away safely, but these stories are common; they are not unique. We have to stop this. If I had £5 for every time a constituent said to me, "I don't go into the town centre any more because I don't feel safe because of the groups of young men hanging around", I would be a billionaire. I can tell them they are wrong and that they have to go

in, but that is what they think. Yes, I will push back when I think they are being over the top, but at the end of the day we have a problem. We have to get fairer funding for Suffolk police and a permanent high-profile policing presence in the town centre and in our communities, and we have to carry on to break the back of these gangs that are exploiting young, vulnerable people and committing acts that are having a chilling effect on the wider community, as happened in Westgate Street only a few weeks ago.

3.4 pm

**Simon Lightwood** (Wakefield) (Lab/Co-op): One of our main duties as politicians is to keep our country and our public safe from harm, yet in the latest statistics from West Yorkshire police, who cover Wakefield, robberies are up, thefts are up, vehicle crime is up and victim satisfaction with our police is down. Let us not forget that, nationally, arrests have halved—yes, halved—since 2010. From the number of emails and calls I receive about antisocial behaviour every week, I know that the people of Wakefield, Horbury and Ossett are deeply concerned about the level of crime in the area and also about their safety.

One of my first activities as Wakefield's MP was to launch an antisocial behaviour survey for residents to tell me about their experiences of policing and crime in their community. The findings were stark. Residents were most concerned about dangerous driving, drugs and vandalism. Only 8% thought that their neighbourhood was safer now than in 2010, with 50% believing that it was less safe. More than a third said that they did not see the police at all. I could spend the next hour detailing the horrific cases that I have received, but the gist is that, despite the diligent work of police officers and forces across the country, people have lost faith in the police.

The most recent statistics show that more than 25,000 incidents of antisocial behaviour are reported every week, but time after time I hear residents say that they have not even bothered to report such incidents to the police because they think it is a waste of time. The figures confirm that feeling, because 94% of crimes result in no one being charged. That is appalling. That 25,000 figure cannot reflect the actual levels out there. If people do not report the crimes, they cannot be investigated. We know these are artificially low statistics that are leading to fewer police resources going into those areas, so the crime and suffering in those communities continue. We must stop this cycle of decline in our police.

People desperately want a plan to reduce antisocial behaviour and crime in their communities, but how can that be delivered by a Conservative Government who have cut 6,000 officers and 8,000 PCSOs? I started this speech by saying that one of our main duties in this House was to protect the public from harm. It is about time we invested properly in community safety and put neighbourhood policing at the heart of our communities. That is why Labour's plan, championed by my right hon. Friend and neighbour, the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), is so important. It will put 13,000 additional officers and PCSOs into our communities so that people can be sure that, when they need the police, there will be someone there to keep them safe. We will strengthen policing standards so that people can have more confidence in their police.



[Simon Lightwood]

In West Yorkshire, we have already seen what Labour in power can do. Our Labour Mayor, Tracy Brabin, has secured funding for 60 new police officers and PCSOs across the Wakefield district. That is the kind of difference we need: actual bobbies on the beat to protect our public. This proves that Labour is the party of law and order and the party that will protect our communities and punish offenders with tougher sentences, but until we have Labour in power nationally, my constituents in Wakefield, Horbury and Ossett are left crying out for action from this Conservative Government. That is why I am very pleased to support the motion today.

3.8 pm

**Anna Firth** (Southend West) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Wakefield (Simon Lightwood), but I must say that neither I nor any of my constituents in Southend West would recognise the picture put forward by the Opposition today. Not only do those of us on this side of the House believe in cutting crime and building safe communities, but we have actively voted for it. That is why we introduced the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which has the central objective of cutting crime and building safe communities. Opposition Members opposed that legislation. They opposed new laws to give the police the powers and tools they need to protect themselves and the public.

**Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act includes the ability to increase sentences for those who attack our brave emergency workers. Will my hon. Friend join me in condemning Stoke-on-Trent Labour Councillor Jo Woolner, who was recently arrested for assaulting an emergency worker? When Labour said that they were fighting hard all year round in Stoke-on-Trent, none of us realised that they meant it quite literally.

**Anna Firth:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing that example to our attention, as he illustrates my point and gives me the opportunity to change my glasses.

Labour Members also opposed the law that will keep serious sexual and violent offenders behind bars for longer, so they are in no position to lecture us on tougher policing. Frankly, every Labour Member who voted against the 2022 Act should be ashamed of themselves.

Making streets safer was one of my key priorities when I was elected a year ago, which is why I particularly welcome the fact we now have 16,743 new police officers, as we head towards 20,000—395 of them are in Essex and 20 of them are on our streets keeping Southend safer.

It is not just the numbers. We are also investing in police funding, which is up £1.1 billion on last year, to £16.9 billion in 2022-23. Essex has benefited from £432,000 of investment through the brilliant safer streets fund, which is already making our streets safer. The money has had a real impact on the ground, with overall crime down 10% and neighbourhood crime down 22% since 2020.

In the city of Southend, we are lucky to have a brilliant local police force. I pay special tribute to Inspector Paul Hogben and his team, who work tirelessly to keep our streets safer not only through sheer hard work but by innovating at a rate of knots. The excellent Operation Union takes an events mindset to policing our summer seafront. It was trialled last year in partnership with the council, transport networks and tourism and hospitality traders to tackle emerging issues and to prevent and detect crime. I cannot think of a better example of community and neighbourhood policing. As a result of Operation Union, we have now seen 7,437 hours of police patrols, which has led to 294 stop and searches and 106 arrests, taking criminals off our streets and making our community safer. That is not the only thing Southend police have been doing. I could mention numerous community initiatives. Operation Grip has recorded a 73.5% drop in violent crime and a 32% fall in street crime.

Unfortunately, however, one partner in Southend is not so helpful: our local Labour-Lib Dem coalition council, which is failing to keep our streets safe. Not only is it turning off our street lights at night, making vulnerable women feel unsafe, but it has taken more than a year to replace six lightbulbs on one of our footbridges, plunging women and tourists into complete darkness on a very dangerous bridge. I say to our Labour-Liberal council, “No more prevaricating. No more passing the buck. Fix our lights.”

I also made it a mission to support our police on knife crime, and I was proud to help the police obtain two new state-of-the-art knife poles, which are easy to move around and can detect all manner of offensive weapons. They have been a huge success, allowing our local police to confiscate a vast number of nitrous oxide canisters and to remove knives from our streets.

Knives take lives, and we must do all we can to remove them. Labour’s record on knife crime is abysmal. Sadiq Khan has let it rise by more than 11% in London over the past year. He is not keeping Londoners safe.

As a coastal community, Southend has its fair share of knife crime. One crime that came to my notice over Christmas involved a 17-year-old who purchased a two-foot zombie knife and had it sent straight to his door. Had our brilliant community police officers not taken the initiative to look for the packaging, they would have been unable to confiscate the knife because there were no violent images on the blade or handle, as proscribed by the Offensive Weapons Act 2019. Knives are not toys, but a quick Google search brings up any number of sites selling zombie knives with names such as Fantasy Master for as little as £40, and they can be sent direct to people’s homes. We must do more to get these knives out of homes, out of the hands of young people and off our streets. I want to see the loophole in the Act closed and I want to see us make more effort to ensure these offensive weapons, which are already proscribed under the Offensive Weapons Act, are not allowed to be sold online, manufactured or imported—it is already illegal and we must enforce that measure.

Thanks to successive Conservative Governments, overall crime is down by 50% and neighbourhood crime is down by 48%. Southend has a brilliant police force. This motion is an insult to every one of my brilliant community police officers, and for that reason I will certainly be voting against it.

3.15 pm

**Samantha Dixon** (City of Chester) (Lab): Neighbourhood policing is at the heart of the safety of our communities, and it is something to which I committed during my campaign in Chester just a couple of months ago. Everyone has the right to feel safe in their local community.

Having worked alongside Cheshire police officers over the past 12 years as a local councillor, I know how committed they are and how hard they work to protect our local communities. I thank them for everything they do to keep our communities safe and, in particular, I welcome Chief Inspector Darren Griffiths to his new role in charge of Chester's policing. I have worked with him before and would work with him again. He is an excellent officer.

What deters crime and antisocial behaviour more than anything else is the visible presence of uniformed officers, but we need more of them in Chester and across the country. The current challenges of violent crime and the exploitation of young and vulnerable people through county lines are serious, and officers are working hard to tackle them. Given the scale of serious and organised crime, Cheshire police has made it everyone's business to gather intelligence on the street and across our county. Everyone is playing their part, but it simply underlines the absolute necessity for more officers to do this essential work.

Sadly, it does not seem that the Government are on the same page. The numbers speak for themselves. Nationally, 6,000 neighbourhood police officers and 8,000 PCSOs have been cut. In the north-west, PCSO numbers have almost halved under the Conservative Government, falling from 806 to just 411.

**Carla Lockhart** (Upper Bann) (DUP): The hon. Lady is making a powerful point. Does she agree that effective policing is dependent on numbers? That is just a fact. And does she therefore share my concern that we will be losing 75 neighbourhood police officers in Northern Ireland? That will have a detrimental impact on effective policing in Northern Ireland, and it is all down to the Budget.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** Order. May I gently say that Mr Speaker deprecates the concept of Members walking in and intervening in a debate. If Members want to intervene, they need to be here during the debate.

**Samantha Dixon:** I agree with the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart). At the current rate of recruitment, it is highly questionable whether the Government will achieve their target of replacing the 20,000 police officers by the end of March.

**Chris Philp:** I will elaborate on the national numbers in my winding-up speech, but it is important to get the numbers for Cheshire on the record. The previous peak number of officers in Cheshire was 2,262 in 2007. The number of police officers in Cheshire on 31 December 2022, just a few weeks ago, was 2,396. There are already 130 more officers than there has ever been in Cheshire's history, and that number is only going up.

**Samantha Dixon:** Nationally, the overall charge rate stands at just 5.5%, which is unacceptable. The charge rate is even lower for some crime types, including only 4.1% for theft and 3.2% for sexual offences. Labour's

former Cheshire police and crime commissioner was committed to delivering a dedicated PCSO for every community in the county. Now, under a Conservative police and crime commissioner, there are plans to increase the policing precept by 6.4% while services are slashed and public service desks are closing, including the much valued desk at Chester town hall. In essence, constituents will be getting less for their money. That is the result of 13 years of a Conservative Government, and their cuts, neglect and failure. Our communities, our constituents and the victims of crime live with the consequences of this Government's failures, as do our police officers, who are struggling to do more with less. Labour has a plan to make our communities safe again. Labour is committed to tackling crime through community policing. We are determined to deliver more bobbies on Chester's streets. The Conservatives have had their opportunity and they have failed. It is time for them to move aside for a Labour Government who will be tough on crime.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** Order. In order to try to accommodate all colleagues who wish to participate, I am now placing a formal five-minute limit on all speeches.

3.20 pm

**Katherine Fletcher** (South Ribble) (Con): I read today's motion and listened with care to the opening remarks from the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). It seemed likely to me that her speech had been written by someone in London, who has never left London and never cares that their world view is so narrow that they never get out of London. Let me invite Opposition Members to hear what Lancashire's police are achieving, as perhaps some lessons could be learnt.

Recently, in the past couple of years, we have elected a Conservative PCC. That has been coupled with the appointment of a wonderful new chief constable, Chris Rowley, and a transformation is under way in community and neighbourhood policing. The picture painted today by Opposition Members is unrecognisable on the ground in Lancashire. The new leadership has already delivered improvements and has ambitious plans for the future. What have Andrew Snowden, our PCC, and the chief constable achieved so far? Let us start at the grassroots, where they have championed and boosted our wonderful PCSOs; in Leyland, we have Tony Wojnarowski, who will be very embarrassed that I mention his age, depth of knowledge and engagement in the community, and James Slater. I was honoured to go out with him to see his work in the community. He does not want to be a police officer; both he and the leadership recognise that we are talking about distinct and important roles within neighbourhood policing.

Under Labour's previous PCC, police stations were closed in Lancashire. Local policing structures for neighbourhood policing were left to wither, unencumbered by leadership, supervision or support. The new leadership team have created dedicated neighbourhood and response team structures, which Labour removed previously. The new team have also reopened police stations, not least Leyland's, which the Labour PCC shut. Now, cars and cops are much closer to our communities in Leyland; they are not coming 40 minutes from Preston or Chorley,

[Katherine Fletcher]

and are able to respond much more quickly to crime and antisocial behaviour. That is thanks to that leadership team and this Conservative Government investing in policing in the communities and areas that people want, not investing in Labour's woke projects.

We have heard lots about antisocial behaviour. Last Friday was spent productively at Samlesbury Hall, where the last of three antisocial behaviour conferences took place. It was led by the PCC and the chief constable, pulling together all the different people who have a role in this, including local council leaders and community support officers, to make sure that the police are leading and encouraging those who have the answers to some of the problems to work together on our streets. We heard from local inspectors, including Inspector Moys and Chief Inspector Chris Abbott, on the specific operations they are running in individual town centres to work on this. They are bringing perpetrators to justice if necessary, but doing so with a recognition that sometimes these are vulnerable youths. They are also making sure that there is support in the room for those individuals—diversionary activities, advice and help. They even talk to the parents, among other things. That is a community policing-led neighbourhood response and Lancashire is wonderful about it.

**Sara Britcliffe** (Hyndburn) (Con): Will my hon. Friend also recognise the safer Lancashire neighbourhoods fund that our PCC has introduced to Lancashire, which takes money off criminals and puts it directly back into the communities? Does she agree that our PCC has done more for Lancashire in the past three years than the previous Labour PCC did?

**Katherine Fletcher:** I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. I was going to refer to that later, but let me say now that that is innovation brought by heart and commitment from a Conservative PCC, not a Labour political placeholder. Across South Ribble, in Leyland, Penwortham and Chorley and West Lancashire, these actions are happening before the increase in police numbers—this is about leadership and policing structures. Not all of them are arrived and ready; they are still being trained and are in new roles, yet all this is happening.

Let me summarise what has happened to neighbourhood policing in Lancashire in the past three years: we have reopened Leyland police station, as part of a wider programme; we have dedicated neighbourhood response officers in South Ribble; we have superb PCSOs—not only are they part of the community, but they are supporting it; we have more officers on the beat, with at least 612 to come for Lancashire in total; we have a new antisocial behaviour problem solving unit, who are co-ordinating efforts of all other partners, including local councils—I encourage them to engage—and, as has been mentioned by my hon. Friend, we have an innovative safer Lancashire neighbourhood fund, where local communities can bid in to confiscated proceeds of crime to help detect and prevent antisocial behaviour. As the former Policing Minister said earlier, it is the leadership that makes a difference. Perhaps those on the Opposition Benches, having heard about these actions, successes and ambitions of the new leadership team in Lancashire, might get out—

**Sarah Jones** rose—

**Katherine Fletcher:** I am nearly done. Perhaps the Labour Front Benchers might get out of London and come to receive a warm Lancashire welcome from the Conservatives. It will be warm regardless of the viewpoint of these Members, but it will probably be better if they focus on delivery and stop playing politics.

3.26 pm

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I want to put on record my thanks to my local police in Lancaster and Fleetwood, who go above and beyond, often clocking up overtime, which they are not always paid for—I hope I will have time to come on to that later—building trust with vulnerable members of the community and doing the job because they want to make a difference to the community in which we live. Before I go any further, I want to acknowledge the community anxiety about last week's firearms incident on the Ridge estate in Lancaster and urge people to come forward with intelligence if they have anything on that.

If I had been speaking in this debate 18 months ago, I would have confidently told the House that organised crime and drug dealing was the No. 1 issue in Fleetwood and that increasingly it was causing huge anxiety for residents in the town. However, in the past six months neighbourhood policing teams have executed 20 drugs warrants in the Fleetwood area, with more to come. That is thanks to new leadership under our new Inspector Martin Wyatt and his sheer determination to sort things out. He has had to fight and push for detective resources and proactive policing teams to come into the town, but this means officers can now act on community intelligence and concerns. I wish to acknowledge that Inspector Wyatt is backed up by the support of Chief Superintendent Karen Edwards, who, as the divisional commander of west division, sees the value in this work. I put on record my thanks to Karen as well.

Although things have been turned around, it is fair to say that there is still a lot to do, because the cuts to policing in Fleetwood are still being felt. We used to have custody cells in Fleetwood, but they were cut. Officers making arrests now have to drive from Fleetwood to use the custody cells in Blackpool. That takes officers off the frontline and increases the vulnerability of the detained person, who has to be transported further away. Similarly, we have had cuts to policing resources in Fleetwood that saw us lose a fully resourced CID unit and the police staff who were providing that behind-the-scenes support, which frees up officers' time to do the jobs that only they can do.

Fleetwood is a town at the end of a peninsula, which means that, when our resources are removed and things are centralised, we lose out. Suddenly, it is our police who are travelling to do their job. When it comes to making good use of police officers' time, the crisis in our NHS means that officers are tied up waiting for ambulances and sitting in mental health units with patients, instead of ensuring that they can do the jobs that only they can do.

I wish to address the issue of how we remunerate our police officers. I put on record my thanks to the Lancashire Police Federation for the statistics that it provided to me. Eighty seven per cent. of Lancashire police officers



feel worse off financially than they were five years ago. Eight in 10 officers are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their overall remuneration. Anecdotally, in private conversations, police officers have told me that if they had the power to strike, they would do so, because it appears that the Government are not listening to them. Ninety four per cent of Lancashire officers are now saying that they do not feel respected by the Government.

I said that I would address the issue of unpaid overtime. We do not pay the first four hours of overtime each week for inspectors and above, and that is creating a progression problem. Pay arrangements in policing are out of date, and an overtime buy-out for senior ranks agreed in 1993 is no longer fit for purpose due to the increased complexity and reduced frontline and support resources. If only constables and sergeants can earn overtime, why would a good police sergeant seek promotion for more stress and less pay? Good policing needs good leadership and it is important to attract the right candidates and retain them with fair remuneration.

I wish to put on record my thanks to three PCSOs from Fleetwood—

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend expand on the value of PCSOs in the local community?

**Cat Smith:** PCSOs are an invaluable resource in our community. I wish to talk about three PCSOs from Fleetwood: Ben Arnold, Neil Thomas and Nick Barber. The trust and engagement that PCSO Ben Arnold has gained with young people have been exemplary. In the past 12 months, youth antisocial behaviour in Fleetwood has reduced considerably, and much of that is down to Ben's dedication to engaging with the local teenage community. Ben knows them all by name, and they know him.

PCSO Neil Thomas has done excellent work on a long-term ASB issue at a local park. He managed to regain the trust of some of the main complainants, so much so that one of them even became a PCSO herself, after being inspired by her involvement with Neil and the team.

Nick Barber is a veteran and a brilliant PCSO. He builds excellent community relations and takes ownership of problems. He has been instrumental in building community relations over the past 18 months, and tenacious in following up community intelligence and turning it into positive results.

The story from Fleetwood, from the leadership, the detectives, the police officers and the PCSOs, is a testament to the power of neighbourhood policing and the real difference that it can make.

**Sarah Jones:** I am so grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way in her speech on the value of neighbourhood policing. In Lancashire, the number of neighbourhood police has fallen by 44% since 2015. Does she agree that the PCSOs and officers of whom she speaks do so much good work that we need to put those neighbourhood officers back on the streets of Lancashire?

**Cat Smith:** I hope that, what comes across in my remarks, is the value of PCSOs and the difference that they make to the community that I represent. Indeed, I know that the senior police leadership team in my

county are always glowing in their praise of the PCSOs, and I hope that that is what has come across in my contribution today. However, that does not take away from the fact that I remain deeply worried that, in Lancashire, we are seeing police officers retiring and leaving at a faster rate than we are recruiting. I agree with those who have told me that their pay is too low for the dangerous job that they do, but I am optimistic that with more resources, including custody cells and CID capacity, in communities such as Fleetwood we can really turn around the trend that we have been seeing with organised crime and drug dealing. If the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire could commit to visiting Fleetwood, I would love him to meet some of the amazing individuals who serve their community with passion and a determination to make Lancashire a safer place in which to live.

3.33 pm

**Paul Holmes** (Eastleigh) (Con): Unsurprisingly, I rise to speak against the motion this afternoon. Before I explain why, I wish to pay tribute to my local policing team led by William Rollinson. I was out with them last week, seeing the selfless work that they do on our behalf, even during this difficult time for policing in general.

I am against the motion because it does not address the full range of actions on which this Government are focusing in relation to policing and crime, and because it does not acknowledge the Opposition's failure to back any measure that has been taken by this Government in making the population of this country safer.

Earlier, the shadow Home Secretary said that she did not know what the Home Secretary was doing. Well, I know what the Home Secretary is doing—she is leading by putting more police on the streets in my community and communities around the country. I also know what the shadow Home Secretary and the shadow Front Bench are doing—they are consistently opposing everything. They opposed the Public Order Bill, which gave our police more powers. They oppose the National Security Bill, which gives the security services and law enforcement more powers. They have always talked down the increase in police numbers that this Government have brought forward, and that undermines the role of policing and neighbourhood policing in this country, because they are consistently saying that there are fewer police on the streets than there were when we came into government. As the Minister outlined, there will be more police on the streets once the 20,000 uplift has happened.

Labour Members needs to take their responsibilities as an Opposition very seriously. They have consistently opposed any actions that this Government have taken. When I was a parliamentary private secretary at the Home Office, following some very good colleagues who are currently Parliamentary Private Secretaries on the second Bench, the shadow Home Secretary consistently opposed without putting decent policies forward herself. She just opposed all the time, to try to make this Government look weak, when this Government have addressed policing in the strongest terms that we have seen for decades.

That plays out in the fact that 16,500 police officers have been recruited ahead of time for our 20,000 target, requiring an extra £540 million. I am pleased that in

[Paul Holmes]

Hampshire that equates to 500 more officers, who will be keeping my constituents safe, and sometimes me as well. That is because of the leadership of the former Home Secretary, the former Prime Minister, the current Home Secretary and the Policing Minister in delivering that.

Those increases in police numbers have meant that crime has been reduced. Since 2010, overall crime has reduced by 50% and the number of young people assaulted with sharp weapons has dropped by 23%. I have found it extremely irritating during this debate to hear shadow Ministers consistently criticising the policies of this Government, but not taking into account their own elected politicians who run policing in this country, such as Sadiq Khan in London, where crime has gone up by 11%. In Manchester, a force has gone into special measures. Not once did the Labour party call out its own politicians for their failures in office; Labour just wants to be opportunistic in this debate.

As I mentioned, I was out with my force last week and saw police engaging with businesses and people on new housing estates, talking about issues such as antisocial behaviour, vandalism and traffic issues. That is neighbourhood policing being delivered every day because of the extra officers put forward by this Government.

I ask the Minister for reassurance on two things. First, the recruitment is happening, but I would like to make sure that retention follows. When police officers do a degree as part of the recruitment process, will the Minister keep an eye on that to ensure that they do not leave the force after they graduate? Secondly, may I lobby the Minister on a fair funding formula for Hampshire, which is often under-resourced for its demographics, with two big cities in Portsmouth and Southampton and an ex-railway town in Eastleigh? I hope that we will be able to get a speedy solution to that.

This is not a long speech, but I was horrified by the tone that the Opposition took. This Government are delivering on policing and delivering on crime. Crime is down and numbers are up. It is about time that the Labour party and the Opposition used their time to have a constructive debate about policy. So far in this debate, we have heard nothing from them but carping, without holding their own side to account where they are in charge of police.

3.38 pm

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): I echo the calls made in this Chamber for a Hillsborough law. I also thank all the police officers, PCSOs and support staff in Cheshire Constabulary; they are dedicated public servants and I am proud, with other politicians, to work alongside them to ensure that our communities are as safe as possible. In some cases, officers give life and limb, making the ultimate sacrifice. I recognise that ultimate sacrifice and pay tribute to them, as I know hon. Members across the House do to their police services.

People's safety is one of the greatest priorities of any Government of any political persuasion. Our constituents should be able to enjoy life to the full in safe communities, and community policing should be at the heart of neighbourhood policing. However, the Conservatives' record in government has simply been dire. The Tory story on crime is a record of crime going up, charge

rates going down, prosecution numbers tumbling and local police stations being shut. The number of officers on our streets—frontline police—has been slashed by 20,000, as has the number of support staff. Let us not forget this hokey-cokey of getting rid of experienced officers and then playing catch-up.

Our constituents are not fools; they see the reality on our streets. The Conservative party is soft on crime and soft on the causes of crime. Indeed, two Prime Ministers have committed crimes very recently. There are more than 3,000 reports of antisocial behaviour every day, and rape and sexual offences are at record highs, but action against dangerous criminals is found seriously wanting. Knife crime is considerable—up by more than 70% since 2015. That is just the tip of the iceberg. It is what you get after 13 years of Tory Government with a policy of austerity to cut vital resources in our neighbourhoods.

Ask any constituent up and down the land if police—bobbies on the beat—are visible, and the answer from many would be a resounding no. Indeed, as the shadow Home Secretary my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) pointed out, the number of people who say they never see a police officer has more than doubled since the Conservative party have been in government.

Figures from 2022 show that in the north-west, PCSO numbers have fallen by 47%—almost half—compared with 2010. In my own patch, despite heavy protests from me, other Cheshire Labour MPs, councils and residents, we have sadly seen the closure of public service desks in Runcorn, Northwich and beyond—a plan chiselled by the Tory police and crime commissioner. The number of PCSOs—the eyes and ears in our communities—has been slashed by 40. Now, my constituents face the serious threat of the closure of Runcorn and Northwich police stations, and of many more across Cheshire.

As I understand it, the Conservative police and crime commissioner now wants to raise the precept by 6.4% during this cost of living crisis. He blames central Government for an uplift of 1.8%, which is in reality a real-terms cut given that inflation is at 10%. It is a hefty price for my residents to pay. It is a hefty price because of the failure of this Tory Government, who are dumping those increases on my local residents.

In conclusion, I thank Cheshire police, as I did at the beginning of my remarks. They could do an even more wonderful job if they had the resources, 13,000 additional police officers and PCSOs, and the right technology. What a wonderful position that would be. It is why we need a Labour Government.

3.43 pm

**Mr Gagan Mohindra** (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate. I have listened with interest to contributions from both sides of the House. Although we may have different political views, we all care about our communities, so I want to take the tone down a bit to focus on them and on ensuring that we in this place do the right thing.

I thank Hertfordshire police, as well as the policemen and women who work on the parliamentary estate to keep us safe. I know from conversations with my local police force and with police around the estate that each

and every one of them is passionate about ensuring that the few rotten eggs in the service are quickly removed, and rightly so.

My beautiful South West Hertfordshire constituency has unfortunately seen an uptick in attempted burglaries, so there is a fear and perception of increased crime, which, although not necessarily reflected in crime figures, has a material impact on my community. I will continue to work constructively with the excellent chief constable of Hertfordshire police, Charlie Hall, as well as with the excellent police and crime commissioner, David Lloyd, and his deputy, Lewis Cocking. They fully understand what is required to combat crime and how to ensure that my residents feel safe and secure.

I had the opportunity last week to speak to the Hertfordshire Police Federation about the issues its members are seeing on the frontline. While we will continue to talk about funding, the thing that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Paul Holmes) spoke about that really struck me was recruitment and retention. Retention is a real issue that will be with us in the future, if not necessarily today, and I look forward to the Minister addressing those questions posed by my hon. Friend.

Rather opportunely, Sharon Long, the clerk of Chorleywood parish council, has sent me an email this afternoon, while I have been in this debate, that she had received from PC Waller of the local policing team in Chorleywood. Police advice on prevention is one of the things I wanted to talk about today. We can continue to be at the forefront of fighting crime with intelligence-led operations, which is the right way to do it, but that requires our community to do some basic things such as making sure their doors are locked and their alarms are on, particularly if they are going away. There are also such things as timer switches for lamps.

I will give a word of warning, if I may, about social media. I know all of us in this place use it, but if someone is likely to be away from their home or residence for a while—for instance, for a holiday—my strong steer is to post those trips and great memories after they have come back, otherwise all they are doing is advertising to potential burglars that they are not around, and therefore the burglars can take their time in scoping out the place and breaking in.

As the House will know, my beautiful constituency of South West Hertfordshire benefits from the M25. The downside of being so close to great transport links is that our communities are vulnerable to outside crime. As a former victim of crime, I know how devastating it can be when one's home is burgled or burglary is attempted. I urge the Minister to continue to ensure that our communities are educated on the right things to do. That is not just the job of the police, however. As well as such programmes as neighbourhood watch, we have our great partners in local government, who inevitably have more contact with our communities than the police before things go wrong.

The police in Hertfordshire have reassured me that they will attend each and every burglary. A scene of crime officer will attend, a detective constable will be allocated to the crime team to investigate and a detective sergeant will review each and every burglary to make sure nothing is missed. The police have minimum standards of investigation to be completed. They will check CCTV, do house-to-house investigations and conversations and

deliver burglary prevention packs. Intelligence-led operations are key to all this. I know that my constituents in Loudwater in Chorleywood are watching with eagerness. They want to feel safer, and I am sure my colleagues in Hertfordshire police will ensure that happens.

3.48 pm

**Anna McMorris** (Cardiff North) (Lab): It is an honour to speak in this important debate this afternoon. After 13 years of Tory rule, crime is up, prosecutions have plummeted, criminals are being let off the hook and victims are being let down. Our communities up and down the country are fractured, torn apart by fear. That is the legacy of this Conservative Government.

The first duty of any Government is to protect people and deliver justice for victims, yet just two weeks ago, in the Government's response to the Justice Committee's report on the victims Bill, which we are still waiting for, they rejected victims of antisocial behaviour being recognised as victims, denying them access to support services and underplaying the toll that antisocial behaviour takes on an individual, which leaves them feeling unsafe in their own home or unable to venture out into their local community. The cumulative impact of antisocial behaviour causes immense distress and suffering, affecting mental and physical wellbeing, work relationships and ultimately quality of life.

I know that communities in Cardiff North have experienced antisocial behaviour day in, day out, whether that is Friends of Forest Farm in my patch falling victim to repeat arson attacks or my constituent suffering a miscarriage due to the stress of antisocial behaviour by her neighbours.

Antisocial behaviour is often symptomatic of more serious criminal behaviour. Drug gangs taking over specific areas or cuckooing a property to sell drugs generate a great deal of antisocial behaviour locally, which is symptomatic of serious violence and drug offences. Thirteen years of crippling cuts to vital crime prevention services and a hollowed-out youth custody service mean that young people are getting sucked back into crime, making our communities far less safe. We need an urgent solution. Labour's community and victim payback board would restore faith and help tackle the crime that is blighting our communities. The blatant disregard for victims of antisocial behaviour shows nothing but contempt for such vulnerable members of society.

This Government have also created a huge backlog of 60,000 cases in the Crown court and 350,000 cases in the magistrates court, leaving dangerous criminals going unprosecuted. The backlog is a direct result of Conservative incompetence and poor political choices. They chose to underfund the system for more than 13 years, closing 260 courts. Rape has effectively been decriminalised, with nearly 99% of rape claims not resulting in a charge or a summons. The charge rate is 1.6%. Hundreds of women are being let down, traumatised by the most horrific crimes and with never a hope of seeing justice. In the tiny minority of cases that are prosecuted, victims face a 1,000-day delay from the initial report of an offence to completion. Rapists and serious criminals walk free in our communities because victims are dropping out and court cases are delayed. Justice delayed is justice denied.



[Anna McMorris]

In my role as shadow Minister for victims, I speak to survivors day in, day out. So many tell me that their experience of the criminal justice system was worse than the crime itself. One survivor told me that she felt it was safer to stay in her abusive relationship than to face the justice system. What does that tell us about this Government's record for keeping people safe? Being elected to this place comes with the responsibility of keeping the public safe. This Government have catastrophically failed at every stage to do that, and members of the public are paying the highest price. Labour is the party of law and order. The next Labour Government will rebuild neighbourhood policing and deliver more bobbies on the beat, just as we are doing in Wales.

3.52 pm

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorris). Wherever people live, they should be able to feel safe, secure and protected from harm. When they call the emergency services, they should be confident that they will respond. But after more than a decade of Conservative Government, more constituents than ever are getting in touch to say that they do not feel safe in their own home or local area due to crime, antisocial behaviour and, sadly, the police being so stretched that they cannot attend all call-outs.

Between 2010 and 2019, the number of police officers in South Yorkshire fell every single year. Though there has been some recovery in the last three years, there are still fewer officers on the streets of South Yorkshire today than when Labour left power. That is simply not good enough. These are not just numbers; the fall in officer numbers has real consequences for people's lives and puts pressure on police officers who are doing their best to serve their community.

I would like to focus my remarks on antisocial behaviour. Across Barnsley East in the last year I have heard reports of antisocial behaviour having a significant impact on people's lives. It is welcome that some issues have been resolved but, unfortunately, far too often it is a recurring problem. Buses have been the target of antisocial behaviour in Grimethorpe, where one service had to be suspended for a time after it was deemed unsafe for drivers and passengers. In Brierley, residents have contacted me again this week about the ongoing issues with roaming dogs that have attacked children and killed farm animals. Meanwhile, in Darfield, constituents have written to me about a whole host of issues including windows being smashed, stones being thrown at traffic and verbal abuse being shouted at bus stops. A serious incident took place on the Cudworth-Monk Bretton border when a car crashed into a resident's garden, and in Hoyland, another constituent had his house damaged by reckless driving.

Tackling antisocial behaviour often involves a number of different agencies and organisations, from residents' groups to charities, local councillors, the local authority and, of course, the police. In the majority of these cases, the police have done their best to intervene, investigate and issue offenders with appropriate disciplinary measures. In Bank End in Worsbrough, for example, when a

dangerous disused police building was being accessed by local children, I was pleased to see that the building was demolished after a number of representations.

However, with incidents happening so often throughout Barnsley East, many residents have told me they are worried that these behaviours, which are already causing them great distress, will spiral out of control. Labour supports a crackdown on antisocial behaviour and the delivery of important preventive work through neighbourhood policing. A Labour Government would introduce new police hubs and neighbourhood prevention teams, which would ensure a renewed visible police presence in local areas.

I know that police officers work incredibly hard, often under difficult circumstances, and I put on record my thanks to them. I meet the local police regularly to discuss their initiatives for preventing and responding to crime, but for those to be a success, they need sufficient resources, and they need a Government who take victims seriously, rather than one who are soft on crime and its causes.

3.56 pm

**Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): Trust in the police has eroded, as we have heard from Members across the Chamber. We need policing by consent to be renewed and restored across many communities. Being an officer can be highly demanding and extremely stressful. Throughout my working life, I have worked with police officers and police staff, and many of them are dedicated and committed to doing an excellent job. However, my focus in this debate will be on children and neighbourhood policing. I add that I have many families and friends in the service, and friends who have retired.

Members will recall the shocking case of Child Q, and many will know that it is not an isolated case. Last year, data requested by the Children's Commissioner for England found that a quarter of all strip searches conducted on children between 2018 and 2020 took place without an appropriate adult being present. That means they had no carer, parent or trusted adult present—how unsafe and how unaccountable that is. It is traumatic enough for an adult to be strip-searched, but for a child it is even worse. It is probably terrifying; they may feel humiliated and very scared, and it can happen from as young as 10 years old.

The issue of how children are treated by the police goes much wider than that. Research conducted by Dr Miranda Bevan at Goldsmiths, University of London found that children held in police custody often do not have a full understanding of their rights. They describe being kept in unsuitable conditions and spending hours detained in cells. In fact, Home Office data published in November 2022 found that 41% of child suspects were held in police custody overnight, sometimes for a full weekend. Police remand children five times more than the courts, which indicates that something is crucially wrong in policing and detaining children. That figure is far too high, so I ask the Government to commit to addressing it.

Unfortunately, these problems are just the tip of the iceberg of concerns about how children are treated in police custody. Following the Casey report, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner admitted that hundreds of corrupt, racist and misogynistic police officers were still serving.

The police are there to serve. The Government must invest in raising policing standards, with zero tolerance of abusive police officers; a focus on recruiting, retaining and training officers; and investment in community policing. That will increase trust and confidence in the police among all communities from all backgrounds, and especially diverse backgrounds.

Children's rights must be respected, women deserve to feel safe walking on our streets, and victims of crime need justice. Last month, I wrote to the Minister regarding an inquiry of the all-party parliamentary group on children in police custody, and I was grateful to receive a response. I reiterate that it cannot be right that 41% of children were kept in a police cell overnight according to the Home Office. What are the Government doing to ensure that this is not happening across our country? The Government need to keep children safe at all times.

3.59 pm

**Tahir Ali** (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to the fact that I am the proud father of a police officer who joined the West Midlands police two years ago on a degree apprenticeship programme. He is finding the work that goes on in the police force extraordinary.

For the past 13 years, Tory Governments have failed to tackle crime. After they reduced funding significantly, our police services are now fatally under-resourced, so more victims are left without recourse and perpetrators grow more brazen in their defiance of the law. Local communities feel abandoned, as the police presence has plummeted. Faith in the justice system is at an all-time low, which means that we are experiencing an underreporting of crimes and a growing mistrust between the public and our institutions of justice. That is a direct consequence of Tory mismanagement, which has left our police and our courts in dire need of more resources.

The overall charge rate for crimes is now 5.5%, with rates in some areas much lower. The number of rape cases has hit an all-time high. In my constituency, more than 43.4% of cases in the past year have been violent and sexual offences. Women fear to leave their own homes or to walk the streets alone, and it is easy to understand why. Many constituents have come to me in fear because of antisocial behaviour on their doorstep. Those I have spoken to at West Midlands police express their dismay at being unable to keep up with growing demand in their area, although Inspector Fitzpatrick leads a fantastic team in my constituency.

The result is that communities feel unsafe and unprotected, while our police services continue to struggle. Yet it is all too clear what is needed: neighbourhood policing, which, when fully resourced, helps to reduce the incidence of crime in local communities. With officers embedded in communities, and known to them, the public gain greater trust in policing services, so they feel empowered to report crime and to help the police to achieve their goals.

I know first hand the fantastic work of neighbourhood policing teams in my constituency. I also know the difference that it would make if they were given proper funding so that they could do their job without hindrance. Under the last 13 years of Tory Governments, however, 8,000 PCSOs have been cut and voluntary resignations

from the police have increased by a staggering 70%. I ask the Minister: where is the evidence that the Government's commitment to neighbourhood policing will continue and it will get to the levels in 2010? Why are they cutting PCSOs, given the huge increase in antisocial behaviour? What will they do to improve the police presence in local communities, so that our people and communities feel safe?

4.3 pm

**Ruth Jones** (Newport West) (Lab): I start by extending my deepest condolences to the First Minister of Wales, the right hon. Mark Drakeford MS. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House send his family our love and prayers following the sad news of his wife Clare's sudden passing at the weekend.

This is an important debate because keeping our communities safe and secure is one of our most important responsibilities as parliamentarians. This issue is a priority for many local people in Newport West, from Pill and Allt-yr-yn to Caerleon and Rogerstone. After 13 years of Tory Governments, the Conservative legacy is simple: criminals are being let off and victims are being let down. The Conservatives have turned their backs on communities, run down our vital public services and undermined respect for the rule of law. Too often, when things go wrong, no one comes, nothing is done and there are few consequences for law breakers.

We all know one simple thing: Labour is the party of law and order. The last Labour Government cut crime by a third and rolled out neighbourhood policing across the country. The number of recorded rapes and sexual offences has now hit a record high, but the charge rate for rape is still shockingly low, at a disgraceful 1.6%. Knife crime is up more than 70% on seven years ago, with knife-enabled rapes at record highs. We need action from this Home Secretary, not this obsession with closing our country to the world.

I cannot rise in a debate on crime and policing without touching on the recent stories of misogyny, racism and corruption within Gwent police force, my local police force, following an investigation by one of the national Sunday newspapers. Like many others in Newport West, I was horrified by what I read in the press, and I extend my sympathy and solidarity to all those targeted and affected by this disgraceful behaviour. I have had a number of the women affected contact me, and the details of the incidents they experienced are truly shocking.

It is clear that the culture in Gwent police needs to change, just as it does in the Met in London, and I want to pay tribute to our chief constable, Pam Kelly, for her commitment to ensuring that Gwent police force serves its people and, importantly, represents them, too. She needs to call out and confront this culture wherever it is to be found, but I also want to acknowledge all those officers who work hard, who respect the people and who do the right thing. I will do what I can as the Member of Parliament for Newport West to help to ensure that policing by consent remains the order of the day.

On that point, yesterday I raised a number of written questions about the Independent Office for Police Conduct. It is vital that it speeds up its work and helps to process issues, concerns and problems. I would be grateful if the Minister touched on the effectiveness of the IOPC and

[Ruth Jones]

what is being done. I do not want the investigation into misogyny in the Gwent police force to be delayed by the IOPC dragging its heels as it leads the investigation.

Keeping our communities safe does not appear to be a priority for Tory Ministers, and that is why I am pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition led the Crown Prosecution Service as the Director of Public Prosecutions. In that role, he locked up serious criminals and terrorists, and stood up for victims and their families. This stands in stark contrast to recent Conservative Prime Ministers—obviously, bar the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May)—who have broken the law in office and undermined respect in local communities up and down the land.

Every woman, man and child has a right to feel safe and secure in their homes and in their community. They should never have to fear going out to learn, to live or to work, but far too many do. The Conservatives are weak on crime, with millions of victims paying the price, and it is a price they cannot afford to pay.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** The last Back-Bench contributor is Margaret Greenwood. Can I therefore remind those who may be in their offices that the wind-ups will begin in five minutes, and they should make their way to the Chamber if they have participated in this debate?

4.7 pm

**Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab):** I begin by joining my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary and other Labour Members in calling for a Hillsborough law now.

Under the Conservatives, we have seen the destruction of neighbourhood policing, with a drop of 6,000 neighbourhood police officers and 8,500 police community support officers. The Conservatives' destruction of neighbourhood policing has consequences, as my constituents know only too well. In Wirral West, we have seen horrific violent crime in recent months, devastating families and leaving communities damaged and anxious for themselves, their families and the future.

Young people from the Woodchurch estate recently took part in a theatre for democracy event organised by the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts. A statement from the group that worked with the young people in Woodchurch has shared some of its findings with me. It said:

"Crime, gangs, and gun violence were all brought up often when talking about what the young people at the Carrbridge Centre in Woodchurch were worried about in their area. These young people's ages ranged from 10 to 14, and they felt scared about the issues going on in their neighbourhood, and felt they couldn't do anything about it".

These young people have a right to feel safe and the Government are failing them. There have been 11 firearms discharge incidents and two fatalities in Wirral since April 2021, the second highest figure in Merseyside, behind only Liverpool. Violent attacks are harrowing for victims, families and local communities.

Following a spate of incidents in Liverpool last year, the then Home Secretary announced support for the local community, including £150,000 additional funding

for trauma-informed support in local schools and mental health provision, and a further £350,000 to expand the "Clear, hold, build" pilot, intended, as she put it,

"to disrupt Merseyside's corrosive and deadly organised crime groups", to other areas in Merseyside affected by organised crime, predominantly focusing on Knowsley and Liverpool. Following the tragic murder of a young woman in Wallasey, the four Wirral MPs and the Merseyside police and crime commissioner, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Dame Angela Eagle), wrote to the Home Secretary to ask for similar support to be provided for Wirral, and asked for a meeting to discuss the issue. We have not yet had a response from the Home Secretary on this most urgent matter—*[Interruption.]* I see she has just arrived in her place, so I will repeat the point. The four Wirral MPs have written to her asking for a meeting to discuss the crime situation in Wirral and for more support for our communities. We have not yet had a response from the Home Secretary and we desperately need one. I hope she will advise the Minister who sums up the debate when she will respond to our letter and meet us to address the issue of crime in Wirral.

It is the first duty of Government to keep citizens safe and the country secure, and the Government are failing to fulfil that duty. Conservative cuts have led to the loss of 983 police and community support officers in the north-west since 2010—a loss of 47% of the workforce—leaving those left to carry out those duties overstretched and under-supported. In England and Wales, the cuts have led to the loss of 8,655 PCSOs—a cut of 51%. No wonder neighbourhood policing is suffering.

Figures from the House of Commons Library show the impact of Conservative austerity on police officer numbers. They show that in 2010 in England and Wales there were more than 143,000 police officers, but by 2018 that figure had fallen to around 122,000. Last year, the numbers rose to around 140,000 officers, but that is still lower than in 2010 and does not make up for the damage that Conservative cuts have done. It has been a similar story in Merseyside, where in 2010 there were more than 4,500 police officers. Numbers dwindled every year thereafter until 2019, by which time there were fewer than 3,400—over 1,100 fewer than in 2010. Numbers have started to increase again, but, as of last year, Merseyside was still short of 450 officers compared with 2010.

The loss of hundreds of police officers means the loss of a great deal of experience and intelligence, and leaves remaining officers under immense pressure in what is a difficult and important job. I pay tribute to officers and PCSOs in Wirral West for the work they do in difficult circumstances.

We need investment in policing so our communities can feel safe and officers are properly resourced. The next Labour Government will rebuild neighbourhood policing and deliver 13,000 extra neighbourhood officers and PCSOs, putting police back on the beat. We urgently need a Labour Government to ensure that people can live their lives free from fear and anxiety. Our communities deserve no less.

4.12 pm

**Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab):** In West Denton last month, a big pile of rubbish was set alight by teenagers, who threw petrol bombs at firefighters when



they arrived to tackle the blaze. Communities are scared of arson, and no wonder: cases of antisocial arson went up by 25% last year. In one horror home in Cleveland, a den for crack deals with Rambo knives, antisocial behaviour has made lives in the community a misery, with litter everywhere, assaults outside the property and local residents terrified, and no wonder: knife possession is up by 15% on pre-pandemic levels, with more than 6 million Brits witnessing drug dealing or drug use last year, and 3,000 reported incidents of antisocial behaviour every single day.

In Lancashire just a few days ago, young people were throwing rocks in a shopping centre and careering around the car park on quad bikes. Communities are scared of antisocial behaviour, and no wonder: more than 35% of people—more than 20 million people—have witnessed antisocial behaviour in the last year. People all over the country know exactly what this feels like. They know what broken Britain feels like. This is Tory Britain.

So what went wrong? Today's debate has laid it bare. First, they came for our police officers, cutting 20,000 across the country. Then they came for our PCSOs, cutting half the entire workforce. Our wonderful specials did not escape—8,000 down—and police staff who do the vetting, the training and the forensics have been cut by 6,000 since 2010. Then they came for the courts, with cuts leaving victims waiting years for any hope of justice and turning away from their cases in record numbers. Now they are coming for our public services. The transport network is in ruins, hospitals are at breaking point, and our police are spending hours—days—dealing with mental health cases. In one force, mental health-related calls are up by more than 450% since 2010 because there is simply no one else to pick up the pieces.

The worst thing is that they are coming for our future, too. Support services for our kids have been decimated, with mental health, Sure Start and youth work cut, cut, cut, so our lost boys and lost girls are a lost generation. What about victims? They have simply been ignored. Charge rates have plummeted and victims are not reporting crimes; they are simply walking away.

I turn to the results. We have heard eloquently about the impact from hon. Members. My hon. Friends the Members for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) and for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) talked about the pictures in their communities of the effect of crime. The hon. Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt) talked about the fear that people have about going into town centres. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Simon Lightwood) talked about the number of arrests having halved nationally since 2010 and how, in his survey, only 8% feel safer than they did in 2010.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Samantha Dixon) talked about the impact on neighbourhoods of the cut in PCSOs. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) talked about the police staff cuts. We need to free up officer time for them to be in the neighbourhood, but now we have warranted officers doing police staff jobs. They cost more money, and that is not what they should be doing.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Paul Holmes) might want to check some of his facts. He said that there are more police on our streets than ever before and that crime in London is up by 11%. Neither of those things

is accurate. Perhaps he will want to correct the record. My hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) summed it up by saying that people in our constituencies are not stupid; they know the truth.

**Paul Holmes:** In response to the shadow Home Secretary, I gave the source and figures that show that, in London, under this Mayor, crime was up by 11%. Perhaps she would like to correct the record.

**Hon. Members:** Knife crime.

**Sarah Jones:** I thank the hon. Member for that intervention. When he talked about crime, he was actually talking about knife crime. Knife crime was up across the whole country in the last year, because during covid the whole country had a drop in knife crime. In London, over the last four years, knife crime is down—unlike in the rest of the country, where it is up. *[Interruption.]* I will leave Conservative Members to check their own figures at a later date.

**Tahir Ali:** Does my hon. Friend agree that Conservative Members are just concentrating on London and do not give a damn about the rest of the country?

**Sarah Jones:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful intervention. We cannot level up without tackling crime.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorris) made a powerful case about victims being left behind and the impact of the victims Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) talked about the impact of antisocial behaviour, and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) talked about the impact on children. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) talked about the impact of misogyny in Gwent policing, what needs to be done at a national level and the Home Secretary's lack of action on that front.

The number of criminals facing justice has fallen. Arrests have halved. Charge rates have plummeted. We have a 7,000 shortfall in detectives, who have huge case loads. The public see what is happening. In the most damning indictment of the Government to date, More in Common yesterday published research based on tens of thousands of people across the country showing that 68% now believe that the police have given up trying to solve crimes such as shoplifting and burglaries.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I am finding it difficult to reconcile the hon. Lady's exhortation about crime with the record of her and her party. Every time the Government bring in legislation to crack down on crime and restore order, her party votes against it. How does she reconcile that? Does she agree that it is quite simple: we should be catching and locking up many more people than we do, and locking them up for longer?

**Sarah Jones:** I gently remind the right hon. Member that the number of arrests has halved since his party came to power. Perhaps he should focus on that.

In the research of tens of thousands of people, only 25% of the public think the police do a good job of being visible in local areas, only 26% say the police do a good job of tackling antisocial behaviour, and only 24% say they do a good job of tackling crime. People even said that there is no point in investing in improving

[Sarah Jones]

the community if it is just going to be vandalised by criminals. We agree: you cannot level up without tackling crime.

Where is the Government's plan? Where is their righteous anger that it is poorer communities who are the greater victims of crime? Where is their apology for cutting 20,000 police officers, claiming for years it would have no impact whatever on crime and then rushing to replace them when they finally admitted that perhaps it did? Where is their apology to our police forces who are under greater pressure but are paid 20% less in real terms than they were in 2010? What is their plan? At the very least, surely they can support Labour's motion today to put more police and PCSOs on our streets in our neighbourhoods? And how can they boast in their amendment that rape convictions have risen from one a day to one and a half a day?

A Labour Government will fix the mess this Government have created. Where Conservatives have dismantled neighbourhood policing, Labour will put 13,000 police and PCSOs back on our streets preventing and fighting crime. Where the Conservatives have weakened antisocial behaviour powers, Labour will bring in tougher punishments. Where the Tories have forgotten about our young people, Labour will prevent crime with youth workers in custody suites and A&E, and mentors in pupil referral units. Where the Government are making hard-working taxpayers foot the £5.1 billion excess bill for their own catastrophic mismanagement of the long-delayed new radio network, Labour will save millions from shared services and procurement. Where the Home Office pushes blame to local forces and never takes a lead, Labour will be an active Government legislating for national standards on policing, vetting and misconduct. Where the Government pay lip service to violence against women and girls, Labour will put RASSO units in every force and fast-track rape cases. Will the Minister respond to the question earlier from the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips)? Will the Government commit to the police going to every case of domestic violence, as well as every case of burglary? Where the Government stoke division on wokery, Labour will get serious about catching criminals. Where the Government ignore victims, Labour will put them at the heart of everything we do.

People are tired of feeling their problems will be ignored, and that their values of community and respect are being ground down by a Government taking a backseat on law and order. The next Labour Government will bring back security and respect to our communities. We will bring back public faith in policing, prevent crime, punish criminals and protect communities. It can't come soon enough.

4.23 pm

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** It is a pleasure to be here winding up this afternoon's debate. I would like to start—I am sure speaking for people on both sides of the House—by thanking, and paying tribute to, the vast majority of the 145,000 dedicated police officers up and down our country who, on a daily basis, put themselves in harm's way to keep us, our families and our constituents safe. Our thanks go out to them.

The speeches from the Opposition, starting with the shadow Home Secretary, painted a picture of dystopian misery which flies in the face of the evidence and the statistics. Let us start by calmly reviewing the figures produced by the Office for National Statistics in the Crime Survey of England and Wales, the only set of crime statistics endorsed by the ONS. It lays out exactly what has happened in the last 12 years, since 2010. Let us go through some of the key figures, so no one is in any doubt.

Overall crime—excluding fraud and computer misuse, because they came into the dataset only in 2016—has gone down by 50% in the past 12 years. Criminal damage in the past 12 years has gone down by 65%. Domestic burglary in the past 12 years has gone down by 56%. Other household theft is down by 33%. Robbery is down by 57%. Theft from the person is down by 52%. Vehicle-related theft is down by 39%. The figures for most of those crimes—serious crimes that affect our constituents—were twice as high under the last Labour Government. I am looking forward to hearing the apology from the shadow Home Secretary, who was a Minister in that Government, for presiding over crime levels 12 years ago that in many cases were double what they are today. I am sorry to burst the Twitter bubble for Opposition Members, but those are the facts.

Speaking of facts, let us come on to the topic of this afternoon's debate: police numbers. Opposition Members have concocted some concept of neighbourhood policing. I can tell the House that police forces have different ways of reporting officer numbers, including incident response and neighbourhood policing numbers, but if we look at frontline officer numbers, which are the relevant measure, they tell a very different story.

Let us look at total police officer numbers, because that is what our constituents care about. The police do important jobs on our streets—of course they do—but they also investigate rape, detect crime, protect us from terrorism and so on. The most recent figures came out just last week, so there is no excuse for not being up to date. There were 145,658 extra officers as of 31 December—an increase of about 16,000 over the past five years. That number is only about 350 short of the all-time record, which was set in March 2010.

This will not be confirmed for a few more weeks, but based on our recruitment trends it is likely that we passed the previous peak about two weeks ago and had a record number of officers. I expect that that will be confirmed in April, when the figures up to 31 March come out. My expectation is that we will have about 3,000 more police officers than we have ever had in our country's history. Those are the facts. The Opposition may not like them, but those are the facts.

**Sir John Hayes:** Thank goodness for the Minister and all his great work in the Home Office, and thank heavens for our splendid Home Secretary. The Minister is right that the Labour party has a vested interest in despair, as we have heard today, but in addressing police numbers, will he look again at rural areas? The police funding formula militates against them. He would expect me to do no less than make a robust case for Lincolnshire. Will he meet me to discuss it?

**Chris Philp:** Of course I will. My right hon. Friend, as always, speaks with great authority and wisdom. I can tell the House that we will shortly be consulting on a new police funding formula.

I welcome the debate that the Opposition have chosen today, which has highlighted the fact that we will very shortly have a record number of police officers. In fact, in 19 of our 43 forces, we already do. I was particularly surprised that two Cheshire Opposition Members chose to mention police officer numbers, because in Cheshire we already have record numbers of officers, as we do in 19 forces.

**Yvette Cooper:** Can the Minister explain why there are 6,000 fewer neighbourhood police on our streets and 8,000 fewer PCSOs in neighbourhood teams? That is what communities can see, right across the country. That is why, compared with 13 years ago, twice as many people now say that they never see the police on patrol.

**Chris Philp:** I do not recognise that calculation around neighbourhood numbers. What I do recognise is the police statistics published last week, which show that we are on the cusp of setting a record number of police officers in this country's history. I expect that to be confirmed in April, so I look forward to the shadow Home Secretary congratulating the Home Secretary on her accomplishments. By the way, I was rather struck by the amount of time the shadow Home Secretary spent personally and unjustifiably attacking a Home Secretary who has been working so hard to deliver these numbers.

Time is short, but I will respond to one or two points that have been raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Anna Firth) made some very good points about knives, such as zombie knives and machetes, which are extremely dangerous. We will shortly to be consulting on banning more of those dangerous weapons to keep our constituents safe.

**Sarah Jones:** Will the Minister give way?

**Chris Philp:** I have very little time. I do apologise, but I must make some progress.

There is clearly more work to be done in relation to serious sexual offences. In the year to June 2022, there were 1,371 prosecutions for rape. The number rose by 15% year on year, but it is still low. More work needs to be done, which is why, by June this year, Operation Soteria will be rolled out across the country.

Let me now respond to the question about police attendance in cases of domestic violence, because it was an important question and it was asked two or three times. According to the authorised professional practice of the College of Policing, police officers should attend every incident of domestic violence unless there is a personal safety reason—to do with the victim—why they should not do so. In some cases it may be more appropriate to deal with the offence confidentially, outside the domestic setting, but that is what the authorised professional practice already says.

There is a great deal of work under way on efficiency. We are working on reforming the Home Office counting rules and the incident reporting rules to remove bureaucratic burdens from the police so that they can be busy chasing criminals rather than filling in excessive paperwork, and I congratulate Chief Constable Rowley on the fantastic work he is doing in that regard. We are also working with our colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care on ensuring that the NHS and ambulance

services do more to alleviate mental health pressures on policing, and I thank Sir Stephen House for the work he is leading in that area.

Questions about police misconduct were asked by the hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) and others. Next month the College of Policing will set out an expanded set of statutory guidance on vetting. We are checking police officers against the national police database, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services is checking up on the 43 recommendations that it made a couple of months ago, and the Home Office is reviewing the police dismissal procedure to ensure that officers who do commit misconduct can be dismissed more quickly. The hon. Member for Newport West asked about the speed of IOPC investigations. Speaking frankly, I must say that that does concern me, and it is an issue I will be raising with the IOPC.

Let me finally turn to the absurd and extraordinary claim that somehow Labour purports to be the party of law and order. If we look at Labour's record in office around the country, we will see the truth. We can look at Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, closing police stations and presiding over an 11% increase in knife crime year on year. We can look at the west midlands, where the Labour police and crime commissioner, despite having received a 10% real-terms increase in funding in 2015, is proposing to close 20 police stations. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones), talks about antisocial behaviour. We both come from Croydon. She has got a cheek: it was a Labour council in Croydon—a bankrupt Labour council—that scrapped the graffiti cleaning team. Goodness me! And, only a few months ago, we saw Labour Members vote against keeping rapists in prison for longer.

There is only one party of law and order, there is only one party delivering record police numbers and there is only one party that has cut crime by 50% in the last 12 years, and it is the Conservative party.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Just to inform the House, I will first put the question on the Opposition's main motion. If that falls, the question on the amendment will be put.

*Question put (Standing Order No. 31(2)).* That the original words stand part of the Question.

*The House divided:* Ayes 195, Noes 309.

**Division No. 167]**

**[4.34 pm]**

#### AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)

Abrahams, Debbie

Ali, Rushanara

Ali, Tahir

Amesbury, Mike

Anderson, Fleur

Antoniazzi, Tonia

Ashworth, rh Jonathan

Barker, Paula

Beckett, rh Margaret

Begum, Apsana

Benn, rh Hilary

Betts, Mr Clive

Blake, Olivia

Blomfield, Paul

Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben

Brennan, Kevin

Brown, Ms Lyn

Brown, rh Mr Nicholas

Bryant, Sir Chris

Buck, Ms Karen

Burgon, Richard

Butler, Dawn

Byrne, Ian

Byrne, rh Liam

Cadbury, Ruth

Campbell, rh Sir Alan

Carden, Dan

Chamberlain, Wendy

Champion, Sarah

Charalambous, Bambos

Clark, Feryal



Cooper, Daisy  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Daby, Janet  
 Davey, rh Ed  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Davies-Jones, Alex  
 Debbonaire, Thangam  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dixon, Samantha  
 Dodds, Anneliese  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Eshalomi, Florence  
 Evans, Chris  
 Farron, Tim  
 Foord, Richard  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Foy, Mary Kelly  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Green, Sarah  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Dame Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Howarth, rh Sir George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma

Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Navendu Mishra*)  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lynch, Holly  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMorris, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Helen  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Murray, James  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Oppong-Asare, Abena  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rayner, rh Angela  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, rh Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tarry, Sam

Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Andrew

Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitley, Mick  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Winter, Beth  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

### Tellers for the Ayes:

Liz Twist and  
 Colleen Fletcher

### NOES

Adams, rh Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aiken, Nickie  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Anderson, Lee  
 Anderson, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, rh Edward  
 Atherton, Sarah  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Bailey, Shaun  
 Baillie, Siobhan  
 Baker, Duncan  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Steve  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Baynes, Simon  
 Bell, Aaron  
 Benton, Scott  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Bhatti, Saqib  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, rh Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Bristow, Paul  
 Britcliffe, Sara  
 Browne, Anthony  
 Buchan, Felicity  
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, rh Conor  
 Butler, Rob  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Carter, Andy  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chope, Sir Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
 Clarkson, Chris  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey

Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
 Colburn, Elliot  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Coutinho, Claire  
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crosbie, Virginia  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Daly, James  
 Davies, rh David T. C.  
 Davies, Gareth  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Davison, Dehenna  
 Dinanage, Dame Caroline  
 Dines, Miss Sarah  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Double, Steve  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, Sir James  
 Duguid, David  
 Dunne, rh Philip  
 Edwards, Ruth  
 Ellis, rh Michael  
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
 Eustice, rh George  
 Evans, Dr Luke  
 Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Everitt, Ben  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Farris, Laura  
 Fell, Simon  
 Firth, Anna  
 Fletcher, Katherine  
 Fletcher, Mark  
 Fletcher, Nick  
 Ford, rh Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Frazer, rh Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gibson, Peter  
 Gideon, Jo  
 Glen, rh John  
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert

Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, James  
 Grayling, rh Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Griffith, Andrew  
 Grundy, James  
 Gullis, Jonathan  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hart, Sally-Ann  
 Hart, rh Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, rh James  
 Henry, Darren  
 Higginbotham, Antony  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Holden, Mr Richard  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Howell, John  
 Howell, Paul  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, Jane  
 Hunt, rh Jeremy  
 Hunt, Tom  
 Jack, rh Mr Alister  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnston, David  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, Fay  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Jupp, Simon  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kearns, Alicia  
 Keegan, rh Gillian  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi  
 Lamont, John  
 Langan, Robert  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Levy, Ian  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Loder, Chris  
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackrory, Cherylyn  
 Maclean, Rachel

Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, rh Kit  
 Mangnall, Anthony  
 Mann, Scott  
 Marson, Julie  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Mayhew, Jerome  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McPartland, rh Stephen  
 McVey, rh Esther  
 Mercer, rh Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Millar, Robin  
 Miller, rh Dame Maria  
 Milling, rh Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Damien  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Mortimer, Jill  
 Morton, rh Wendy  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mumby-Croft, Holly  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryl  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Sir Robert  
 Nici, Lia  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, rh Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Philp, rh Chris  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, rh Victoria  
 Pritchard, rh Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, rh Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, rh Dominic  
 Randall, Tom  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela  
 Roberts, Rob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Russell, Dean  
 Rutley, David  
 Sambrook, Gary  
 Saxby, Selaine  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok  
 Simmonds, David  
 Skidmore, rh Chris

Smith, rh Chloe  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Spencer, rh Mark  
 Stafford, Alexander  
 Stephenson, rh Andrew  
 Stevenson, Jane  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, rh Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, rh Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunderland, James  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie

Trott, Laura  
 Tugendhat, rh Tom  
 Vara, rh Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Sir Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Warman, Matt (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Watling, Giles  
 Webb, Suzanne  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
 Wiggin, Sir Bill  
 Wild, James  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy  
 Young, Jacob

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Joy Morrissey and  
 Nigel Huddleston

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31(2)).*  
 That the proposed words be there added.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** If you are forcing a Division, Mr Bone, you must follow your voice and you must vote that way.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): Of course, Sir.

*The House divided:* Ayes 308, Noes 1.

**Division No. 168]**

**[4.48 pm**

#### AYES

Adams, rh Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aiken, Nickie  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Anderson, Lee  
 Anderson, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, rh Edward  
 Atherton, Sarah  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Bailey, Shaun  
 Baillie, Siobhan  
 Baker, Duncan  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Steve  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Baynes, Simon  
 Bell, Aaron  
 Benton, Scott  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Bhatti, Saqib  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen

Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, rh Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Bristow, Paul  
 Britcliffe, Sara  
 Browne, Anthony  
 Buchan, Felicity  
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, rh Conor  
 Butler, Rob  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Carter, Andy  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Cates, Miriam  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chope, Sir Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
 Clarkson, Chris  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
 Colburn, Elliot  
 Collins, Damian

Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Coutinho, Claire  
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crosbie, Virginia  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Daly, James  
 Davies, rh David T. C.  
 Davies, Gareth  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Davison, Dehenna  
 Dinage, Dame Caroline  
 Dines, Miss Sarah  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
 Double, Steve  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, Sir James  
 Duguid, David  
 Dunne, rh Philip  
 Edwards, Ruth  
 Ellis, rh Michael  
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
 Eustice, rh George  
 Evans, Dr Luke  
 Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Everitt, Ben  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Farris, Laura  
 Fell, Simon  
 Firth, Anna  
 Fletcher, Katherine  
 Fletcher, Mark  
 Fletcher, Nick  
 Ford, rh Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Frazer, rh Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gibson, Peter  
 Gideon, Jo  
 Glen, rh John  
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, James  
 Grayling, rh Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Griffith, Andrew  
 Grundy, James  
 Gullis, Jonathan  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hart, Sally-Ann  
 Hart, rh Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heappey, rh James  
 Henry, Darren  
 Higginbotham, Antony  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Holden, Mr Richard  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Howell, John  
 Howell, Paul  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, Jane  
 Hunt, rh Jeremy  
 Hunt, Tom  
 Jack, rh Mr Alister  
 David, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnston, David  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, Fay  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Jupp, Simon  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kearns, Alicia  
 Keegan, rh Gillian  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi  
 Lamont, John  
 Langan, Robert  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Levy, Ian  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lockhart, Carla  
 Loder, Chris  
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackrory, Cherilyn  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, rh Kit  
 Mangnall, Anthony  
 Mann, Scott  
 Marson, Julie  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Mayhew, Jerome  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McPartland, rh Stephen  
 McVey, rh Esther  
 Mercer, rh Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen

Millar, Robin  
 Miller, rh Dame Maria  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Damien  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Mortimer, Jill  
 Morton, rh Wendy  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mumby-Croft, Holly  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Sir Robert  
 Nici, Lia  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, rh Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Philp, rh Chris  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, rh Victoria  
 Pritchard, rh Mark  
 Purslove, Tom  
 Quin, rh Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, rh Dominic  
 Randall, Tom  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela  
 Roberts, Rob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Russell, Dean  
 Rutley, David  
 Sambrook, Gary  
 Saxby, Selaine  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok  
 Simmonds, David

Skidmore, rh Chris  
 Smith, rh Chloe  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Spencer, rh Mark  
 Stafford, Alexander  
 Stephenson, rh Andrew  
 Stevenson, Jane  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, rh Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, rh Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunderland, James  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
 Trott, Laura  
 Tugendhat, rh Tom  
 Vara, rh Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Sir Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Warman, Matt (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Watling, Giles  
 Webb, Suzanne  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
 Wiggin, Sir Bill  
 Wild, James  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy  
 Young, Jacob

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
 Nigel Huddleston and  
 Joy Morrissey

## NOES

Ferrier, Margaret

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Amanda Milling and  
 Mr Peter Bone

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*The Deputy Speaker declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to (Standing Order No. 31(2)).*

*Resolved,*

That this House welcomes the Government's efforts to increase police numbers, with 16,743 so far recruited and on track to meet the Government's 20,000 target by March; notes that there will be



more officers than ever before in England and Wales; recognises that, excluding online crime, overall crime is down by 50 per cent since 2010; notes with concern that the Labour Mayor of London has overseen a 9 per cent increase in knife crime while the number of young people assaulted with sharp objects is down nationally by 23 per cent since 2019; notes that adult rape convictions are up by a third in the last recorded year; notes that the Safer Streets Fund rounds have funded 270 projects designed to cut neighbourhood crimes such as theft, burglary, anti-social behaviour, and violence against women and girls; and welcomes the Government's determination to back the police in giving them the powers they need to crack down on dangerous criminals and protests that wreak havoc on ordinary people's lives.

## Non-domicile Tax Status

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I remind everybody here that, if you participate in this second Opposition Day debate, you will be expected to turn up for the wind-ups.

5 pm

**James Murray** (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That there be laid before this House, no later than 28 February 2023, a copy of the Treasury analysis related to the effect of the abolition of the non-domicile tax status on the public revenue referred to by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in evidence to the Treasury Committee on 23 November 2022 together with any other document or analysis relating to that matter prepared for the Chancellor's consideration since 14 October 2022.

Today, 31 January, is of course the last day for people across the country who pay taxes by self-assessment to file their returns and make any payments. In a very small number of cases, those tax returns will have been submitted by people who are claiming tax benefits because of their non-dom tax status. That loophole is well known to some of the current occupants of Downing Street; indeed, some of them may still have that status and hope to benefit from it again in future.

The loophole allows a small group of high-income people who live in the UK to avoid paying tax on their overseas income for up to 15 years. It is a status that can be passed down through people's fathers. It costs the public finances £3.2 billion a year and it fails to support economic growth in the UK. It is a 200-year-old loophole that should have no place in our modern tax system.

**Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): If it is such a long-standing loophole, as the hon. Gentleman describes it, why have successive Labour Governments not abolished it?

**James Murray:** We are debating the importance of a fair tax system for the future of this country. This Government have sat on non-dom tax status for months and years. We are questioning why this Prime Minister is not heeding Labour's calls to abolish the non-dom tax status once and for all, and spend the money on the NHS, childcare and a growing economy.

When the Government are making working people pay more tax, it is simply wrong to allow wealthy people with overseas incomes to continue to benefit from an outdated tax break. It is also bad for UK business. The loophole prevents non-doms from being able to invest their foreign income in the UK, as bringing it here means that it becomes liable for UK tax. That is why the shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), first set out our party's position last April—four Conservative Chancellors ago. She confirmed that, in government, Labour would abolish the non-dom status as part of our reforms to create a fairer tax system for working people. We will abolish that indefensible 200-year-old tax loophole and introduce a modern scheme for people who are genuinely living in the UK for short periods.

Labour believes that, if a person makes Britain their home, they should pay their taxes here. That patriotic point should be accepted on all sides of the political divide, yet Ministers in this Government, under this Prime Minister, seem desperate to defend the non-dom loophole. What is it about the current Prime Minister

[James Murray]

that makes him so reluctant to abolish non-dom tax status? The Government are increasing taxes on working people, businesses are struggling, and our NHS is in crisis. Yet the Conservatives defend a small number of rich people who use non-dom tax status and offshore trusts to wriggle out of paying taxes here in Britain.

We know that the Prime Minister understands how non-dom tax status works—he can hardly claim ignorance on that—so how can he possibly justify it? How do Conservative MPs look their constituents in the eye and tell them that their taxes will keep going up, while the taxes of non-doms must always stay down? It is indefensible, and that is why the next Labour Government will act by abolishing the non-dom tax status.

**Anthony Browne** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): The hon. Member asks what makes this current Prime Minister reluctant to change non-dom tax status, but what made Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, the former Labour Prime Ministers, also very reluctant to scrap the non-dom tax status? They both reviewed it and both kept it.

**James Murray:** We were not increasing taxes on working people when we were in government. The hon. Gentleman can start looking at the record 13 years ago, but it is high time that Members on the Government Benches took responsibility for what they have done in government—for the low growth, for the high taxes on working people and for the fact that our public services are crumbling.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): On that point, to recall what happened in 2010, one of the first things that the incoming Conservative coalition Government did was to increase VAT from 15% to 20%. Who did that hurt?

**James Murray:** As my hon. Friend reminds us, increasing taxes on working people has long been a hallmark of the Conservatives. That has led us to a situation where we have the highest tax burden on working people in more than 70 years.

**Anthony Browne:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**James Murray:** No, I will make some progress. Our position contrasts with that of the current Government, whose Ministers have been at pains over the past year to protect this unfair loophole. When the Chancellor told the Treasury Committee last November that he wants “to make sure that wealthy foreigners pay as much tax in this country as possible”,

his words could not have rung more hollow. They rang almost as hollow as the Prime Minister’s promise when he took office that he would run a Government of “integrity, professionalism and accountability.” The truth is that the Prime Minister is running a Government without even basic competence and it is hitting people across this country.

**Anna McMorris** (Cardiff North) (Lab): It is reported today that Infosys, the Indian-based IT firm, which holds several contracts with public services here, is in a £20 million dispute with His Majesty’s Revenue and Customs. Whether it is through non-dom status or

something else, it costs our country dearly when there are tax avoiders. Does my hon. Friend not agree? I am sure that the Prime Minister knows that company very well.

**James Murray:** I thank my hon. Friend for drawing attention to the impact that tax avoidance has on the public purse and on people across this country and to the fact that the Prime Minister probably understands some of these issues very well indeed.

As my hon. Friend set out, people are feeling the impact on this country’s economic growth as we lag so far behind other countries around the world. People are feeling the impact of so many parts of our public services breaking at the seams, and people are feeling the impact as the big challenges of the future get kicked ever further into the long grass.

We need a Government with a plan to grow the economy, with the drive to get ahead of the challenges of the future and with the determination to reform and strengthen our public services. Nowhere is that clearer than with the NHS, as more than 7 million people wait months and even years for treatment, unable to work or to live their lives to the full. We know that, to make the NHS fit for the future and able to support a healthy society and economy, it desperately needs reform and sustainable funding from a growing economy.

**Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making a typical, anti-aspirational socialist rant straight out of the book called “Politics of Envy”, but he is not actually speaking to the motion on the Order Paper. Why has he put “28 February” in that motion when he could just wait for the Budget on 15 March?

**James Murray:** It would only be a Conservative MP who could criticise an Opposition shadow Minister for suggesting that people should pay their fair share of tax.

I was speaking about the NHS, so let us look at the Government record on the NHS and see what can be done. We know that, after 1997, Labour’s reforms and funding from a growing economy meant that our country had an NHS of which we were proud. If we win the next general election, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeter) the shadow Health Secretary has set out, one of the first steps we will take to get the NHS back on track is to use some of the money raised by scrapping non-dom status to implement a workforce plan that addresses the root cause of the crisis the NHS is in. Under our plan, we would double the number of medical school places to 15,000 a year. We would double the number of district nurses qualifying each year. We would train 5,000 new health visitors a year. We would create 10,000 more nursing and midwifery clinical placements each year.

**Harriett Baldwin:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Opposition spokesman to be talking in such general terms about a wide range of things, without actually addressing the motion on the Order Paper?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** If I had heard anything out of order, I would have called the shadow Minister to order. I am quite content with what he is saying at this moment in time.

**James Murray:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to set out the details of the kind of long-term workforce plan that we believe the NHS needs.

The NHS is one of the great challenges we face, but we know another challenge that parents and children across the country face: the desperate need for a modern childcare system. We need a system that supports families from the end of parental leave to the end of primary school, as the shadow Education Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson), has set out. As the first step in this landmark shift, we would use revenue from abolishing non-dom tax status to guarantee breakfast clubs for every primary age child in England. Too many families cannot afford the clubs before school that boost children's learning and development and help parents to go to work. Labour's plan would save families money as well as help parents to work the jobs and hours they choose.

Our plan to abolish non-dom status, replace it with a modern system and use the money raised to strengthen the NHS, childcare and the economy should be a no-brainer. Yet the Conservatives refuse to do it. We want to know why. This is not the first time I have asked Ministers to explain their position. In the last few months of last year, I asked Treasury Ministers five times to explain why the Government have been so reluctant to abolish this outdated tax loophole. I asked Ministers five times whether the Chancellor considered abolishing non-dom tax status, whether the Prime Minister was consulted about doing so and whether, when the current Prime Minister was Chancellor, he recused himself from discussions on the matter.

Five times I asked those questions; five times the Ministers refused to answer or even acknowledge them. Instead, Ministers have been determined to defend non-dom status. I suspect we will hear some of those same defences today. If previous debates are any guide, the Minister may well repeat her line that we should be grateful to non-doms for paying £7.9 billion in UK taxes last year.

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Victoria Atkins):** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. If I am going to be quoted, I expect to be quoted correctly. The hon. Gentleman seems to use words I am not sure he quite understands—I do not know. In my speech, I am going to help him to understand some of the words he has used. But I have only ever sought to set out the facts, which we have to take into account on the issue under discussion, which is that they do pay £7.9 billion in tax. That is the context in which I have cited that figure, not in the way that he has alleged.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Shadow Minister, do you want to respond to that? They were your words, not mine.

**James Murray:** I am not sure I want to respond to that. The Minister has made her point. No doubt she will have a further chance in a few moments to set out those points again. She confirmed, in fact, that she is seeking to use as a defence for non-dom tax status the fact that non-doms paid £7.9 billion in UK taxes last year. Of course that argument entirely misses the point. We are talking about the £3.2 billion of tax that non-doms do not pay each year in this country.

Without wanting to forecast what might come in a few minutes, I suspect the Minister might also recycle her line that non-doms have invested £6 billion in investment schemes since 2012. But, of course, that ignores the fact that only 1% of non-doms invest their overseas income in the UK in any given year, and that non-dom status actively discourages people from bringing money into the UK to invest. Finally, the Minister may try to win praise for the Government having stopped non-dom status being permanent, but I suspect she will neglect to mention the fact that the Government have created a brand-new loophole that allows people to use offshore trusts to retain non-dom benefits permanently.

To be fair, while Treasury Ministers have come to the Dispatch Box time and again to defend non-dom tax status, the Chancellor did at least confirm to the House of Commons Treasury Committee on 23 November last year that he had asked the Treasury to look into how much abolishing that loophole would save. When he was questioned at that Committee by the superb interrogator, my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), the Chancellor claimed:

“I want to make sure that anything you do in terms of the non-dom tax regime does not mean you lose more than you gain.”

We already have clear, well-evidenced work from the London School of Economics and Warwick University—respected academic institutions, using HMRC data—which confirms that non-dom tax status costs the public finances £3.2 billion a year, even after any behavioural effects are taken into account. If the Chancellor is determined to ask his officials to confirm that figure, presumably using the same HMRC data as the LSE and Warwick University, we want to see him doing so as quickly as possible, and we want to see the result. That is why we have tabled today's Humble Address.

We believe that non-dom tax status should be abolished, but that is not what we will be voting to make happen today. All we are voting for today is to make sure that, by the end of next month, the analysis the Chancellor referred to at the Treasury Committee on 23 November last year is published. Our motion would put that analysis alongside any other document or analysis on non-doms prepared for the Chancellor since he took office into the public domain ahead of the spring Budget.

I would hope that a Government supposedly committed to integrity, professionalism and accountability would feel obliged to accept that request. If not, the question will surely arise, what have they got to hide? What is it they are so keen to keep out of the public domain? What questions or conclusions are they so desperate to avoid? Our motion would simply make sure that any information the Chancellor has been considering in relation to the non-dom tax status would be made public ahead of the spring Budget in March 2023.

We know what happened at the last fiscal event, the autumn statement in November 2022. The decisions taken by the Chancellor at that time hit working people by forcing through a council tax rise and extending freezes in thresholds for income tax and national insurance contributions. Those freezes in tax thresholds will, over time, cost the average household more than £1,000 a year, and yet, at the same time as announcing those tax rises on working people last November, the Chancellor



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was silent on non-doms. That is what it looks like when working people are forced to pay for this Government's failure.

Time and again, the Conservatives have chosen to put the burden of tax on to working people, rather than asking those with the broadest shoulders to pay their fair share. If working people are being asked to pay more tax, it is simply wrong to allow well-off people to continue to benefit from an outdated tax break on their overseas income. The truth is that Labour wants lower taxes for people who keep the country moving. The Tories want lower taxes for people who move their tax status overseas. We believe that if a person makes Britain their home, they should pay their taxes here. We believe that abolishing this tax loophole should be common sense and that using that money to invest in the NHS and childcare should make it a no-brainer. We will be voting today to make this Government finally come clean about why they are so reluctant to do the right thing.

5.18 pm

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Victoria Atkins):** If the House will allow me, I would like to take a moment to mark the 70th anniversary of the east coast tidal surge, which saw 307 lives lost in England, including 43 people in Lincolnshire. Sutton-on-Sea in my constituency was one of the worst affected areas, and this morning constituents and Lincolnshire residents came together on the coastline to mark this terrible day in our nation's history. Sadly, I could not be with them, but I want to place on record that my thoughts are with them on this difficult anniversary.

The Government have five priorities, as set out by the Prime Minister. First, we will halve inflation to give respite to business and reprieve to families living under the pressure of rising prices. Secondly, we will grow the economy to create better paid jobs and opportunities across the country. Thirdly, we will ensure that our national debt is falling, so that we can secure the future of public services. Fourthly, we will cut NHS waiting lists, so that people can get the care they need more quickly. Fifthly, we will pass new laws to stop small boats. To reflect the people's priorities, three of our priorities are economic. They are a plan for a bright future where our economy is growing faster and where people across the country have opportunities for good jobs and for their pay to go further.

The autumn statement laid out our plan to achieve that future and, despite the difficult fiscal decisions we had to make, re-emphasised our support for the most vulnerable. Having helped households throughout the pandemic, we have set up new schemes to help people and businesses with rising energy bills, and we have taken targeted action on the cost of living. We have raised pensions, benefits and the national living wage to help those who might otherwise have been left behind. Those who ask where the burden falls in paying for that support should look at the measures in the autumn statement, which, as a whole, show that we have asked wealthier people to pay more. We have asked those with the broadest shoulders to carry the heaviest burden.

Today is not only the deadline for self-assessments, but, interestingly, the third anniversary of the Conservatives keeping our promise to the British people by honouring

the result of the referendum and leaving the European Union. It is therefore ironic that Labour has chosen to table this type of motion today, because it was a parliamentary device that the Leader of the Opposition fell on when he was the shadow Brexit Minister and self-identified as a Corbynite. Labour used this sort of motion to try to block Brexit, but it did not work then and it will not work now to stop the Government's responsible handling of the economy.

The flaws in the motion are fundamental, because long-standing and crucial conventions exist that Ministers should be able to receive free and frank advice from officials. In developing policy, Ministers must have a safe space to be advised by officials. That process should not play out in public, especially given that Treasury Ministers are often dealing with issues that are highly market sensitive. Those conventions apply to Governments of all political colours. If we were to make changes to any aspect of the tax system, the right and proper place to publish related costings and assessments is at the relevant fiscal event.

Having dealt with the motion's flawed framework, I will say that we understand the legitimate concerns of people across the country. The country has a strong instinct for fairness, and we want all people to pay their fair share of tax. As the Minister responsible for the tax system, I feel that keenly, because I know that many people across the country are under pressure at the same time as we need to fund our public services properly.

**Matt Western:** At its heart, the motion is about laying before the House the evidence and analysis undertaken by the Treasury. On the point about fairness, I am sure the British public will want to hear the answer to my simple question about the 28,000 people who are non-domiciled in this country. What is the average length of time that they have been in this country? What is the longest and what is the shortest?

**Victoria Atkins:** I am genuinely grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because that helps me to set out the progress that has been made in that area in the last decade. Non-domicile tax contributions rightly play an important part in funding our public services. Non-doms pay UK tax on their UK income and gains, and they pay UK tax on foreign income and gains when those amounts are brought into the UK.

I know the hon. Member for Ealing North (James Murray) dismisses £7.9 billion out of hand, as though it is somehow not relevant, but I set out these facts precisely because that is a very large sum of money and it helps to fund public services. It is right, in having a reasoned debate about these measures, that we adhere to the facts.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I have a rather technical question about the remittance basis charge. Would His Majesty's Government consider raising the lower rate from £30,000 to £60,000 and perhaps the upper rate from £60,000 to £90,000? It would make better the balance between taking in revenue and the non-doms paying their share. Furthermore, following on from that, would they index link the charges to inflation in following years?

**Victoria Atkins:** I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that thoughtful contribution. I hope he will understand that I must neither confirm nor deny that given where

we are in the Budget cycle, but he makes an interesting point about the level of the remittance and his views on its impact.

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab) *rose*—

**Victoria Atkins:** The hon. Gentleman at the back has been very patient, so I will give way.

**Imran Hussain:** I am very grateful to the Minister. Thus far in this whole debate I have not heard one credible reason why we should not abolish non-dom tax status. The Minister seemed to indicate earlier that she is waiting for the right fiscal event, and then she will abolish it. Is that right?

**Victoria Atkins:** Again, I have to be very careful, as any Treasury Minister at the Dispatch Box six weeks before a fiscal event—a Budget—would have to be. The hon. Member will understand that there may or may not be market sensitivities in relation to tax policies ahead of the Budget, so I am not able to give any indication at this moment. What I am trying to do is to set out the facts in relation to tax take, and of course there will be a debate across the House about the whys and wherefores of that.

It is important, for us to have a reasoned debate, that we understand that non-domiciled taxpayers pay UK income tax, capital gains tax and national insurance contributions on their UK income and gains. That is money, as all taxpayers' money is, that we can use to improve our schools, benefit patients in our hospitals and pour into infrastructure projects that will help level up across the country.

On top of that—again, the shadow Minister seems ready to dismiss this—non-doms have invested more than £6 billion in the UK into UK businesses, helping to grow the UK's economy. That is an extraordinary amount of money: it is just under half the policing budget for England and Wales. I know that, when writing a speech, these sums may not seem very significant, but the real-life impact these figures have is very significant.

As the shadow Minister also, sadly, does not seem to have understood, we have in fact gone further in making sure non-doms pay their fair share of tax. In 2017, the Government reformed the rules to end permanent non-dom status and ensure all non-doms have to pay inheritance tax on any residential property owned in the UK, even when they own that property through a complicated structure such as an offshore trust or an offshore company. When the challenge was put to the shadow Minister by my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Rob Butler) about why a Labour Minister had not managed to do that before, we did not have an answer. Those affected by these reforms are paying more than £3 billion per year in UK income tax, capital gains tax and national insurance contributions on top of the earlier figures.

I would like to correct another mistake made, I am sure inadvertently, by the shadow Minister. We did in fact deal with non-domiciled taxpayers in the autumn statement, because the Chancellor closed a loophole to ensure that non-doms who have grown companies in the UK pay capital gains tax to the UK, bringing in an additional £830 million in revenue to support frontline public services. This announcement makes the tax system fairer and ensures that tax cannot be avoided by an

individual exchanging shares in a UK close company for shares in an equivalent non-UK company as a way to re-categorise UK income or gains as foreign income or gains. That means that UK resident non-doms pay tax on gains and distributions received where value has been built up in the UK. The remittance basis is intended to provide an alternative tax treatment for foreign income and gains. It does not extend to income and gains that result from UK assets, and the Government are not willing to accept contrived arrangements that allowed clever tax planning to sidestep the tax charge that would otherwise have been due. As I mentioned a few moments ago, any analysis will be considered as part of the usual Budget process. We keep all taxes under review, as usual, and we do not comment on speculation around changes to tax policy outside fiscal events. That long-standing tradition has historically been respected by parties of all colours.

The Government will be voting against the Opposition motion, because it breaches established precedents and would prejudice the development of tax policies. I note that we have a Budget in just six weeks. I also note that we need to maintain an internationally competitive tax system that brings in talent and investment, which contributes to the growth of the economy. It is vital that we deal not just with the current economic problems we face, but also with the long-standing difficult ones that have beset us for decades. As the Chancellor outlined in his growth speech last week, we need to support enterprise so that more businesses want to locate here. Among other things, that means taking steps to reduce the tax burden overall. We are a party that believes in low taxation, and as soon as the fiscal situation allows, we want to reduce it. The Conservative vision for our economy is to unlock our national potential, and to be Europe's most exciting, innovative and prosperous economy. We are making taxes fairer, simpler, and supportive of growth, to achieve the bright future for our country that I am sure we all want.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. A fair number of colleagues want to contribute to this debate. It finishes at 7 o'clock and we will have winding-up speeches. I impose an immediate four-minute time limit for Back Benchers, but that may have to go down. I am sure the SNP spokesperson will bear that in mind.

5.32 pm

**Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP): I will happily bear that in mind, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister said that she wanted talent and investment to come to the UK. I think that sorting out the inordinate visa costs and upfront health costs to allow talented people to come here would be rather more effective than allowing a tiny number of very wealthy people to shelter earnings offshore. She also prayed in aid the Budget to justify the arguments she was making, but at the time of the Budget, the Office for Budget Responsibility assessed that by 2027-28 the Government would barely meet its own new public sector net debt target—I think it was by 0.3% of GDP, or £9.2 billion, which is hardly a ringing endorsement.

The issue of those who are non-domiciled, or non-doms, is of long standing. It turns out that the system has been with us since the 18th century—1799—and was designed

[Stewart Hosie]

to allow people with foreign property to shelter that property, and the income from it, from wartime taxes. Instead of being unwound over the years, the system spiralled to the point that by about 2007-08, 140,000 people were using it. Even in 2021, close to 70,000 people in the UK still had non-dom status. Of course being a non-dom isn't for everybody. It would be great to have the Prime Minister explain, on behalf of all the other near billionaires, the burdens that must be borne when sheltering so much income overseas and away from the prying eyes of the taxman.

So who is the system for? The enlightening report from Warwick University in April 2022 told us that 30% of all people earning more than £5 million a year claimed non-dom status, compared with 0.3% of the population earning less than £100,000. Most non-doms live in and around London. Indeed, more than one in 10 adults in Kensington and the Cities of London and Westminster are or were non-doms. That presumably explains why, in 2015, when changes were proposed, the then Mayor of London—now the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and discredited former Prime Minister—described them as being part of an “anti-London agenda”. I would describe them as part of a tax fairness agenda, but, for Tories, paying tax without a fight is not really to be countenanced. I do wonder if there is not a recently retired Tory chairman who might like to give a TED talk to explain how easy it is to be careless when one owes the taxman some money.

I suppose the questions that we should be grappling with are: how much would abolition generate, and how much is currently being lost in tax yield by the Treasury? Those questions have also been around for some time. In an assessment made by Richard Murphy in 2007, it was about £4 billion. In an assessment made in 2015, it was also about £4 billion. It is true that they said that behavioural changes such as becoming non-resident could cut that yield to about £1 billion. Last year, the London School of Economics suggested that the figure could be about £3 billion. Those variances alone justify supporting the motion to ask for the data to be published.

Before I move on, it is worth noting that the politics surrounding this issue have also never been far from the surface. In the run-up to the 2015 election, the then Chancellor, George Osborne, claimed Labour's plans were merely “tinkering round the edges”. At the same time, it was suggested that Labour's modest plans were designed to win back SNP voters. Given that the SNP-Labour result in 2015 was 56-1, that was not a very successful plan. However, that spat did illuminate the then Labour leader, the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), suggesting that the reforms could still raise

“hundreds of millions pounds”.

While dismissing fears of an exodus of wealth—that seemed to be confirmed by the last LSE report—he suggested that it was morally right to stop the UK operating as a “tax haven”. On that, he was absolutely right. What is odd, though, is that after the election, that same George Osborne did abolish permanent non-dom status. As I think he said, it was preposterous that some families had seen that tax perk handed down through three generations. On that, he was absolutely right.

Let me bring the story up to date. On 18 November last year, the current Chancellor said that axing non-dom status would be the “wrong thing to do”. Again siding with the London based mega-wealthy, he defended resisting the moves to force the super-rich in the UK who pay no tax on their offshore income to shoulder more of the burden. Bizarrely, he actually said that “non-doms are good for the economy”.

However, by 23 November—less than a week later—it was reported that the door was open and the Chancellor had looked again at the possible abolition of non-dom status.

It is pretty clear that the Government's policy on non-doms is at best confused. If one were a cynic, given how many very wealthy people have benefited from such an arrangement, one might suggest that it is deliberately opaque. That is another reason to publish the data requested in the motion. If, however, I was being generous, I would concede that the number of non-doms is falling and that the anticipated yield from abolition is genuinely unclear: it is anywhere from £3 billion to £4 billion down to £1 billion, or possibly even the hundreds of millions suggested by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North. We also know that there would have to be exemptions. No one would expect to see foreign students taxed on their overseas earnings while they studied here for a small number of years.

But that is not really the issue, is it? It is about tax fairness. Why should ordinary taxpayers in the UK, even very wealthy ones, who pay their tax through pay-as-you-earn or after an annual return, or who are taxed on their dividends or their pensions, and, with I am sure a few exceptions, pay their dues on time and in full, while the super-rich, the euphemistically titled “economically mobile”, are allowed to dodge tax on the basis of a claimed association with another tax regime when they could have lived permanently in the UK for 15 out of the last 20 years?

Whether the yield is hundreds of millions of pounds, £1 billion, £3 billion, £3.2 billion, £4 billion or more, finally abolishing non-dom status is simply the right thing to do, particularly for those people who for all intents and purposes permanently reside here.

5.40 pm

**Michael Ellis** (Northampton North) (Con): I rise to speak about the specific issue of the constitutionality and propriety of Labour's motion in calling for,

“a copy of the Treasury analysis related to the effect of the abolition of the non-domicile tax status on the public revenue.”

The point I wish to make could equally be made were any other papers of Treasury analysis the subject of a request for disclosure in this way. It is irregular and at the very least injurious to the public interest, and potentially unconstitutional, to open, for what would be the inspection of the financial services sector and others, papers just before a financial statement or a Budget that may very well, at least in theory, give an improper or unfair advantage to some interested parties. That is why the confidentiality of Treasury documents is so incredibly important, a fact to which the Minister alluded. For that reason alone, the motion should not be supported. It is constitutionally irregular, in my respectful submission.

The Labour party's opposition to non-domicile tax status is another matter. I, Conservative Members and many others all think it would be wrong to remove that



status, which has existed for two-and-a-quarter centuries. Further, the ability to know Treasury analysis before a financial statement would give the very people whom Labour presumably wishes to incommode some advantage. With the greatest respect, therefore, I do not think the Labour motion has been clearly thought through; were it to succeed, which is exceedingly unlikely, it would be counterproductive.

It is not just me who thinks it wrong to abolish the current arrangements. There is a very good reason why they have been in place for two-and-a-quarter centuries. I do not expect Labour Members to pay heed to what I say, but they might, I venture to suggest, pay heed to what their own party has said in the past. Labour, after all, abandoned removing this status when last in government. Alistair Darling said he did not want to turn investors away. It has been said that Labour is an anti-business party. Colleagues have referred to it as being anti-aspirational. Labour Members reject that, but I am afraid the motion calls another conclusion.

Something is better than nothing: make business go elsewhere and the whole UK economy will suffer. The Conservative Government have ensured that non-domiciled individuals pay tax on UK income, and gains and income gains that are brought into the UK, putting fairness at the heart of our system. That is what this Government have already done. They have protected almost £8 billion in tax revenue paid by non-domiciled taxpayers and have introduced over 150 measures since 2010 to tackle non-compliance, and rightly so, in our tax system. They have been closing the estimated avoidance tax gap by almost £4 billion. The rhetoric is one thing; the facts are another. There are good reasons why this motion should therefore be roundly rejected.

5.44 pm

**Naz Shah** (Bradford West) (Lab): Since 2010, Conservative Governments have demanded that working people pay yet more tax, but Conservative MPs and their friends are keen on avoiding paying tax themselves. Working people are picking up the tab again while the rich and powerful benefit from non-dom status and loopholes. Indeed, the Prime Minister himself was Chancellor of the Exchequer for two years before his wife gave up her non-dom status. He himself held a US green card.

This is not carelessness. The Conservative party has deliberately failed to clean up the sleaze and get rid of the loopholes to generate income to strengthen our economy. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated that abolishing non-dom status alone would generate £3 billion a year for the economy. That is how much the current Chancellor has pledged for the NHS over the next two years, so if he is trying to find the money, now he knows how.

While the Tories keep telling us that we are all in this together, the UK is not even in this together with other G7 countries. According to the International Monetary Fund, we are the only country in the G7 that is moving into a recession—we are all alone. Over the past few years, while those with non-dom status have seen tax breaks and benefits, hard-working people in Bradford West and around the country have been let down by austerity and economic failure and are experiencing a big tax burden.

In the last financial year, Government spending per head was significantly lower in the Yorkshire and Humber region than in any other area of the UK. So was Government spending on transport and infrastructure, despite the Government's commitment to level up the north of England. As for Government spending on education, Bradford West has seen a reduction of 10.2% in real-terms spending since 2015, whereas the national average is 3.9%. The Tories' failure to properly invest in Bradford district and Bradford West has created devastating outcomes for the area, where child poverty is at 51.2%, the highest rate in the north of England. In Bradford West, 22.3% of households are in fuel poverty, compared with 13.2% in the country as a whole.

It is clear that abolishing this unjust, unfair tax perk would create a fairer and stronger economy that works for everyone, not just the richest in society. Conservative Members argue that abolishing non-dom status would be bad for business, would not be competitive and—as the right hon. and learned Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis) suggested—would deter business and investment in the UK, but that is simply not true.

I can see why the Tories have an issue with abolishing non-dom status. After all, the chairman of the party resigned for failing to declare his taxes, the party treasurer took part in a tax avoidance scheme, and the party has a CEO whose firm is allegedly involved in a tax avoidance scheme. But while abolishing non-dom status might be bad for the Conservatives, let us not pretend that it is bad for business. Other countries that attract business, investment and entrepreneurship, such as the USA, Canada and Germany, require people to pay tax after six months or even immediately.

Despite the UK's non-dom status, it is the only country in the G7 that faces negative growth, as predicted by the IMF. Not Germany, not Canada, not the United States—the UK. Honestly, the Conservatives have had 13 years, five Prime Ministers and seven Chancellors and the only thing they have been consistent on is low growth. They talk as if they know what is best for business and the economy, but the only thing they have succeeded in doing is crashing the economy into the ground. If the Government were truly serious about strengthening and growing the economy, if they were serious about levelling up the north, if they were serious about lifting people out of poverty, if they were serious about accountability and ethics or if they were even remotely serious about the NHS and other vital infrastructure, they would have gone further than sacking individual Ministers. They would have abolished non-dom status and closed the loopholes. We need a change to the system, not just the faces.

5.48 pm

**Anthony Browne** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah).

I want to start by congratulating the Government on what today's IMF report says about economic growth last year. Despite what some Opposition Members have said, the fact is that we had the fastest-growing economy in the G7 last year, with a growth rate of 4.1%. Our economy grew twice as fast as America and Germany, 1.5 times as fast as France and almost three times as fast as Japan. Those are the facts.

[Anthony Browne]

I turn to the Opposition motion. I will address first the policy, then the motion itself, and finally the politics. On policy, I think there is some agreement between our position, Labour's and the SNP's. We want a tax system that is fair—clearly people who are better off need to pay their fair share of tax—but that is also attractive to internationally mobile people, whether they are overseas students or international businesspeople. Thirty-five jurisdictions around the world have regimes involving temporary residence tax schemes similar to the non-dom scheme. They might go by different names, but they have the same basis. If people are in a country for a certain length of time but it is not their permanent destination, they should be subject to a regime whereby they pay tax on their local income but not on their international income, and, in fact, I think that that is Labour's policy.

As for the non-dom scheme in the UK, this Government reduced the period to 15 years—it was previously a permanent scheme—and I think that that was the right thing to do, although questions are being asked about whether it should be reduced further, to 10 years or five. There are also problems that have been rightly ridiculed in the media. For example, people have previously been able to inherit non-dom status. There is also no clear legal definition of “domicile”, although it ought to be crystal clear. I would certainly welcome reforms to the regime. Labour says that it would abolish non-dom status, but I suspect that it would just introduce a new regime that would do remarkably similar things to ensure that internationally mobile people who bring benefits to the economy can come here.

As for the economic impact of scrapping non-dom status, I asked the hon. Member for Ealing North (James Murray) why he thought the previous Labour Prime Ministers, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, had not done it, and gave him the answer: they had carried out a review and concluded that, overall, the benefits of non-dom status were greater than the cost and so it brought a net benefit to the economy. There is a spectrum of data, and we do need the data, but if the regime were scrapped and everyone who abided by it suddenly fled in a mass wealth exodus, there would clearly be a huge net loss to the Treasury, whereas if it were scrapped and not replaced with anything, and all those people stayed here and suddenly started paying tax on their overseas earnings, the £3.2 billion a year that we have heard about would clearly bring a net benefit. What really matters is what the response would be among existing non-dom people but also among future ones who might not come to the UK as a result. It is necessary to have the precise data to create the optimum scheme, so that we not only raise revenue for the UK Government to pay for public services but ensure that people pay their fair share.

We clearly should not publish Treasury advice, as the motion suggests, for all the reasons given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis).

Finally, let me comment on the politics: why does Labour keep focusing on this one issue rather than many others that are actually more important? It is all about politics. Labour is the party of envy, and we are the party of aspiration. We are the party of workers. We have reduced tax on working people, we have increased

funding for the NHS to historically record levels, and all that Labour Members are trying to do is play politics with us.

5.52 pm

**Ms Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): I do not think I have followed the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) before, but here we are.

Our tax system is broken. It is unfair and unjust. Non-dom status gives the wealthiest a way of avoiding tax, no doubt while the people who work for them pay out a disproportionate amount of their income in tax. Three in 10 people earning £5 million or more claim non-dom status, whereas the figure is fewer than three in 1,000 among those earning less than £100,000. This is a tax scheme that is taken advantage of by the wealthiest. If Britain is your home and you are making your life here, you should pay your taxes here—it really is that simple. Non-doms get the benefits from all of our taxes, but they are not paying their fair share. It is troubling that there are Members of this and the other place who use non-dom status. If they are voting on issues that have an impact on this country, they should be paying tax here.

Non-dom status was introduced more than 200 years ago. It lets people dodge millions in tax. It is not fit for the modern era. It is not progressive or fair. Working people are having to pick up the tab while non-doms enjoy tax-free earnings. Labour will introduce a modern scheme that will be fair to people who are genuinely in the UK for short periods, to allow us to continue to attract top international talent.

Our system will be fit for purpose in the 21st century. As colleagues have mentioned, the money generated will make a huge difference to our country. Our NHS is struggling. Not enough home-grown doctors and nurses are being trained, but we will do that. There are not enough places for them to study. One of the most common arguments against abolishing non-dom status is that it would cause a mass exodus of international talent, yet research by the London School of Economics shows that only 0.3% of the people affected would leave. That is a tiny fraction of the non-doms. The reality is that they enjoy living here in Britain. Britain is their home. They use the non-dom legal loophole as it is readily available. The study shows that non-doms are more than happy to keep Britain as their home.

Over the course of the pandemic, the wealthiest have got even richer and our country has become even more unequal. Labour, in power, will have the guts to abolish non-dom status and tackle offshore trusts and tax havens. We will introduce a modern tax system that is fit for purpose and fair for all, bringing our rules into line with those of other major economies such as France, Germany and Canada.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, I just want to remind hon. Members that the debate is about the release of papers and that criticism of the conduct of Members would need to be made on a substantive motion. I want colleagues to consider the spirit of the rules in their contributions,

which I am sure they will do. They have done pretty well so far, but some have been slightly on the edge. Let us return to the motion itself.

5.56 pm

**Aaron Bell** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer). On the wording of the motion, I cannot really add much more to the comments from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis). The Opposition know perfectly well that analysis from officials is confidential for a very good reason: to make sure that Ministers have the best possible advice without second-guessing what that might look like in the public domain and potentially affecting markets.

Turning to the substance of the non-dom situation, I really think this is a case where Labour is chasing a mirage. The Government could do with raising more tax if that low-hanging fruit, that £3.2 billion, was really out there, because of the present fiscal situation as a result of the money we have spent protecting people's livelihoods during covid, through the furlough scheme, and on supporting people with high energy bills this winter. We could do with raising more tax easily, if it was really there.

The hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston spoke about the LSE and Warwick research, but I do not find that figure of 0.3% very credible because it refers to fewer than 100 people who would consider leaving because of all that additional tax on them. That figure has been extrapolated from the behavioural response to the previous changes, but those changes were more modest. They were modest because the Government took their decision for the same good reason that the previous Labour Government did: looking at the issue in the round, they concluded that this would not be a revenue raiser and it would not be good for the economy overall if we drove people abroad.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ealing North (James Murray), said that when people make their home here they should pay all their tax here, but those non-dom people would not make their home here—they would not come and invest in this country or employ people in this country—if they had to pay tax in that way. That is the key point. We cannot assume that all that low-hanging fruit is out there without assuming the behavioural responses that would follow.

Talking about non-compliance more generally, as the shadow Minister did in his speech, this Government have tackled non-compliance consistently since they came to power, with more than 150 measures since 2010. The estimated avoidance gap under Labour in 2005-06 was £4.8 billion. It was down to £1.2 billion in 2020-21 under this Government. That is already more than the £3.2 billion the Opposition are claiming is available.

The wealthiest have been paying more under this Government and we have been taking the poorest out of tax altogether, contrary to what we have heard from the Opposition. The personal allowance that we inherited in 2010 was £6,475; it is now £12,570, and we have raised the national insurance level as well. We have taken many people out of tax altogether and at the same time ensured that the poorest—the least well-off—are earning more when they are working because we have consistently raised the national living wage. Those are Conservative

principles in action: real changes rewarding work and letting people keep more of their own money to spend as they see fit.

Labour obviously aspires to government, about which there have been increasingly cocky briefings in the press, but government is not about easy slogans. It is about taking decisions in the best long-term interest of the UK. It is not about soundbites, party management and trying to buy off the people in Momentum. I might have thought Labour would learn from the last Labour Government. People like Gordon Brown, who considered a five-year cap but abandoned it. People like Alistair Darling, who said that

“such a charge could discourage men and women—doctors and nurses, business men and women—from coming to this country...and we do not want to turn them away.”—[*Official Report*, 9 October 2007; Vol. 464, c. 171.]

People like Ed Balls, who said:

“I think if you abolish the whole status then probably it ends up costing Britain money because there will be some people who will then leave the country.”

I am sure the shadow Minister admires all those former Labour Ministers, and I am sure he and the shadow Chancellor aspire to the jobs they once held, so why are they going down this road? Because it is an easy, if inaccurate, response to the question they cannot answer: how will they pay for whatever fresh commitment they have made in any given week?

**Anthony Browne:** My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that Labour is playing the classic Labour game of class war as a mirage to try to gather votes from the left?

**Aaron Bell:** The right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) has a difficult balancing act, because he has to hold his party together. He made a lot of promises to the left to win the leadership, and he has junked them all, so he is giving them a little red meat on non-dom status to try to keep them on board. I am sure there is a lot of party management happening on the Labour Benches.

Labour has already committed the supposed revenue from this policy to multiple policies. First, it was breakfast clubs, and then it was midwives, nurses and health visitors. The shadow Health Secretary had to admit that, even on Labour's questionable estimates, the funds supposedly raised would not be enough to cover its NHS reforms. Time and again, Labour Front Benchers and Back Benchers alike hide behind this dubious policy, which I fear is a mirage in terms of the money it would raise, to justify yet more uncoded pledges. Labour has made so many uncoded commitments already: £150 billion of spending and less than £60 billion of revenue rises. We have heard £90 billion of uncoded commitments from Labour in this Parliament, which would cost each household more than £3,000.

That is what we get under a Labour Government, which is why we need to stick with a Conservative Government. Labour has never left office with unemployment lower than when it came to power and, of course, it cannot be trusted with the public finances, as we know from the note left by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne): “there is no money.”

We will get the debt down, we will halve inflation and we will get growth going again. Voting for Labour would put all that at risk.



6.1 pm

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): That was very interesting from the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell)—particularly his revelation that Labour aspires to be in government.

It is pretty much universally accepted that people who work in the UK, make their life here and benefit from all we have to offer should pay their taxes here. I cannot see why that is a controversial point. Non-dom tax status completely undermines that by creating a tax system that is rigged against working people. It cannot be one rule for the wealthy and another rule for everyone else. This is not about envy or wishing that we were incredibly rich, or anything like that; it is about basic fairness.

Those benefiting from non-dom tax breaks are estimated to have almost £11 billion a year in unreported income and capital gains overseas. As has been mentioned, a study by LSE and the University of Warwick estimates that this means the UK has lost more than £3 billion in tax revenue. Labour believes this money would be better spent on the NHS than on lining the already bulging pockets of the extremely rich.

This debate is about transparency, fairness and prioritising areas of society that need support. It really is as simple as that. If there were a direct choice between more non-doms and more nurses, between a tax break for the wealthy and a school child's breakfast, what would the Government choose?

We have to ask ourselves whether we want to live in a country in which it is easier to avoid paying taxes than to see a GP. There are 4,500 fewer GPs in England than there were a decade ago, with more than 1.3 million people having to wait more than a month to see theirs. We have heard Conservative Members floating the idea that people might have to pay to see their GP. My father in Ireland had to pay to see his GP, and perhaps he would still be with us now if he had not put off going to investigate the symptoms of bowel cancer. We certainly do not want to go down that route.

The money raised by abolishing non-dom tax status could double the number of medical school places, double the number of district nurses and provide 10,000 more nursing and midwifery clinical training places. In my constituency, we have a wonderful University of the West of England campus that is training midwives and nurses. We also had a birth unit at Cossham Hospital, which had to close because there simply were not the midwives to staff it. Southmead Hospital had to be given priority, where the more critical cases go. We absolutely need to invest in more doctors and more nurses, shorter waiting times and better care.

We could also use the profits from closing this loophole to provide breakfast clubs for primary school children. We know that far too many children are spending the day at school too hungry to learn; according to Magic Breakfast, as many as 3 million children could be in that situation. Some £3 billion in lost revenue from abolishing the non-doms loophole would go a long way to filling that gap.

No one would propose this non-dom policy now if it did not already exist. As has been mentioned, this move would simply bring us into line with major economies, including France, Germany and Canada. What the proponents of the non-dom regime, and some MPs

speaking here today, have failed to understand is that to the British public, who regularly poll in support of abolishing the exemption, it is about what is fair and right. A common refrain throughout the pandemic was, "We're all in this together. We are all contributing to a common cause." The fact is that we are not and we should be.

6.5 pm

**Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy). Just to confirm, I will not be voting for the motion. It clearly is nonsense that we could require the Chancellor to publish all the things he has been considering in the lead-up to the Budget in March. However, I look forward to the Government sticking by that principle and to our not reading the Budget in the Sunday paper the week beforehand—I fear I may be a little disappointed. However, I gently say to the Minister that, if he or the Chancellor appear at a Select Committee after the Budget and come up with a number as a reason why they did or did not make a policy change, it is not unreasonable to put in the public record how they came to that number. Had the shadow Minister just stuck to his first calculation in the motion, he may have had a little more support for it. But I cannot vote for the whole motion.

I actually support ending the current non-dom status. I think it is outdated and I do not think people can make a coherent case for the rules as they stand. The idea that where my father was born should define my tax treatment is clearly nonsensical and we need to find a more modern way. We need to stand back and have a proper look at how we handle the complex area of residents and non-residents across our tax regime, and probably across our benefits and access to public services regime. When we look at this, we have to navigate all manner of different terms: not just "residents", but "ordinary residents", "domicile", "deemed domicile", "habitual residents" and "settled status". All these things are trying to do the same thing: work out when someone is legally resident in the UK sufficient to trigger certain tax obligations or entitlements.

Having left the EU, where we had to tweak our rules to try to get around staying compliant with freedom of movement, freedom of establishment and all those things, it would make sense to step back and have a full review of what we are trying to do in this policy area, what we are trying to tax and what we are not trying to tax, so we could have coherent policies and a new law that people could understand—both those here and those coming here.

Having worked as a tax adviser, I can say that, when one has clients bringing people over to the UK to work, they have to incur quite a lot of cost trying to work out what their tax position is, what they have to comply with, what they do not have to do and what they should do before they come and what they should not. If we can make a clearer, simpler regime, that would be far more beneficial all the way around, especially as the world has moved on and the economy has moved on. These rules were written decades, or hundreds of years ago. They do not really work for a modern, mobile, dynamic economy where people can move money at the click of a finger through the internet. What is a UK-based asset and what is not? If I have just moved it into a crypto account held in Brazil, is that really a UK asset?

What is my income on that? Is it in the UK that I have the tax or is it not? We need to have a thorough review of how all these rules work, so that we can have a coherent system and not just play around the edges with individual bits, because we will end up in a slightly different mess and having slightly different loopholes from those that we had.

As part of that—I think when we, including the shadow Minister, are talking about abolishing non-dom status, we mean recreating something similar but for a shorter time and with slight restrictions in place—we absolutely need to have temporary resident's relief, whereby, if you come here for a short time, you pay tax on what you earn here and on the assets you have here, but you do not pay tax on whatever you have earned already abroad and you never bring here and never will. I think that would be too strong a deterrent for people to come here.

I think we could find consensus on what a coherent policy looks like, but the Government should go away and try to rethink all these rules and make sure that they work for a modern, dynamic, global and mobile economy. Otherwise, one day we will find out that we have something that you can drive a coach and horses through and it is not at all fit for the way we work these days.

6.10 pm

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am the MP for West Dunbartonshire and I do not think many of my constituents are non-doms, but I do know that they are struggling, as so many across these islands are, with inflation, the cost of living and, of course, the economic catastrophe that is Brexit.

My constituents cannot actually take advantage of non-dom status to reduce their financial exposure to the taxman, but they are certainly the types of people that HMRC will come after if they miss a self-declaration or other arbitrarily imposed deadlines, which have done so much to convince people that the tax system is rigged in favour of the better off.

There are also implications in preserving non-dom status and we need to think more about what the status means for our social contract. Maintaining this dual system, whereby there are convenient opt-outs for so many who are of means, when the system seeks to be unnecessarily punitive to those who are not of means, causes the very foundations of our society to crumble. At least from my perspective we can see clearly that there is one rule for them and one rule for us.

Tax is one of those things that can quite quickly cut to the core of our political outlook. There are those of us who see tax as part of the fundamental glue that holds our society together. Many others deny society even exists. Each to their own and, to paraphrase Donald Trump, only stupid people pay taxes. I can say unequivocally that I and my party believe the opposite: if you are lucky enough to be able to pay tax, you should pay tax when you are able.

Another practical step would be to stop doling out honours to party donors. I must declare that I would abolish every honour, but let us accept that the Government and, I am afraid, even the loyal Opposition, agree with the honours system. We all know that they have been very fond of doling them out over the years. The reality is that the British establishment will not abolish them but, on that basis, let them give gongs to the folk who

pay the most tax every year. I believe there was even a story in the *London Times* the other day about such folk. That alludes to the idea that we should create positive incentives for paying tax, instead of simply making it about taking away loopholes for the wealthy.

Let us be transparent. Let us make all our tax records publicly and freely accessible, as they do in Norway. The £3.2 billion that the LSE survey found is a drop in the ocean in terms of public finances. But if the super-rich do not want to live in London, I am sure that Londoners would say, "Cheerio, ducks, don't let the door hit you on the way out." If their commitment to this political state is that thin, I am sure we all agree that they will not be missed. If tax were the prime consideration for many of them moving to these northern latitudes, they should have gone the whole hog and moved to the Isle of Man or Jersey. Indeed, it has even been noted in the press recently that some in the other place may have even sought sanctuary in Manx and Jersey for the very purpose of possibly not paying tax—or was that Honduras?

I am grateful to people such as Carol Vorderman for speaking out on this matter and bringing it into the public discourse. Carol, keep going. People who use the system to not pay tax in this way are thieves. They are not standing up against the big state; they are selfish, arrogant and inextricably linked to the establishment. They are this state.

6.12 pm

**Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): I rise to speak against the motion on the Order Paper. It is important that we recollect what that is. It says that Treasury analysis of a potential tax policy should be laid before the House two weeks before the Budget. Having listened very carefully to the previous four speakers from the Opposition Benches, I do not recall any of them actually addressing that point. That is surely because the Opposition know full well that no Government could publish pre-Budget advice, for the simple and straightforward reason that Budget announcements are market sensitive. No Government of any colour have ever published that sort of advice. Those on the Opposition Front Bench know that full well and they know that, if the situation were reversed, which, hopefully, it never will be, they would not publish it, either. It is important that the public understand exactly what has been put on the Order Paper by the Labour party, which has brought us here today.

This Conservative Government are absolutely committed to a fair tax system, ensuring that the UK attracts talented people to work and do business here and, at the same time, generating tax revenue that pays for our public services. That was brilliantly set out by my hon. Friend the Minister. It is, of course, vital that our tax regime is competitive and that talented entrepreneurs overseas see the UK as a country where their risk taking will be rewarded and where their commitment to developing their business will bring jobs to British people, strengthening our economy and generating in turn more tax that will pay for more public services. It is a virtuous circle.

Let me be clear that I am not in any way suggesting a blank cheque or a free ride for non-doms. I absolutely accept that non-dom status should not be permanent and I am pleased that we have already moved away from that. I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) that there is scope for further reform, but that should be considered calmly and rationally.

[Rob Butler]

Let us remember that non-domiciled individuals already pay tax on UK income and gains. They also pay tax on foreign income and gains if those moneys are brought into the UK. We have heard of some £8 billion in UK tax contributed in 2021 alone. I also made the point, when I intervened on the shadow Minister right at the beginning of the debate, that successive Labour Chancellors tried to reform the system and gave up, because they realised it was not the easy panacea that those on the current Labour Front Bench would have us believe. Even Ed Balls has said that abolishing non-dom status would probably end up costing Britain money, because some people would leave the country.

I make those points because it is important that, when we consider headline-grabbing ideas, we take the time to look behind the headlines and think carefully about all the implications of a policy proposal. I know that is exactly what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is doing as he prepares his Budget, listening to ideas and weighing up their implications.

**Anthony Browne:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful and important speech. Does he agree that the reason why the Labour party is focusing on this issue so much in this debate and during Prime Minister's questions is that, while we are the party of aspiration, Labour is the party of envy and is just trying to play class war?

**Rob Butler:** I have no alternative but to agree with my hon. Friend—otherwise, what on earth is the point of having this discussion? We believe in aspiring, striving and achieving and we then believe in paying our fair share of tax, which generates the public services that we value so highly.

As I was saying, the Chancellor is currently weighing up what are the best policies to stimulate growth. Of course that involves raising tax revenue, but we need to do so in a way that does not stifle the potential for economic growth in this country. There are plenty of people giving him advice on how to do that, including some of my constituents, and even me.

I believe that there are plenty of changes we could introduce. I would like us to look at the cap on private pensions; doing so would enable us to get more people in their 50s remaining in work or returning to the workforce. Some dub that current tax a doctor's tax, because it creates a strong disincentive for doctors to work extra shifts—doctors, the very healthcare workers the Opposition are so keen that we should support. I agree that we should support them, so let us make a tax regime that creates the opportunity and potential for them to want to work more.

There are other taxes that also impede free markets—stamp duty land tax could be considered one of those—but this is not the place to consider the detail of all that. Nor is this the place for the publication of Treasury analysis on the effect of the abolition of non-dom tax status on public revenue, because of the time, just before a Budget, when the Labour party is suggesting it should be done. Let us instead focus on the real, pressing needs of our economy for our constituents: driving opportunities for growth, building a skilled workforce, creating jobs and so generating revenues that will support our public services for many decades to come.

6.18 pm

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): In a modern society it is ridiculous that we still have so many loopholes for people paying tax. If people live and work here and benefit from our public services and our society, they should contribute fully in their taxes. As colleagues have said, the Tory Government have failed to close the non-dom tax loophole and are instead choosing to raise taxes on working people.

However, I do not want to focus my time on restating the arguments already presented. Instead, I will speak about how the revenue created by the abolition of non-dom tax status would be used to benefit our young people—headline-banging stuff. As colleagues may recall, in 2016 I set up the cross-party Youth Violence Commission, and we spent the next four years examining the root causes of youth violence in our search for solutions. We held a series of evidence sessions in Parliament and worked with academics and practitioners to produce our full report in 2020. The early years of a child's life can have significant long-lasting effects on their life course trajectory, affecting everything from physical and mental health to skills development.

Many of the witnesses emphasised to the commission the importance of the early years, and a point that came up time and again was the importance of early intervention. Witnesses spoke at length about the links between early childhood experiences and the likelihood of being involved in serious violence later in life. One of the report's recommendations was for further investment in programmes that help to prepare parents for parenthood and provide support in the early years of parenting.

It might seem a modest start, but Labour's pledge to deliver breakfast clubs in every primary school in England, alongside our promise to remove legal barriers to councils opening new childcare facilities, will be an important first step on the route to delivering a modern childcare system. Although our schools and other breakfast club providers try to keep their costs down, as the cost of living crisis continues to bite, too many families are struggling to afford childcare. That forces many to cut back on their hours or even to leave the labour market altogether. As well as enabling parents to work, breakfast clubs have been found to be good for children's social development and to encourage healthier choices. I am sure that we have all been told at one time or another that just having a good breakfast helps with concentration.

Our young people are our future, and we should be investing in them, so I ask the Government to end non-dom status and offshoring, and prioritise the future of our young people.

6.21 pm

**Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft), and I commend her for her speech.

It has been asked a few times this evening why there is all this focus on the non-domicile tax status and whether it should be abolished. This has become quite an emotive subject, partly because it has become a lightning rod for a whole range of other questions and concerns about the UK tax system and the need for reform. Those questions include, "Is it fit for purpose?", "Does it raise sufficient revenue to resource our public services adequately?", and "Does it distribute the burden fairly



across society?" We need only look at how the tax system interacts with wealth inequality to see that there is a strong case for broader tax reform.

Wealth inequality should concern all those of us who seek to bring about a fairer and more prosperous society. At present, the wealth held by the richest 1% of households is greater than that held by 80% of the population. Such inequality poses a severe and long-term threat not only to the health of the economy, but, as my friend the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) said, to the future vibrancy of the social contract—of civil society itself. I would very much like the Chancellor to set out measures to address this issue in the forthcoming Budget.

The key, in my opinion, will be how the taxation system can be reformed to ensure that the burden of taxation is distributed more fairly—we have heard a few ideas this evening—and with that endeavour in mind, I think a few obvious examples warrant further attention, such as the decision last year to lower the additional rate threshold for income tax. As a result of that change, someone earning £150,000 a year will pay almost 1% more of their income in tax, while someone earning £1.5 million will pay only about 0.1% more. We could go through the different income levels to make similar points. That raises the question of whether additional thresholds need to be introduced to the income tax system to make it far fairer and more progressive, which I believe the Scottish Government have done for taxpayers in Scotland.

Likewise, I think we need to consider whether it is acceptable for there to be such a discrepancy between the primary and upper rates of national insurance contributions. It is not appropriate for earnings of £50,000 to £170,000 to be levied with a 12% rate when earnings above that threshold incur a 2% rate. All those discrepancies, issues and inconsistencies feed into a widespread concern—one felt by many in Ceredigion—that the system is rigged and is not working fairly. That is something that we should be concerned about if we value a harmonious society and hope to build a prosperous one.

Before I bring my remarks to a close, I will touch upon an issue that needs further Government attention: the tax gap. In 2020-21, it was estimated that the tax gap was £32 billion, or 5.1% of all tax liabilities. Although that figure is contested, I am sure we can all agree that it is still a significant amount of lost revenue to the Exchequer. Given how large the gap is, one would hope that the teams responsible for pursuing this lost revenue within HMRC were appropriately resourced. However, recent analysis by TaxWatch UK considering the approaches taken to tackling tax fraud in comparison with those taken for benefit fraud, suggests that that is not the case. Despite tax fraud costing the Treasury nine times the amount lost to benefit fraud, the Department for Work and Pensions employs 3.5 times more staff in compliance than HMRC, when adjusted to the size of the tax and benefit gaps. I think that should be considered when it comes to the Budget.

6.25 pm

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): This place is a contradiction. Look at the speed at which this place operates when the Government are determined to bring about a change in the law—from the minds of Ministers to the statute book in just a few

weeks. Then I look around, and I see the archaic practices that this place still reveres. Yes, it can be argued that traditions have their place, but when we look under the surface and see some of these ancient laws that not only remain in place, but that some seek to defend, it becomes clear that the forces of conservatism are alive and well here.

Non-dom is a legislative hangover from the 18th century. Far from being an ancient and noble right, it is nothing more than a tax avoidance device. A week is a long time for some; it appears that 220 years is not long enough when it comes to helping your wealthy friends or even your spouse escape from paying their fair share of tax. In many ways, the intransigence we see in the face of mounting opposition to this outdated law shows the Government's poor approach to the UK tax system. They have failed and continue to fail to act upon and prevent basic abuses of the tax system.

I have no doubt that some on the Government Benches believe that people who avail themselves of such loopholes as non-dom are being clever or aspirational, as we have heard several times today. I suppose they might say, "Why pay more tax if you can use these loopholes to your advantage?" That misses the point. Taxes ought not to be viewed as something to avoid; they should be viewed as part of everyone's contract with society—a contract that says, "Pay your dues, and in return we will provide security, education, healthcare and transport." In short, it is the bargain necessary in every civilised society, and it is crucial to securing a fair country that works for all, providing the services on which we rely and security and prosperity for all.

There should not be a two-tiered approach to taxation, where the super-wealthy can shield their riches with expensive accountants and the rest of us have to pay more as a result. Put simply, such loopholes should not exist, because they benefit a tiny proportion of some of the world's wealthiest individuals at the expense of everyone else in this country, and frankly they are laughing at us. Look at how the bulk of these people live in the wealthiest parts of London, making a mockery of the levelling-up agenda.

It is also worth saying that some of the people who choose to live in this country then decide not to live by the same rules as everyone else, because they believe they will be wealthy if they do not pay their full taxes in the UK. Perhaps the most striking thing about this group is not just that they are incredibly wealthy, but how numerous they are as a proportion of the country's highest earners. Research published last year from the University of Warwick and the London School of Economics found that 30% of those earning in excess of £5 million were registered as non-doms in 2018, and a further 10% have been non-doms at some point in the past. That means that just under half of those earning more than £5 million a year have chosen not to pay their fair share of tax to the UK coffers. What kind of country are we living in when those with the broadest shoulders get to opt out of paying their fair share? That shows that non-dom is a loophole for the rich.

We still have people defending this archaic status in the House. They argue that removing it would damage the economy, as those registered would leave, taking their riches and spending power elsewhere. I even remember the Chancellor arguing just a few months ago that if we scrapped non-dom status, those people would leave the

[Justin Madders]

country and spend less money in restaurants. As an economic strategy goes, it is little wonder we are the only country in the G7 with negative growth, when our great hope for prosperity is a few rich people spending more money in restaurants. We believe that everyone should pay their fair share in tax and that people stashing away money in offshore accounts is not acceptable, and we do not think that the wealthiest in society should be able to get away with this any longer.

6.29 pm

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), who always expresses himself so eloquently. In my constituency, fewer than 100 people are non-domiciled for tax; in the constituency of my neighbour the shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), there are fewer than 100 people who are non-domiciled for tax, as there are in Leeds East, too. In fact, in the whole city of Leeds of 800,000 people, relatively few are non-domiciled for tax.

In the constituency we are standing in, 14,600 people—more than 20%—are non-domiciled for tax, according to the House of Commons Library. If any Member wants to intervene and tell me I am wrong, they should feel free. What we do not know is how much the public revenue is losing from those people. My constituents and the people of Leeds would love to know how much tax is being lost just in the Cities of London and Westminster from people utilising the non-dom tax loophole. I would like to know whether it is more than the whole amount that all 70,000 of my constituents pay in tax. That is what this motion is about.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (James Murray) is a modest man. He does not want too much, just to know how much we are losing from the public treasury. He has not moved a motion to ask for the abolition of non-dom status. He may have ambitions in that area, but that is not what we are talking about. He merely wants clarity and transparency, as does everyone on the Opposition Benches. But some people want opaqueness—I sure they are sitting on the Government Benches—as we have heard time and again.

Let us look at what happens with tax in other countries. The Conservative party often lauds the United States of America's tax system and its attitude to entrepreneurship. Would this loophole happen in the United States of America? Would it happen in Canada, Germany or other jurisdictions? No, it would not. They require people to pay tax after a qualifying period. In the United States of America, that qualifying period is just one day.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Recent research from the Tax Justice Network has shown that the UK leads OECD countries in tax abuse.

**Alex Sobel:** That is a very good point. When Ukraine was first invaded we saw how much Russian money was in this country. In fact, I do not think we have yet resolved that issue fully through Magnitsky and other means.

I will try to keep to the time limit, as more Members would like to speak, so I will finish by saying that I go to schools a lot around the city of Leeds. Many families

cannot afford to give their children breakfast. The ending of this loophole would mean that we could give every child in every primary school in this country a free school breakfast. The Prime Minister has aspirations to raise standards, but there is nothing more that he—or we—could do for those children than to give them that free breakfast, paid for by people avoiding tax on their earnings here.

6.33 pm

**Simon Lightwood** (Wakefield) (Lab/Co-op): If you work here and you make your life here, you should pay your tax here. It is a simple proposition that I know people across the political divide in Wakefield agree with. We are in a cost of living crisis. I know how hard it is for people at the moment who are struggling to make ends meet. Mortgages are rising, rent and bills are going up, and the price of their weekly shop is higher than ever. Yet what angers me most is that a few at the top get away with not paying their fair share.

Our estimates show that there are more than 50,000 non-doms in just six London constituencies. There have been fewer than 100 in Wakefield, but the hard-working people in my constituency who play by the rules have had their taxes increased by this Conservative Government. Our council has been stripped of yet more funding, having seen £300 million cut since 2010. That is not fair. The continued failure to crack down on this loophole makes a complete mockery of this Government's so-called commitment to levelling up.

I know what people's real priorities are: an NHS that can see them on time, where they do not have to queue for hours in A&E or for months on waiting lists for treatment, and a modern childcare system that helps families struggling to get the provision for their children around the hours that they want to work. Labour would use those billions in lost tax revenue to invest in our NHS, training the next generation of doctors, nurses and midwives, and we would prioritise children over non-doms, with breakfast clubs for every primary school child in England.

Some Government Members have spoken in the past about how this could lead to some of the richest people taking their wealth out of the UK, but according to research from Warwick University and the LSE, when the non-dom regime has been reformed, it has only had a minimum impact. In 2017, reforms that restricted access to the non-dom regime for long stayers led to just 0.2% leaving the UK, and of those who had been in the UK for less than three years, only 2% left.

The current tax system is bad for business. It acts as a barrier to investing foreign income in the UK, meaning that we see neither the tax benefits nor the investment from this income. Over the past 13 years, we have been told time and again by the Conservatives that we are all in this together, but with a tax status that is unfair to ordinary taxpayers, keeps investment outside the UK and harms our economy, how can we be? For many like me, this is a simple case of fairness and of right and wrong. It is time for change, and I support the motion wholeheartedly.

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

6.36 pm

**Abena Oppong-Asare** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): As we have heard from Opposition Members today, this Conservative Government have repeatedly failed to deal with the non-dom tax loophole, and what is the result? It is higher taxes on working people; tax breaks for the super-rich, when we could be training new NHS workers and delivering breakfast clubs for primary-age children; and a Government mired in sleaze and scandal, with a former Conservative Chancellor who found adhering to the ministerial code just too taxing. Just this morning, the International Monetary Fund predicted that the UK will be the only major economy to see negative growth. The choice is clear: slow growth, stale ideas and sleaze with this Government or ambition, aspiration and a clear plan with Labour.

I thank Members for their contributions to the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) spoke passionately about how working people are picking up the tab for the Government's failure to invest in her constituency. My hon. Friends the Members for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) got to the heart of this debate about the current system. This is about fairness—if people live here and work here, they should pay their taxes here. That was echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), who said that this loophole should not exist.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) asked a simple question, and I would be grateful if the Minister could answer it: how much tax has been lost by the loophole? Do the Government even know? My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) talked about how abolishing the non-dom status could help the Government to prioritise support for young people.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (James Murray) clearly laid out, this Conservative Government are out of ideas and missing in action. Food and fuel costs are soaring, while our economy is left completely exposed. I am sure the Minister will repeat that rising prices are not unique to Britain and many countries are experiencing inflationary pressures, but what is unique to Britain is that we are at the bottom of the pack. What is unique to Britain is that the Government refuse to take action. Through decisions such as the one they will take today when they vote on Labour's motion, the Government are entrenching the pressures that the economy faces and pushing costs on to working people as their own Ministers seek to avoid them.

No one will be reassured by the Government's arguments that all countries are experiencing soaring inflation. The Prime Minister has repeatedly said that the UK will grow the fastest of all G7 countries, but today's IMF stats set the UK far behind its competitors. Contrary to the assurances of the Prime Minister and Chancellor, we are the only G7 country that is forecast not to see its economy grow. The Chancellor could not be bothered to come to the House to respond to those stats today, but it is good to see the Financial Secretary to the Treasury in the Chamber.

The Conservatives have had 13 years in government, but they have failed. Throughout the chaos of the last year, with constantly changing Prime Ministers and

Chancellors, the British public could be sure about only one thing—that their taxes would continue to rise while the pound in their pocket got weaker. While people's pockets have been emptied, a few at the top are wriggling out of paying their fair share. The non-dom tax status allows the wealthy few to avoid following the normal rules and requirements met by people and businesses up and down this country who work hard and pay their taxes. Instead, those around the most powerful in Britain benefit from our country's generosity while getting away with not contributing their fair share.

The non-dom tax status is an out-of-date, 200-year-old system that allows people to dodge millions in tax. The Government may pretend that the system is necessary to provide a trickle-down effect to the rest of the economy, but can they explain how countries with much more successful economies than ours manage without non-doms? Canada and Germany require their equivalent of non-doms to pay their taxes after just six months, and in America, they pay their tax from day one—day one! As a modern economy, Britain should operate with modern principles in line with other major economies such as France, Germany and Canada.

As we have heard, the non-dom tax loophole costs the economy £3.2 billion. With a modern taxation system, we could provide the much-needed investment that our public services are crying out for. A Labour Government would scrap the non-dom tax status and end tax breaks for private equity bosses and private schools. A Labour Government would crack down on hidden offshore trusts that allow people to avoid paying their taxes.

With the money that would raise, a Labour Government would fund the biggest recruitment drive in modern NHS history and provide breakfast clubs for all primary aged children. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North laid out, Labour would train the next generation of doctors, nurses and midwives, so that the NHS can treat patients on time, as it did under the last Labour Government. Labour will support breakfast clubs for children across the country, because we all know that hungry children find it harder to learn.

A Labour Government would do all that by scrapping the non-dom tax status, as we called for ahead of the autumn statement. Although the Chancellor, or perhaps the Prime Minister, decided against it, the Chancellor told the Treasury Committee that he would look into it. Can the Minister tell us whether he has? The Government are yet to publish any analysis or provide an update on their considerations. Why are Ministers so quick to tax my constituents and so slow to act on non-doms?

That is why we are here today. We have heard about the difference that abolishing the non-dom status could make. Academics have estimated that the status costs the Government more than £3 billion, yet the Government refuse to move. Why? So far, they have refused to publish the analysis that would lay out exactly what trade-offs they are choosing to make. If the Government's analysis shows that the non-dom status is an asset to our economy, why do they refuse to publish it? In his closing speech, will the Minister provide us with answers to some of the many questions raised today?

Labour's proposal is not just about raising much-needed money; it is about fairness in the tax system, the same rules for all, and support for those who keep our economy growing. By voting against our motion today,



[Abena Oppong-Asare]

the Government will make it clear exactly whose priorities they are here to serve, but Labour is clear that if people make their lives in Britain, they should pay their taxes here.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Before I call the Minister, I remind hon. Members that, if they have contributed to the debate, it is very important to get back in good time for the wind-ups.

6.45 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Andrew Griffith):** Although we may not agree, it is always a pleasure to hear the passion that the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) brings to her role.

The public expect us to have a plan for the economy, for growth and for the country, and we do. As the Prime Minister has said, we have five priorities that deliver on the people's priorities: to cut inflation by half, to grow the economy, to get the national debt down, to cut NHS waiting lists and to stop small boats crossing the channel. As we deliver against these pledges, we will move towards a better future, with our economy growing faster and the benefits shared across the whole of our country.

Just as we did in the pandemic, we will continue to support the most vulnerable. That is why we uprated benefits by inflation—an £11 billion commitment. It is why we honoured the triple lock on pensions—that is billions more on supporting pensioners on low incomes. It is why, when Putin's war on Ukraine hiked the global cost of energy, we delivered a generous subsidy to cushion households' energy bills: £900 for each household last year and £500 this year, on top of a £900 payment for everyone on means-tested benefits.

The Opposition do not want to dwell on this because they recognise no limits when it comes to spending other people's money. Opposition Members who say we are prioritising the wealthiest simply need to look again. At the same time, we need to make sure that our economy is fertile for growth, and it would be wrong to make decisions based on what is politically expedient at the cost of public services. As the Chancellor has said, it is important to look at any proposals on non-doms in the light of the true impact on the public finances.

I will respond to some of the points Members made shortly, but let me first remind the House that it is well established, in particular in developing policy, that Ministers of the Crown must be able to receive free and frank advice from officials, especially when that advice is market sensitive. It is entirely right that Parliament hears Government decisions first, but that should be through the established process of a fiscal event, when the Government can set out their decisions on market-sensitive issues such as tax in an orderly fashion.

We started this debate with a demolition of the arguments put forward by the hon. Member for Ealing North (James Murray) by my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Rob Butler) raised a valid point, to which we have yet to receive an answer, about why successive Labour Governments did not take action during their years in power. I am very happy to take an intervention if shadow Ministers would like to answer that right now.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis), a master of the constitution, rightly observed that the motion is unconstitutional, irregular and injurious to the public interest. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne), with his deep knowledge of these matters, reminded us that 35 countries have similar schemes. He also reminded us a number of times during the debate about the Labour party using this debate, once again, to restate its credentials as the party of envy. Labour Members have not learned and they have not changed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell) reminded us of how we on this side of the House have taken millions of people out of tax entirely, with an increase in the rate of the personal allowance from £6,500 when we took office to £12,500 today. My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) gave us his own view that he sees a case for reform in this area.

People across the country are looking to us in this House to get inflation down, cut debt and unleash growth, and we have a plan to do so. It is an inflating-cutting plan that will see the economy growing, debt falling, NHS waiting lists cut and small boats stopped—that is what we will deliver. Our plan is rooted in economic stability and the prudent management of our finances. Not for us the shadow Chancellor's spend now, pay later economics. In the three weeks since Labour Members promised no "big Government chequebook" they have made £45 billion of unfunded spending commitments. That is why her predecessor, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), left us a note saying, "I'm afraid there is no money."

The right hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) has been busy. One minute she is hanging out with masters of the universe in Davos, the next making promises to masters of the unions in Deptford. From glühwein to white wine, the only common denominator is spending more of other people's money. But we will not be distracted from our important task, and we will not indulge in this sort of procedural politics from the Opposition, which I regret is the sort of thing that lowers the esteem of this House. Disregarding established precedents while prejudicing the process of consideration would not be in the public interest, especially when we have just weeks to wait until the fiscal event. Instead, our focus is delivering on the people's priorities, and delivering a Budget to help achieve them. That is what we are focused on, and that is why Conservative Members oppose this desperate and distracting motion.

*Question put.*

*The House divided: Ayes 229, Noes 305.*

**Division No. 169]**

**[6.51 pm**

#### AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy*  
*vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-*  
*Addy*)  
Abrahams, Debbie  
Ali, Rushanara  
Ali, Tahir  
Amesbury, Mike  
Anderson, Fleur  
Antoniazzi, Tonia  
Ashworth, rh Jonathan

Barker, Paula  
Beckett, rh Margaret  
Begum, Apsana  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Black, Mhairi  
Blackford, rh Ian  
Blackman, Kirsty  
Blake, Olivia  
Blomfield, Paul

Bonnar, Steven  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brennan, Kevin  
 Brock, Deidre  
 Brown, Ms Lyn  
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Bryant, Sir Chris  
 Buck, Ms Karen  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, Ian  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)  
 Cameron, Dr Lisa  
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
 Carden, Dan  
 Chamberlain, Wendy  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Chapman, Douglas  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Cherry, Joanna  
 Clark, Feryal  
 Cooper, Daisy  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Cowan, Ronnie  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Daby, Janet  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Day, Martyn  
 Debbonaire, Thangam  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dixon, Samantha  
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
 Dodds, Anneliese  
 Doogan, Dave  
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Eastwood, Colum  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Eshalomi, Florence  
 Evans, Chris  
 Ferrier, Margaret  
 Flynn, Stephen  
 Foord, Richard  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Foy, Mary Kelly  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Grady, Patrick  
 Grant, Peter  
 Green, Sarah  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Dame Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette  
 Hanna, Claire  
 Hanvey, Neale  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hosie, rh Stewart  
 Howarth, rh Sir George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jardine, Christine  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Chris  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Navendu Mishra*)  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lynch, Holly  
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Helen  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Murray, James  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)  
 Norris, Alex

O'Hara, Brendan  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Oppong-Asare, Abena  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qaisar, Ms Anum  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rayner, rh Angela  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, rh Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin

Sobel, Alex  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tarry, Sam  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thompson, Owen  
 Thomson, Richard  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Andrew  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Whitley, Mick  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Winter, Beth  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Colleen Fletcher and**  
**Liz Twist**

## NOES

Adams, rh Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aiken, Nickie  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Anderson, Lee  
 Anderson, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, rh Edward  
 Atherton, Sarah  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Bailey, Shaun  
 Baillie, Siobhan  
 Baker, Duncan  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Steve  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Baynes, Simon  
 Bell, Aaron  
 Benton, Scott  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Bhatti, Saqib  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Braverman, rh Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Bristow, Paul  
 Britcliffe, Sara  
 Browne, Anthony  
 Buchan, Felicity  
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, rh Conor  
 Butler, Rob  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Carter, Andy  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Cates, Miriam  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chope, Sir Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
 Clarkson, Chris  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Colburn, Elliot  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto

Courts, Robert  
 Coutinho, Claire  
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
 Crosbie, Virginia  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Daly, James  
 Davies, rh David T. C.  
 Davies, Gareth  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davison, Dehenna  
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline  
 Dines, Miss Sarah  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Double, Steve  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, Sir James  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
 Dunne, rh Philip  
 Edwards, Ruth  
 Ellis, rh Michael  
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
 Eustice, rh George  
 Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Everitt, Ben  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Farris, Laura  
 Fell, Simon  
 Firth, Anna  
 Fletcher, Katherine  
 Fletcher, Mark  
 Fletcher, Nick  
 Ford, rh Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Frazer, rh Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gibson, Peter  
 Gideon, Jo  
 Girvan, Paul  
 Glen, rh John  
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, James  
 Grayling, rh Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Griffith, Andrew  
 Grundy, James  
 Gullis, Jonathan  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hart, Sally-Ann  
 Hart, rh Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heappey, rh James  
 Henry, Darren  
 Higginbotham, Antony  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Holden, Mr Richard  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Howell, John  
 Howell, Paul  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, Jane  
 Hunt, rh Jeremy  
 Hunt, Tom  
 Jack, rh Mr Alister  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnston, David  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Fay  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Jupp, Simon  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kearns, Alicia  
 Keegan, rh Gillian  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Lamont, John  
 Langan, Robert  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Levy, Ian  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lockhart, Carla  
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackrory, Cherylyn  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, rh Kit  
 Mangnall, Anthony  
 Mann, Scott  
 Marson, Julie  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Mayhew, Jerome  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McVey, rh Esther  
 Mercer, rh Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Millar, Robin  
 Miller, rh Dame Maria  
 Milling, rh Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Damien

Moore, Robbie  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Mortimer, Jill  
 Morton, rh Wendy  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mumby-Croft, Holly  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Nici, Lia  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, rh Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Philp, rh Chris  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, rh Victoria  
 Pritchard, rh Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, rh Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Randall, Tom  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Russell, Dean  
 Rutley, David  
 Sambrook, Gary  
 Saxby, Selaine  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok  
 Simmonds, David  
 Skidmore, rh Chris  
 Smith, rh Chloe  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Henry

Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Spencer, rh Mark  
 Stafford, Alexander  
 Stephenson, rh Andrew  
 Stevenson, Jane  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, rh Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, rh Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunderland, James  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trott, Laura  
 Tugendhat, rh Tom  
 Vara, rh Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Sir Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Warman, Matt (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Watling, Giles  
 Webb, Suzanne  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
 Wiggin, Sir Bill  
 Wild, James  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy  
 Young, Jacob

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Joy Morrissey and  
 Nigel Huddleston

*Question accordingly negated.*

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

#### Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):

With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 3 and 4 together.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

### HEALTH AND SAFETY

That the Health and Safety and Nuclear (Fees) Regulations 2022 (S.I., 2022, No. 1378), dated 19 December 2022, a copy of which was laid before this House on 20 December 2022, be approved.



## ENERGY

That the Energy Bill Relief Scheme (Non-Standard Cases) Regulations 2023 (S.I., 2023, No. 9), dated 10 January 2023, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11 January, be approved. —(Mike Wood.)

*Question agreed to.*

## PETITIONS

**Planned closure of Wood Green Post Office**

7.6 pm

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Many of my constituents are extremely concerned about the loss of Wood Green post office when the WH Smith store closes its door in early March. It is a busy, well-used branch in an area of high deprivation, and many people rely on it to collect pensions and energy payments and to access cash. A lot of work is now going on with the local authority and partners to secure a new site in Haringey; they have my full support, but more than 1,061 people have signed this petition to save Wood Green post office, because even a temporary closure of this vital service would be a huge blow. The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to take into account the concerns of the petitioners and take immediate action to ensure Post Office prevent the closure of this branch.

*[Following is the full text of the petition:]*

*The petition of residents of the constituency of Hornsey and Wood Green,*

*Declares that the closure of Wood Green Post Office would be a loss for the local community; further declares that this will mean many residents including the elderly, those with mobility issues, and those who may struggle to afford public transport will have to travel over a mile for essential Post Office services; further that this will leave Wood Green, the only metropolitan centre in north London, without a Post Office; notes that that 8 in 10 “temporary” Post Office closures remain closed for over one year and almost 6 in 10 for over two years.*

*The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to take into account the concerns of the petitioners and take immediate action to ensure Post Office prevent the closure of this branch.*

*And the petitioners remain, etc.]*

[P002799]

**Funding for Small and Rural Primary Schools**

7.8 pm

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I rise to present a petition with which I have been ably assisted by the children of Scorton Church of England Primary School in my constituency. When I visited them, they told me that they were upset that they have to eat lunch in their classroom and that they have to walk down to the village to use the village hall for PE, because their school does not have school hall facilities.

The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to recognise the unique difficulties small and rural primary schools have with accessing larger pots of funding and reallocate existing funds to provide support for these schools.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

*[Following is the full text of the petition:]*

*The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,*

*Declares that small and rural primary schools have difficulty accessing larger pots of funding; notes in particular that Scorton Church of England Primary School does not have a school hall, causing children to have to eat in their classrooms and walk down into the village to use the village hall for PE, causing more pressure on the school budget which is going into deficit; further notes that the school does not have its own kitchen and has to pay to have school meals brought in by taxi.*

*The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to recognise the unique difficulties small and rural primary schools have with accessing larger pots of funding and reallocate existing funds to provide support for these schools.*

*And the petitioners remain, etc.]*

[P002800]

## Green Energy Potential: Scotland

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mike Wood.)*

7.9 pm

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Let me begin by thanking you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for granting this Adjournment debate.

I think it right that in any debate concerning green energy, we should begin by mapping out exactly what is at stake for all of us. As we know, this is not just about the economy; this is existential. As has been said before,

“We are the first generation to feel the effect of climate change and the last generation who can do something about it.”

The clock is ticking for humanity, and every year that clock is ticking faster and faster. Unless we act immediately—unless we change our energy supply and demand right now—this planet of ours will soon choke us to death. It falls on all of us to ensure that that is not allowed to happen.

By now we should all know the very real threat of climate change, but we also need to know about the opportunity that can come if we make the transition away from fossil fuels and that is what I intend to talk about this evening. Meeting the challenge of climate change is in our self-interest, if we are even to survive, but it is equally in our self-interest to reap the rewards of the economic opportunities that new, green technologies offer us in Scotland and across these islands. We in Scotland know those opportunities more than most, because the industries of the future are already putting down strong and sustainable roots.

The last Adjournment debate that I secured concerned the potential of tidal energy, and I am therefore delighted that, just today, Nova Innovation of Edinburgh has doubled the size of its Shetland tidal array. The installation of the fifth and sixth turbines means that it is now the array with the largest number of turbines anywhere in the world. That level of innovation and industry shows what can be achieved, and that scale of opportunity is probably most evident in our offshore wind sector. ScotWind will deliver a new era in Scotland's offshore wind industry. It also represents the world's largest commercial round for floating offshore wind. Fundamentally, it breaks new ground in putting large-scale floating wind technology on the map at gigawatt scale.

Once operational, this will provide several billion pounds more in rental revenues, and every single penny can then be invested for the benefit of the people of Scotland. There will be a green energy windfall for Scotland from the natural bounty that is our green energy potential. In the middle of a cost of living crisis, that vision and that outcome simply cannot come quickly enough. At the heart of the agenda is a very simple truth: this is Scotland's energy, and it needs finally to be used for the benefit of Scotland's people.

As well as the production, use and ownership of this green energy, there is another crucial element that must not be lost, and that is securing the full economic and industrial benefit from it. I am glad to say that each ScotWind application was required to include a supply chain development statement setting out its supply chain goals and committing developers to meet them during the various stages of their projects. Through those statements,

developers have now pledged an investment of £28 billion in the Scottish supply chain. This is the crucial point: in every single area of green growth, this has to be the model that we all pursue. It is not nearly enough just to produce the energy; it is every bit as important to stimulate and grow the industrial base and the jobs that flow from that energy resource.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the right hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. I spoke to him before the debate.

As the right hon. Gentleman will know very well, the Irish sea divides Scotland from Northern Ireland, but it also unites Scotland and Northern Ireland in respect of the tidal and wave energy that we can use. Does he agree that my own Strangford Lough, in particular, offers a possible solution to our energy problems, and that this warrants investment and investigation that might be best served by a dedicated climate office headed by someone in the Minister's Department? Scotland and Northern Ireland can do it better through the Minister and his Department.

**Ian Blackford:** I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. There is enormous potential in tidal energy, and I will say more about that later in my speech when I issue specific requests to the Minister.

The only way in which we can generate the appropriate return in gross value added for the whole Scottish economy and ensure that we feel the benefits in the short, medium and long terms is by controlling the supply chain, in offshore wind and tidal energy as in so many other areas.

Offshore wind may have the most momentum, but it is only one of the many opportunities that have the potential to grow. I am delighted that, only in the last number of weeks, my friend and colleague in the Scottish Government, our net zero Cabinet Minister Michael Matheson, has published our draft energy strategy and just transition plan. That plan contains the ambition to grow the full range of green energy opportunities, including pump storage, tidal, solar and of course green hydrogen. The ambition is to create an additional 20 GW of capacity by 2030—enough to power around 6 million homes, which is far more than the number of households in Scotland. This increased capacity would account for the equivalent of nearly 50% of all current energy demand of households and businesses.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The right hon. Gentleman mentions green hydrogen. The fact is that distilleries in the highlands—Clynelish, Glenmorangie and Dalmore are three examples—are particularly keen to heat and make their whisky using hydrogen rather than fossil fuels. There is a great opportunity here, and I believe it would be of great benefit to His Majesty's Government and the Scottish Government to have a green hydrogen check to see which businesses could go over to that. It is easy: we take the electricity from the offshore windfarms, we make the hydrogen, it burns and it is dead clean.

**Ian Blackford:** The hon. Gentleman is correct. There is a significant opportunity for hydrogen in the distilleries in his own constituency, in mine and right through the industry. I will go on to talk about the Skilling report that I published on behalf of the SNP a few months ago.

It mentions the ability to generate five times as much green energy by 2050 as we are doing today and to grow from just over 12 GW up to 80 GW. There is an enormous opportunity within all that for hydrogen in the domestic economy and for exports.

When we talk about the domestic economy, it is important to dwell on the fact that, if we have the ability to upscale our energy production to the extent that that report has indicated, there ought to be a competitive advantage for industry. We must ensure that we get to net zero and reduce our carbon footprint but we must also create a competitive advantage. The holy grail is to ensure that we can strengthen sustainable economic growth and ensure that that ability to generate green energy creates a competitive advantage for industry that drives up investment and productivity and improves living standards.

But my goodness, let us think about the economies of scale in doing that in the context of the cost of living crisis that we are suffering from today. I say to the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, whose constituency is in the highlands, that it is an absolute disgrace that so many of our constituents, and our pensioners in particular, are living in fuel poverty when the highlands and islands are generating so much green energy potential, never mind the impact of the cost of living crisis. I say to the Minister that we need to look at the mechanisms of setting a price in the energy market, which has been a considerable factor in putting so many of our constituents in the peril they are in. In the context of Scotland, we are producing six times as much gas as we need, yet suffering from the mechanisms of the market that are forcing our people to pay for energy to an extent that they should not be.

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): My right hon. Friend is making an incredibly important point. From the perspective of people outside, looking in here, who cannot afford to pay their fuel bills, does he agree that it is galling and inexplicable to them that, although Scotland is such an energy-rich country, it has so little control over the prices that people have to pay?

**Ian Blackford**: Absolutely. I hope the Minister appreciates that I am trying to do this in as consensual a manner as I can, but we have to learn from the mistakes in setting energy policy. We have to recognise that, to a large extent, the bounty of North sea oil is now in the rear-view mirror, but we did not benefit from that bounty or from the £350 billion-plus of tax receipts that the UK Government have taken from it. Of course it is galling for people in Scotland to be paying a price for the failure of energy policy in the UK, whether that relates to fossil fuels in the past or green energy in our future.

I will make some progress so that I can leave the Minister some time to respond. On hydrogen specifically, the plan maps out how we can develop 5 GW of power by 2030 and a further 25 GW by 2045. This would provide a clean and sustainable alternative to fossil fuels and would help us to decarbonise heavy industry and transportation.

As some in the Chamber might know, Scotland is already a leader in innovative hydrogen energy solutions. The world's first hydrogen-powered double-decker bus fleet is already operating in Aberdeen, and the world's first hydrogen-powered heating network is currently

being developed in Fife. If we continue to grow that hydrogen base, not only can we hope to provide energy at home but we can export it abroad, too.

It is estimated that there will be £48 billion of annual green hydrogen exports to Europe by 2050. We talked about the potential of North sea oil in the 1970s but, my goodness, Scotland's green energy potential is enormous. Scotland can become a substantial green hydrogen exporter, delivering thousands of jobs. That hydrogen potential is also a priority in supporting the fastest just transition for workers, communities and businesses in the oil and gas sector.

The latest plan builds on the £0.5 billion just transition fund that is already being rolled out by the Scottish Government. Just transition funding has already been allocated to support the development of a skills passport, to create an advanced manufacturing skills hub in Aberdeen and to develop a pilot scheme with the national energy skills accelerator to determine the skills required for an energy transition. This includes transitioning skilled offshore workers into jobs in carbon capture and storage, and decommissioning or diversifying oil and gas business models into renewable energy portfolios, including the offshore wind, carbon capture and hydrogen sectors.

All of this good work is under way, but I am afraid it does not tell the whole story because, although many good initiatives are powering ahead, another reality has been evident for far too long. I am sorry to say that, when it comes to green energy, both Scotland and the UK in general are being held back by the UK Government's toxic mix of lack of action and lack of ambition. It is fair to say that Members are used to hearing me criticise the UK Government in such terms, so they might be tempted to dismiss the criticism as predictable or standard fare. But if they will not listen to me on this, maybe, just maybe, they will listen to the head of the CBI. I am conscious that this debate comes after weeks of heavy and pointed criticism from Tony Danker, and those criticisms are worth repeating in full for the record. Tony Danker said he is

"genuinely worried the current government is losing the race on green growth... The UK is falling behind rapidly—to the Americans and the Europeans, who are outspending and outsmarting us. We're behind the Germans on heat-pumps, insulation and building retrofits, the French on EV charging infrastructure, and the US on operational carbon capture and storage projects—despite the UK's North Sea advantage. We're lagging all three on hydrogen funding. This is stunning to many who rightly felt clean energy was ours to own."

Those words are from only a matter of days ago, and I suggest that few could argue with any of them.

Tony Danker is describing what SNP Members have been saying for years. I will give a few examples. The UK energy market is completely unfit for purpose, as it is linked to the price of gas rather than the price of renewables, which has painfully punished consumers during this cost of living crisis. We have also constantly said that Scotland's energy producers continue to be put at a financial disadvantage by Westminster's disastrous pricing system. Only recently, Scottish Renewables said this system makes

"Scottish offshore wind farms 20% more expensive than those in English waters."

The very same shortcomings are true of carbon capture, on which this UK Government are failing to live up to their previous promises to Peterhead and the Acorn Project.



[Ian Blackford]

When will carbon capture and storage be given the go-ahead in Scotland? Let us show that we are determined to deliver on net zero, and for us in Scotland that means 2045 at the latest. Will the Minister take this opportunity to deliver on the UK Government's past promises?

We even see this with the good news story I mentioned earlier, Nova and tidal energy in Shetland, as behind that is unfortunately another story of a lack of ambition by the UK Government. We know that a Royal Society report from October 2021 found that tidal is now capable of generating 11 GW of power by 2050—that is 50% greater than current nuclear capacity—and would provide the baseload of energy that we need. Ultimately, it would do so at a cheaper price than nuclear energy could do. Yet, instead of providing the ringfenced £50 million in the CfD—contracts for difference—round that would unleash this industry in full, the Government are only providing £20 million. Minister, that is not nearly enough to kick-start its full potential.

What assessment has the Minister made of the Royal Society report? When can we expect the delivery of a ringfenced pot of £50 million so that we can deliver on the potential for tidal energy to the fullest extent, right around the coast of these islands, including in the Irish sea, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)? We must allow manufacturers such as Nova to compete, not just from export markets, but from a thriving domestic market. We have technological leadership today and we must not lose that advantage. We must make sure that that domestic demand is there to power our innovation.

When it comes to carbon capture and storage, transmission charges or tidal, the story is the same: opportunity lost again and again because of the inaction of this Government. From Scotland's point of view, we cannot afford to be held back any longer, because there is very little doubt that the new, green economy will form the foundation of Scotland's future—all the evidence is pointing in that direction. Only last year, I commissioned a report by the eminent economist Dr David Skilling. It shows that Scotland has the potential to boost our output by more than five times. By expanding Scotland's renewable capacity and by becoming a green hydrogen exporter, we have the chance to pump £34 billion into Scotland's economy every single year. That is an investment that could sustain 385,000 jobs. That would dwarf the number of jobs we have in oil and gas today. This is a real plan for growth: green, sustainable growth for the long term, driving higher productivity, driving an industrial green strategy and driving our economy into the future. For me and my party, it is obviously the template upon which an independent Scotland can be built and can succeed.

Obviously, we will continue to have that debate on Scotland's future and our independence, but in the here and now I would make this plea to the Government tonight: whatever the constitutional future holds, the opportunity of this green industrial future is something that we can and should be working on together. This is in Scotland's interest, it is in the UK's interest and it is in this planet's interest. But if this Government are willing to work together, they need to change course urgently. They need to start to listen to people such as Tony Danker at the CBI. A good start would be ending

the unfair transmission charges in Scotland, investing properly in tidal and, finally, green-lighting the Acorn Project. If we can agree to work together on that agenda, not only can we share all the benefits that green energy provides, we can protect this planet that we all call home.

7.28 pm

**The Minister for Energy and Climate (Graham Stuart):**

Let me begin by congratulating the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) on securing this Adjournment debate. I agree with him that green energy in Scotland has a great future, and it plays a key role in bolstering the UK's energy security and driving greater energy security for the nation as a whole. That will be important in ensuring a cost-efficient energy system consistent with net zero, while creating value for money for consumers and taxpayers. I am also grateful to the other Members who have contributed, through interventions, to the debate.

The right hon. Gentleman has made some interesting points. There was precious little praise from him for any Government policy. He said that some might regard him as taking normal trite separatist lines, which is true. The truth is that Scotland, which has a population lower than that of Yorkshire, disproportionately, per capita, is able to invest in green energy through the CfD system. It is able to do so because of the levy, effectively paid through the CfD, which is from all the bill payers of Great Britain. That is allowing the transformation of Scottish energy. Without that—without the base of all the electricity and gas bill payers across this country—Scotland would not be able to deliver the huge potential that it has. If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that green energy is an argument for independence, I would say to him and his separatist colleagues that the absolute opposite is true. It is access to the whole of Great Britain, the integration with all the bill payers of Great Britain, that is allowing Scotland, as part of this United Kingdom, to lead the world. Of course, he talks in the way that, sadly, he and his separatist colleagues always have done. They are always talking down what we are doing. We have done more on offshore wind than any other country in Europe. We are second only to China in the world now and we transformed the economics of it. That was this UK Government, this Conservative Government.

If the right hon. Gentleman wants to sway others, rather than just playing to the Gallery of his own supporters, which ultimately he did not succeed in doing and thus his change in position, he should make a more balanced argument, otherwise, he looks incredible.

**Ian Blackford:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I really encourage him not to use pejorative language such as separatism, but be that as it may. When he reflects on the contribution that oil and gas has made to the UK Exchequer, and indeed, the windfall tax that has come in now, he will see that that could have been used to make sure that we were getting the investment in tidal that has been called for not just by me, but by the Royal Society. I am trying to encourage the Government to do the right thing to make sure that we speed up. Let us not have any of this nonsense about having to accept what is given to us by the UK Exchequer.

**Graham Stuart:** Again, the right hon. Gentleman said in his speech—this is what is incredible—that the Scottish people had not benefited from the bounty in the North sea. Has he looked at the accounts of the Scottish Government? Has he looked at the black hole that would open up in their accounts were his separatist agenda to be delivered? *[Interruption.]* It is a separatist agenda. Calling someone a separatist if they are in favour of independence is not pejorative; it is simply descriptive. The truth is that the Scottish Government today enjoy bounty from the UK Treasury on a daily basis and it is thanks to our being able to work together as one United Kingdom that we can support each other, and support the transformation of the energy system in Scotland. Without being a member of the United Kingdom, without access to the support from all GB bill payers, Scotland would not be able to develop the industry that it has done in the way that it has done.

In April last year, we published the British energy security strategy, which set out plans to deliver a secure, affordable energy system, and reduce our vulnerability to international energy prices by accelerating the deployment of renewable and low carbon technologies, supercharging our production of low-carbon hydrogen, and supporting North sea oil and gas in the nearer term for security of supply.

The right hon. Gentleman suggested in some way that the UK Government lacked ambition. This is a Government who hosted COP26, who led the world from 30% of GDP covered by net zero pledges to 90%, who were the first of any major economy to legislate through the Climate Change Act 2008 and to move to put net zero into law. Ambition is not something that this country lacks at all. The right hon. Gentleman did not reflect any of that progress. We have led Europe and we have led the world and people would not know that if they listened to the right hon. Gentleman.

The Government have committed fully to decarbonise the electricity system by 2035 subject to security of supply. Our carbon budget 6 trajectory suggests that we will need to build all low-carbon technologies at or close to their maximum technical limit to meet the twin challenge of accelerating decarbonisation and servicing increased demand.

We are absolutely committed as a Government to the renewables industry across the UK. Scotland has benefited from, and will continue to benefit from, UK investment in energy and energy efficiency. The Secretary of State has received a letter from the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport outlining Scotland's energy strategy proposals. The Secretary of State is considering those and will respond in due course.

Since we are talking about ambition, I note that this is about not just ambition, but delivery. The Climate Change Committee reported in December:

“Scotland's lead in decarbonising over the rest of the UK has now been lost. Progress is now broadly the same as the UK as a whole. There are now glaring gaps in the Scottish Government's climate plan and particular concerns about the achievement of the 2030 goal to cut emissions by 75%”.

It is a challenging situation, but this Government lack neither ambition, nor the will and determination to deliver.

Our investment in the contracts for difference scheme, the Government's flagship scheme for incentivising the deployment of renewable technologies, has proved extremely

successful for Scotland. Some 44 of the 161 projects awarded CfDs by the UK Government to date are in Scotland. They represent 27% of all CfD projects and around 23% of total CfD capacity—around 6.3 GW of nearly 26.6 GW awarded contracts to date.

Adding to the offshore wind successes, as a result of the scheme—to return to a point made by both the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber—over 30 MW of new tidal stream power has been secured in Scotland. Anyone not familiar with tidal power and the global record and positioning of it would not know from the right hon. Gentleman's speech that that is a world-leading deployment—the first time that tidal stream power has been procured at this scale. Scottish projects will be crucial to delivering more wind as well as tidal. Nowhere else in the world has invested in the way that the UK Government have facilitated the investment into tidal stream in Scotland.

**Ian Blackford** *rose—*

**Graham Stuart:** Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman is now going to apologise, albeit briefly, to the House.

**Ian Blackford:** I find this quite extraordinary, because I asked the Minister specifically to reflect on the Royal Society report that called for a ring-fenced pot of £50 million so that we can get up to 11 GW. I also asked specifically about the assessment he made on the £20 million that is there. The simple fact of the matter is that we are being held back. We have the windfall tax on oil and gas producers, which could be used to step up that investment to make sure that we get to net zero by the target dates. The Government can do more.

**Graham Stuart:** We are leading the world on tidal stream. That is indisputable. It has never been procured anywhere in the world on this scale, and we plan to go forward now with annual CfD auctions. None of that features in the right hon. Gentleman's speech. It is no wonder that, despite all the rhetoric, he makes so little progress in persuading the Scottish people of his separatist intents.

Hydrogen and carbon capture utilisation and storage will be critical to delivering UK energy security, highly-skilled jobs and economic growth, and will help the UK to reach net zero. That is why we have set an ambition of up to 10 GW of low-carbon hydrogen production capacity by 2030, including four—yes, four—CCUS clusters by 2030. Scotland has a key role to play in that and other areas. I must now come to a close, but I thank the right hon. Gentleman for securing this debate.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, earlier today, by mistake, I walked through the voting Lobby during a Division on a devolved matter. I did not tap my pass and advised a teller that I was not voting, but I have since been advised that the vote will be counted and that the only way to potentially correct that would be by raising a point of order. I am hoping that you can advise me on how I may correct it. Thank you.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I thank the hon. Lady for that point of order. She has explained what has happened and the House will have

*[Madam Deputy Speaker]*

*Question put and agreed to.*

heard that. I will undertake to consider whether there is anything further that should be done in light of what she has raised.

7.39 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

*Tuesday 31 January 2023*

[GERAINT DAVIES *in the Chair*]

## Levelling-up Missions: East of England

9.30 am

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered progress on the Government's levelling up missions in the East of England.

It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Davies. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting this debate, which comes a year after a similar debate, when the opportunities and challenges facing the east of England were also considered through the prism of levelling up.

Last February the Government published their White Paper, "Levelling Up the United Kingdom", in which they set out 12 levelling-up missions, with targets to be achieved by 2030. Last month, in December, the all-party parliamentary group for the east of England, which I co-chair with the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), published a report in conjunction with the East of England Local Government Association and various private sector partners that analysed confidence in the region in achieving those targets.

In summary, the report found that there was high confidence in achieving three of the levelling-up missions: employment and pay, research and development, and wellbeing. There was medium confidence in achieving four of the missions: improving digital connectivity, delivering pride in place, reducing crime and widening devolution. However, there is low confidence in five policy areas, many of which are the most important to the people of, and the prospects for, the east of England: improved educational attainment, more skills, better transport, longer, healthier living, and more affordable housing to buy and rent.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): The hon. Member is doing an excellent job of making the case for the east of England. One of the five areas of concern he referenced was transport. Does he agree that it is essential to keep up the pressure for important rail improvements at Ely and Haughley junctions, to restore four trains per hour to London Stansted, to secure East West Rail and to ensure that affordable, reliable bus services become the norm rather than the exception across the region?

**Peter Aldous:** I thank the hon. Member for that intervention, and I greatly enjoy working with him on the APPG. He is correct to raise those issues. I will comment on the rail issues in passing a little later, but they are vital to the east of England and to the whole UK.

I will comment in a little more detail on the five issues where there is low confidence and on what needs to be done so that we can get on course to deliver the 2030 targets. I anticipate that colleagues will home in on areas and issues that are important to them and their constituents. I should add that each of the issues warrants a debate of its own, and I am conscious that I will only scratch the surface of each mission.

Earlier this month the Government published the results of round 2 of the levelling-up fund. In the two rounds that have taken place so far, there have been 12 awards in the east of England, with a total value of £252.5 million. In both rounds we secured the fourth lowest amount of funding in the UK. Although, on an allocation per head basis, the situation has improved significantly, from £14 per head in the first round to £26 per head in the second, the east of England remains the region with the third lowest funding over both rounds.

It would be wrong to judge levelling up solely on the basis of those grants, but there is a worry that there is a lack of understanding in Whitehall of the challenges faced by many people in the east of England and of the exciting opportunities available in the region. With the right policies and support, the Government can help unlock these opportunities, which will benefit not just our region but the whole United Kingdom.

Down here in London, there may be a view that East Anglia is a comfortably-off region where levelling up does not apply. That is wrong, as we have relatively low levels of pay and there are deep pockets of deprivation in coastal communities such as Lowestoft, which I represent, in rural areas and in our larger cities and towns, such as Norwich and Ipswich.

**Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that some coastal regions around the country suffer from pockets of deprivation that are unrecognised because the central hinterland looks wealthy?

**Peter Aldous:** My hon. Friend raises a good point. I am mindful of the fact that Jaywick, which is in his constituency, is statistically the most deprived area in the east of England. As he rightly says, pockets of deprivation can be hidden, because there are often areas of wealth within a few miles of them that camouflage that deprivation.

The east of England is an economic success story, and it is one of only three regions that are net contributors to the Exchequer. With the right policies and the necessary initiatives, we can significantly reduce poverty and create what, in effect, would be a global powerhouse, with specialist skills and expertise in such sectors as low-carbon energy, agritech, life sciences and sustainable fishing. Despite the drawbacks, a good start has been made locally in Waveney, and much of Lowestoft resembles a building site at present, with work well under way on the Gull Wing bridge—the long-awaited and much-needed third crossing of the port, which divides the town—as well as on the construction of permanent flood defences.

At this stage it is appropriate to pause and to recall that this evening is the 70th anniversary of the 1953 storm surge that hit our coast so cruelly, causing death, destruction and, ultimately, the demise of the beach village in Lowestoft. Today the region remains extremely vulnerable to rising sea levels and the threat of climate change, but the drive towards net zero presents our economy with significant opportunities, which we must grasp. In Lowestoft, work is also getting under way on the various towns fund projects designed to regenerate the town centre and the surrounds. These projects, together with the flood defence scheme and the new bridge, currently represent a public investment in the town of in excess of £220 million.

[Peter Aldous]

Due to inflation, the shortage of raw materials and supply chain challenges, delivering such construction projects is not easy at present, and I commend the project managers at Suffolk County Council, Coastal Partnership East and East Suffolk Council for their hard work. Our task locally is to ensure that the developments act as a catalyst for private sector investment and that they fit in with and complement the overall economic strategy for the region.

I will now briefly touch on the five missions where there is low confidence of meeting the 2030 targets.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman's constituency and mine are very alike from a fishing point of view. He mentioned 1953, which is also an anniversary for us back home: the MV Princess Victoria went down that year, and I was at the service on Sunday, so 1953 also resonates with us.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it sometimes appears that the regions that shout the loudest get the lion's share of the funding? Does he agree that the Government should consider introducing a scoring matrix, which would ensure that each constituency sees projects delivered? That would mean that my constituency could level up with the rest of the United Kingdom.

**Peter Aldous:** The hon. Gentleman is quite right that there are significant similarities between the east of England—East Anglia—and Northern Ireland. As far as a matrix is concerned, I am not 100% sure about that, but there needs to be much better feedback from Government on why particular bids are not successful. We probably need to look at the criteria that bids must satisfy before we come on to the next round.

I will comment on the five missions where there is low confidence in achieving the 2030 targets, and I will start with transport. It should be highlighted at the outset that the east of England, with 17 ports and airports—including two freeports and Stansted—is very much a strategic gateway to the whole UK. If the east of England has a fit-for-purpose, 21st-century transport system, the whole UK benefits; unfortunately, we are some way from achieving that. There is concern that the transport needs of the region are being overlooked in Whitehall, notwithstanding the good, co-ordinated work of our two strategic transport bodies, Transport East and England's Economic Heartland.

On the railways, it is vital that funding is provided for the upgrading of the Ely and Haughley junctions. That will improve connectivity from the Felixstowe-Harwich freeport to the midlands and the north, thereby facilitating levelling up in those regions. It will get freight off the busy A14 and help to provide additional capacity for passenger services into London Liverpool Street. Reinstating the four trains per hour from Liverpool Street to Stansted would help to attract investment from airlines and to secure new routes to destinations such as San Francisco and Boston—that is the one in Massachusetts, not our near neighbour in Lincolnshire, although that road also needs improvement.

It is estimated that, if such routes are opened up, they will deliver £95 million in new investment to the east of England. However, if we are to deliver such investment,

there is a need for good transport links to and from the airport. Locally, the Waveney constituency is served by two railway lines—the East Suffolk and the Wherry—which must be upgraded to improve accessibility and connectivity. That is vital to deliver meaningful levelling up to coastal communities such as Lowestoft and Yarmouth.

I will turn now to education. Achieving good grades not only benefits the individuals themselves, improving their life chances and sense of wellbeing, but enhances the prospects of economic growth. Unfortunately, the overall level of attainment across the region is behind that in England as a whole. That is predominantly because the funding for east of England schools is way below the national average. The £40 is a group of the lowest-funded education authorities in England; it is a club to which one does not aspire to belong but, unfortunately, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Central Bedfordshire are all members. To ensure that young people in the east of England have a fair opportunity to realise their full potential, attention should be given to revising the funding formula that applies to rural schools, and a significant part of the increased funding of £4.6 billion over the next few years should be allocated to councils to support children and young people with educational needs and disabilities.

On skills, exciting opportunities are emerging in the east of England, such as in the energy sector and in further education colleges such as East Coast College, with its campuses in Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth. Such colleges are doing great work, but they are hamstrung by a lack of revenue funding and a shortage of teachers and trainers. The key recommendations in the APPG's report when it comes to meeting the region's future needs are that there should be much greater in-work education provision and participation in further education and skills training for adults; improvements in the overall quality of training; better access to training, taking into account rurality and transport challenges; and better alignment with employers' needs.

Local skills improvement plans, which are being worked up by chambers of commerce, councils and local enterprise partnerships, are the vehicle for bringing about that sea change. However, when we look at energy—with the construction of Sizewell C, with 50% of the UK's offshore wind fleet anchored off our coast and with the potential for hydrogen production distribution starting from the gas terminal at Bacton—there is concern that the scale of the opportunity has not been fully recognised and acknowledged. The fact that we do not have a bespoke institute of technology is a disappointment.

With regard to the health mission, insufficient regard is had to the fact that population of the east of England is increasing and that a higher percentage of elderly people are resident in the area than in other areas. Those factors apply added pressure to our health and care sector, which is grappling with unprecedented demand and a workforce crisis. There are also significant health inequalities, including an increasing number of children living in poverty and an alarming gap in healthy life expectancy between areas that are often only a few miles apart. To meet those challenges, Government policy should recognise the significant population growth and pressures in the east of England to ensure that the region gets a fair share of funding overall for its demography and that the most deprived areas are recognised within that.

While home ownership in the east of England is the highest of any English region, at 67.4% in 2021, those homes are less affordable than in the rest of the UK. In 42 out of 48 areas in the region, average house prices are more than eight times the median wage. The bottom rungs of the housing ladder have, in effect, been sawn off. In my own constituency casework, the No. 1 issue is the challenges faced by many people seeking a comfortable, warm and dry place to live that they can truly call home. To meet that challenge, we need to build more houses, with the necessary supporting infrastructure, across all tenures, including social housing. We need to meet the needs of all people, whether those setting up home for the first time, those starting families or those looking to downsize or rightsize as their children leave home.

Moreover, the Government need to follow up on their recently announced and welcome ambition to reduce energy demand by driving forward a national retrofit programme. We have successful individual schemes, such as the energy company obligation, but we are yet to embark on the journey to upgrade the bulk of the UK's existing building stock. Policies should be set in Whitehall—hopefully, the Chancellor will have more to say on that next month—and then delivered locally, carried out by local craftsmen who are trained in local colleges and overseen by local councils.

In conclusion, I will make three observations about levelling up in the east of England. First, those living in the east of England will clearly benefit if we achieve the 2030 targets for the 12 missions, but so will the rest of the UK. For example, as I mentioned, improved connectivity and transport links across the region will lead to benefits flowing to all corners of Great Britain.

Secondly, there is the opportunity not just to level up but to create global exemplars in sectors such as low-carbon energy, life sciences and agritech. Low-carbon energy is particularly important in my constituency on the East Anglian coast—the all-energy coast. Nowhere else in the UK, quite likely nowhere else in Europe and possibly nowhere else in the world, do we find offshore wind, nuclear, carbon capture and hydrogen clustered so closely together. We must realise the full potential of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It is an open goal staring us in the face, and it is vital that we do not kick the ball over the bar.

Thirdly, in these uncertain times, we need to have in mind our national security, which the east of England played a crucial role in providing during world war two, when the RAF and the US air force flew from our network of airfields across the region. I hope that security in that form will not be necessary again, but in a geopolitical context, we are in worrying and uncertain times. As the breadbasket of Britain, and as the aforementioned all-energy coast, we have a vital role to play in providing food and energy security.

Delivering on the levelling-up missions, not just in the east of England but across the country, requires collaboration. There is a need for Departments to be properly co-ordinated—I am conscious that I have commented on many issues that do not fall within the Minister's remit, and I apologise for that. There is also a need for collaboration between national Government and local government, and with the region's businesses. We need a delivery vehicle to achieve that. I look forward to the Minister's summing up, and I hope she can pledge that the Government will commit to this important partnership approach.

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** Thank you so much; that was very interesting. I remind Members that they need to bob to indicate that they want to speak.

9.51 am

**Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) on securing this important debate, and for the work that he and others here do with the APPG to promote and improve the eastern region. I read the APPG's report into levelling up with great interest. It is obvious that the potential in the region is not being unleashed. In essence, we are underfunded; our funding per head of population is near the bottom of the table, despite the fact that the region is one of only three that are net contributors to the Exchequer.

I will not be the only MP in the room to feel profound disappointment at the Government's latest levelling-up fund allocation. My constituents in Bedford and Kempston got a raw deal yet again, when a second attempt to access levelling-up funding was rejected. The funding would have regenerated the area around the Saxon Centre in Kempston by encouraging new businesses and public services, including a desperately needed new health centre, and improving the town's walking and cycling infrastructure. It is a real blow to everyone at Bedford Borough Council who worked so hard on a great bid that ticked a lot of boxes in the Government's stated levelling-up aims—in particular, delivering pride in place and crime reduction. My constituents pay their taxes too, so it is not right that they miss out. They can see where the money has gone, and they know the area has not been levelled up, which has become a meaningless slogan.

Instead of pitting towns, communities and regions against each other, we need the Government to improve areas through long-term, sustained support that is based on need—not these random, piecemeal hand-out schemes. The public continually have to pay more for less, and that is most obvious in health services. There is an overall failure to invest in critical infrastructure, such as modernising in-patient mental health services and GP hubs. Government bureaucracy is holding up Whitehall capital funding allocations. As a result, the Borough of Bedford is unable to attract desperately needed GPs and community-based health professionals to the area because the primary care estate is not fit for purpose. I hope that the Minister will say when the Government will finally release the funding to build the facilities to relieve the pressure on our hospitals and get patients in Bedford, Kempston and across the eastern region the appropriate community care.

On transport infrastructure, the Government's handling of the East West Rail project has been shambolic. Bedford residents are sick and tired of waiting for a detailed decision on the project. Reasonable requests for information from residents, such as to see a business case, have not yet materialised. A lack of transparency has created significant and understandable distrust in the project. It also came as a big blow for rail users when train services on the Bedford to Bletchley line were suspended when Vivarail entered administration in December.

So far, the Government's levelling-up agenda has delivered the worst living standards in the past 70 years. I think my constituents would prefer the Government



[Mohammad Yasin]

concentrate on getting the basics right and delivering public services that work again. Only thoughtful, long-term investment in our region will unlock the vast potential and deliver the prosperity my constituents richly deserve.

9.56 am

**Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I am incredibly grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) for securing this great debate. He is a great champion of levelling up the east and I thank him very much.

As was mentioned, it is just a year since our last debate on levelling up the east of England. I am happy to say that my local authority has been successful in its bid to receive £20 million for the much-needed rejuvenation of Clacton town centre. It was a fantastic result and I want to thank the Minister. One does not always anticipate a great phone call, but it was a great one to receive. I also want to thank the leader of Tendring District Council, Neil Stock, the chief executive officer, Ian Davidson, and all the other officers who backed them to achieve that result.

We mentioned Jaywick earlier. Seventy years ago today, 37 people lost their lives in that very small village, of the 307 across the east of England. Although the local council is making great efforts to improve that particular area with flood-proof homes and building a brand new market area, it is still served by one very poor road. It is one of the areas in my constituency that needs investment.

We are not an urban city down in Clacton, like Chelmsford or Colchester. We are multiple communities spread across a rural landscape. We have two railway lines that come into Walton and Clacton, with an hourly service that takes 90 minutes to cover the 69 miles to reach London. I have always said that is not acceptable in this day and age. It is certainly not appealing to commuters and is a great barrier to levelling up my patch. There is the unfair and flippant view, about which we heard earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney, that the east of England is just universally wealthy. We know that it is not. Try telling that to pockets of my constituency, which have deprivation issues that outstrip anywhere in Scotland or Wales. That is just a fact.

The roads are a core part of that and some are in a very poor state. They are the only way to get from one end of my constituency to the other. If we throw in some roadworks, which we recently had in Kirby Cross, it is somehow quicker to get to London than it is to cross the 14 miles of my constituency. That is ridiculous. We must invest in my constituency's roads, which means affordable homes and sustainable jobs, if they can be built in the right places. We currently lag behind urban neighbours. We talk about how future rail such as High Speed 2 will change the world. What about the old-fashioned, crumbling roads that are holding back areas such as Clacton?

The east of England has been granted a fantastic and brilliant opportunity with Freeport East. That will help enormously with the global powerhouse that my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney mentioned earlier. It will create jobs and provide long-term income for the

area. We need to utilise it, and I can think of no better way than by investing in transport infrastructure, so jobs in the freeport can be accessed from areas such as Jaywick, which is the most deprived ward in the country. This is our opportunity not to gloss over the situation. It is a better chance than any for the Government to show their long-term ambitions for levelling up and really improve the lives of my constituents. My plea to the Minister is that she should not think the job is done following the latest round of investment. Instead, I urge her to work with colleagues in the Department for Transport and the Department for Work and Pensions, to maximise the benefits of levelling up in tucked-away coastal communities such as mine in Clacton.

9.59 am

**Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) on securing the debate. I pay tribute to him and to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for their leadership of the important all-party parliamentary group. It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling). I am very fond of Clacton. I have been a resident of the east of England for nearly 17 years, and I know my hon. Friend's constituency well. We campaigned on a by-election together, with good long-term results.

It is important to say that the contributions so far have included some serious issues that need to be addressed, which I say as the Member of Parliament for Witham for just over 12 years. My hon. Friend the Member for Clacton is the chairman of GEML, which for the benefit of *Hansard* is the Great Eastern Main Line taskforce. I co-set that up nearly 10 years ago: GEML was all about getting infrastructure investment into that main line. We have been successful, though I will touch on some elements that have not materialised. There are important areas, highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney, that speak to lamentable actions across Government and the low confidence that my hon. Friend touched on. I want to speak specifically about those.

First and foremost, infrastructure clearly covers road and rail. That has frankly become a joke in the overall way that Whitehall has failed to integrate. That is not to do with the Minister's Department; it is a failure of the Whitehall system to work across Departments and integrate funding. Basically, securing investment in our infrastructure is one example of how we can support levelling up. It is a statement of the obvious.

We have new rolling stock on our line—part of the GEML taskforce—for a very good reason. A decade ago, I and colleagues across that network went to the Treasury and the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, the former Member for Tatton, and put forward a business case. Some of us are capable of putting together presentations and business cases. We put that forward in conjunction with Network Rail and it secured £600 million, linked to a nine-year franchise that was very much about delivering rolling stock, improvements on productivity, performance and so on. We achieved that, but it is only one example.

The failure to secure funding for Ely junction and Haughley junction was not the fault of the taskforce but of Whitehall, and its lack of integration. Those sites

are not in my constituency, but they are east of England infrastructure projects that would unlock the economic potential not just of the east, but of the nation. It is interesting that, at a time when HS2 is again being vilified for a range of reasons, such as being over budget and not on time, we have to stick the course with infrastructure projects.

The problem is that the Armitt process has not been published. That is the funding mechanism, which sits in the Department for Transport, for securing these major infrastructure projects. The other problem, as we have already heard, is that the east of England is a net contributor. Our main line has been subsidising the rail network for the rest of the country for decades. That money goes to the Treasury. The revenue base sits with Treasury, and the Department for Transport is deprived of the funding stream to help with the financial pipeline of rail investment.

**Giles Watling:** Does my right hon. Friend not believe that the investment in Haughley and Ely is relatively low? We are not asking for a lot of money. It would unblock the blockage; it would take the cork out of the bottle of the entire east-west connection.

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend, the chair of the GEMIL rail taskforce, has hit the nail on the head: this speaks to a fundamental failure in Whitehall, and my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney repeatedly highlighted that. This is the core message that has to be taken away, and that is just on rail. Of course, rail supports economic growth. The west Anglia line is another classic case. With four trains an hour to Stansted airport, it feels like “Mission Impossible” right now. Some proper work needs to be undertaken, and the Government need to support that. We have been successful in getting Emirates into Stansted. We want to get other international airlines, as my hon. Friend said, including from India.

On roads, I have again secured funding, as a Member of Parliament, for feasibility studies on the A12 and A120, but yet again we are going round the merry-go-round of not getting the commitment from central Government to proceed with those schemes. Quite frankly, that is down to inadequacies with National Highways, which fails to operate in a transparent way, to engage with local community or the county council, which has responsibility for the strategic road network, or to engage with the Department for Transport, so we are not getting the road upgrades we need in the county. Those road networks are the economic arteries of the east of England.

**Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con):** Integration in the planning of infrastructure goes beyond just roads and rail; there is the integration of offshore wind into the national transmission network. Only in East Anglia are there radial connections from offshore wind to the national transmission network. The rest of the country benefits from the holistic network design. Does my right hon. Friend agree that East Anglia should be included in that design and that we should move away from these radial connections?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I will come on to energy shortly for another reason, and I will pick up on that point after I conclude on the issue of roads.

Essex is a net contributor, and the A12 and A120 are literally roads from the dark ages. They are deeply unsafe roads. If we care about road safety and the people who get up every day at the crack of dawn, such as lorry drivers and commuters, to service our public services or to come to London to provide services for major hotels and the UK’s service sector, we must upgrade these roads. It is becoming a joke right now—it really is. It is an insult to commuters and the people who use the roads who have to navigate the potholes and poor quality of the roads every single day. They feel, by the way, that they are getting an unfair deal when they fill up their cars because of the cost of fuel at the pump. This is not a criticism of the Minister’s Department, but it shows the breadth of issues that need to be grasped across Government on integration to provide those levelling-up outcomes. Otherwise, levelling up will just become a slogan.

I would like to touch on a couple of other areas, which are both linked. One is skills and education. I am proud not just to be the Member of Parliament for Witham, but to represent Essex and the east region. When I became the MP for Witham, the majority of my schools locally were in special measures or required improvement. I am pleased to say right now that we have great schools—good schools and outstanding schools—and, as a result, Witham is now a commuter town. People want to live and work there, and some schools are outstanding—that is a great thing. We need not just to give our youngsters great educational opportunities through our schools, but to ensure that they can get jobs and that they inherit skills for life. That could be skills within the region for the great energy coastline that we have developed over the past decade, which has been remarkable, and previous Ministers in Government should be thanked for their hard work on that matter.

Essex is a county of entrepreneurs, and I never tire of saying that. We are the home of small businesses and innovators, and R&D is big in Essex. However, our prosperity masks challenges when it comes to deprivation, as we have heard, but also skills, opportunity and aspiration. We need businesses to work with our schools and get their foot in the door to talk to pupils at an earlier age. I have a careers fair taking place on 24 March in Witham. I never tire of being a champion of those skills fairs, and we are bringing in businesses from former industries I have worked in to those schools. I want to see Government embrace that, because the apprenticeship levy is, quite frankly, not delivering the outcomes it was originally set up to deliver. I maintain that it needs reform. Of course, by getting those skills locally, we can create jobs with skills that focus on areas that Members have touched on already. I feel very strongly about that.

I want to touch on health, which has been raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney said that we do not have a technology campus in the east of England—I agree, and we should work to achieve that—but we do have a university medical school. I was involved in the original bid to do the business case for that, and I am proud that we achieved it. However, I am afraid that our health infrastructure across the east of England is inadequate. Our patient-GP ratio is one of the highest in the country, and we are not training enough students in our medical schools. We need to do much more.

[Priti Patel]

When he was Health Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt) worked well with us to deliver some good health outcomes, but there is much more that needs to be done. We are an ageing part of the country, but we must work with our young people to grow skills in health and social care. I pay tribute to Essex County Council for the work it is doing in that area.

This is a message to central Government: we cannot have people working in silos in Government anymore. When I was Home Secretary, the Health Department said to me, “Please do much more on health and social care visas,” which I am pleased that we have done—I did that as Home Secretary. However, there is more that we need to do in that area, and we also need more home-grown talent.

Finally, planning is the biggest issue in my constituency casework. Witham has become a building site over the past decade. We are building homes, and it is right that we do that. The question is, are they affordable homes? We have already heard of the high income ratio that is required to live in our fantastic part of the country. This point is specific to the Minister’s Department. Planning is contentious, and we are not getting it right in this country; there is no doubt about that.

In Essex, and in my constituency in particular, we stopped the West Tey development, a proposal for a garden community of 45,000 new homes—which, by the way, was without any infrastructure at all. The entire concept was an absolute scandal and a disgrace. I pay tribute to campaigners such as Rosie Pearson and others in my constituency who worked together to bring that to the Planning Inspectorate and get that proposal overturned. Five-year land supply has also been a problem, along with local councils that have no neighbourhood plans. I want to put on the record the fact that I think it is deeply disappointing that the Department, in its former guise as the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, used taxpayers’ funds to boost and beef up that concept without working in a considered way with the local community on the kind of housing that was required.

I am afraid that this is not specific to the Minister’s Department. We are going through this all over again with another project: pylons. It is less about housing, but it will become a planning issue. The development of pylons across the east of England will, frankly, have a detrimental impact. We are pioneers in offshore grid wind farm development and renewables, and we must absolutely look to invest in that capability, rather than putting up more infrastructure that will bring great blight to our local communities and, I am afraid, agitate them even more.

I know I have taken up a great deal of time, Mr Davies. In conclusion, there are great things about the east of England. We are net contributors to His Majesty’s Treasury, and we cross-subsidise much of the United Kingdom through the hard graft of the great men and women of the east of England, but we are lagging behind on these key assets that are of national significance. My hon. Friend the Minister can only do so much with her remit in her Department. My wider message is about devolution and local government reorganisation, as well as about the size of the state in Whitehall; how

bloated and unaccountable that has become, and how detached it is from the good men and women of the east of England who, as taxpayers, contribute to the bureaucracy of Whitehall and get very little back. That is where reform has to start. The devolution train is well under way now—certainly in our part of the country. In Essex, I back it. Quite frankly, we need reform of the core of Whitehall to start delivering for the good people of the east of England.

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** I call the last, but not least, of the Back Benchers, James Wild.

10.14 am

**James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) on securing this debate and on the great work that he does with the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) in chairing the APPG. I will begin by marking the 70th anniversary of the terrible floods that look lives in Hunstanton, Heacham, Snettisham, King’s Lynn and along the east coast in my constituency.

As we have heard, the east of England is a driver of growth and one of only three regions that are net contributors to the Exchequer. However, the full potential of our region is being held back by barriers including skills, connectivity and housing. I am fortunate to represent one of the most attractive constituencies in the country, but it is also a priority 1 levelling-up area due to the deprivation that exists in certain parts, as it does in other areas of Norfolk and across the east. Levelling up is therefore as relevant in North West Norfolk as it is anywhere in the country.

For me, levelling up is about spreading opportunity, which starts with education. The paper from the APPG highlights the challenge of meeting the 2030 reading, writing and maths targets. That mission is essential to giving young people the best opportunity to realise their potential. Much will depend on the White Paper’s parent pledge and on supporting teachers to deliver the improvements.

Giving children the best environment in which to learn is also important. I welcome the inclusion of Smithdon High School, and King Edward VII Academy, where I am a governor, in the school rebuilding programme to give young people the best facilities. From my weekly visits to schools across the constituency, I know that they continue to face significant issues, despite the additional £4.6 billion to which the Government have committed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney highlighted, the current funding formula does not work effectively for rural schools. That is particularly the case with special educational needs and disabilities, which the head of St Martha’s Catholic Primary School raised with me only a week ago. There is much anticipation for the forthcoming Government response to the consultation on special educational needs and disabilities to ensure that provision can meet growing demand.

This is a timely debate, coming a week after the latest round of the levelling-up fund. I am grateful to the Minister that the £24 million bid submitted by Norfolk County Council to transform the 15th-century South Gate entrance to King’s Lynn has been successful. That will do a lot to promote growth, improve transport links, protect heritage and improve air quality. That



comes after the success of the £25 million town deal for King's Lynn, which will deliver projects to boost skills, jobs and regeneration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) will be interested to know about the project to restore St George's Guildhall, which is the oldest continually working theatre in the country and the only one that can credibly claim Shakespeare performed there. That is £49 million of investment in a priority 1 levelling-up area, underlining the Government's commitment to North West Norfolk and to working with Conservative council leaders Stuart Dark and Andrew Proctor to spread opportunity in our area.

Many of the issues facing my constituents and local businesses come down to connectivity, and digital connectivity is crucial. Due to the geography of the rural area, Norfolk lags behind other areas in mobile and broadband, which is why I pressed for it to be included in the early phase of Project Gigabit. Contracts worth over £100 million to connect 86,000 premises are due to be awarded in May. That could cover up to 8,000 premises in my constituency, making a real difference to growth and productivity.

Turning to rail, I will highlight the importance of upgrading Ely junction, as others have. The project is backed by MPs across the east of England precisely because it will deliver a major boost in capacity—up to 30%. That will create more passenger services for my constituency and support freight and Freeport East, delivering a major boost to growth for our area and the country. That is the case regardless of the damage that the unions are currently doing with their strike action. The business case by Network Rail demonstrates a benefit-cost ratio of nearly £5 for every £1 invested. That compares favourably with any other rail project. I hope that the project will proceed in the next rail network enhancements pipeline update.

A number of colleagues have commented on roads. My constituents want to see the A47 dualled, and the next investment round should include the Tilney to East Winch scheme that has been prioritised by Transport East. That comes on top of six schemes that are currently under way in the road investment strategy 2 process. The A10 West Winch housing access road is desperately needed to unlock—as the name suggests—housing in a growth area. Work is continuing on the next phase of the business case for that. We need to have the infrastructure alongside the affordable homes that people desperately need.

Finally, the APPG report highlights low confidence regarding the mission on health and life expectancy, which is a vital issue. North West Norfolk has many of the coastal areas that the chief medical officer has highlighted as having some of the worst health outcomes. People living in those areas are served by the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn. The hospital has nearly 3,400 steel and timber supports holding up its cracking concrete roof, which desperately needs to be replaced. The new hospital programme offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform the QEH, to deliver modern, fit-for-purpose facilities, and to support people to live healthier lives. The Health and Social Care Secretary has stated that dealing with hospitals made of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete is his priority, and I welcome the focus that he has brought to

solving this problem. I call on the Government to give certainty to my constituents, patients and staff that the QEH will be rebuilt by 2030.

In conclusion, the APPG report and the debate show that progress is good in some areas, but greater focus is needed elsewhere to realise the huge potential of the east of England and to meet the cost-cutting missions and our shared ambition to level up.

10.20 am

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Davies, and to speak in this debate on behalf of the Opposition.

As has been mentioned, it is a little over a year since we had a similar iteration of this debate. I was relatively new in my role as shadow Minister and rather expected a blizzard of similar, regional-type levelling-up debates in this Chamber, but that has not been the case. That is testimony to the commitment of the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), but also to his ingenuity in the use of the Backbench Business Committee process and to the wisdom of the Committee's members. I associate myself with comments that he and others have made about the 70th anniversary of the 1953 storms. We will all hold those communities in our thoughts as they mark the anniversary today and tomorrow.

I was struck by the way in which the hon. Gentleman's all-party parliamentary group is monitoring levelling up on a thematic basis, which probably provides a good model for the rest of the country. There are likely to be some similarities, particularly the more input-type targets, such as on research and development, which are easier to do. Progress is good, but there are knottier, longer-term questions around skills, transport and housing. As he said, we could debate each of them at great length. They pose common challenges across the regions, and they show how much further we have to go.

The region was well represented in the debate, and I agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) said about long-term funding moving away from the "Hunger Games"-style stuff that we have seen with the levelling-up fund, and all the disappointment that it has clearly generated in Bedford and other parts of the country.

In response to a comment made by the hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling), levelling up can be a funny fish. All our communities are different in some way, and we could create many different carve-outs for towns, cities, rural, coastal, north, south or whatever, to the point that the scheme would stop meaning anything. There has to be some degree of commonality so that there is a consistent and effective approach, but coastal might just be different in this case. There are many issues relating to housing and mental health services that mean that we have to have a bit of an enhanced approach to coastal communities if we are going to deal with some of the knotty, long-term challenges. I think the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) said that the hinterland may mask a lot of those social challenges, which is a very important point.

One of the things I will take away from the debate is the cross-departmental focus. We have many different and well-meant interventions from all over Government, but how do we get true value? For me, the answer is

[Alex Norris]

devolution—certainly of the leadership, if not of all the funding and the power—to those communities, because place is the best way to hold all those different streams together.

I knew the hon. Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild) would not miss an opportunity to raise QEH, as he does with admirable consistency. He made an important point about the funding formula for rural schools, which can have a profound impact on resources for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Members do not see levelling up as either a “north versus south” thing or a “London versus the rest of the UK” thing. We recognise that there is deprivation in every local authority, and all right hon. and hon. Members made that case very well. For the east of England, that is certainly a real challenge. If we look at the top lines—it is one of the net contributing regions and it has high home ownership—we could kid ourselves about some of the underlying challenges. That point has been well made in the debate.

Of course, the region has huge potential. The hon. Member for Waveney spoke about energy, which made me think of a visit I undertook with the Industry and Parliament Trust last week to the east midlands. We went to see Donaldson Timber in Ilkeston, which has 10 similar sites around the country, including one in Cambridge that serves the east of England. It specialises in off-site timber making and provides hundreds of jobs and tens of thousands of homes each year. If we get the right mix of increased house building and skills, sites like that in Cambridge have the potential to create many more skilled jobs in careers that will last. That is the sort of potential we need to tap into through levelling up-type interventions.

We have to deal with the problem that the brand of levelling up has become highly discredited. YouGov polling this year showed that in only four local authority areas residents feel that their community has improved in recent years, whereas in 215 areas they think it is the same, and in 142 they think it has got worse. Of course, that is understandable and right: people cannot see a GP, they cannot get a train, the available jobs are insecure and on low pay, and there is the sense that nothing in this country works any more.

The levelling-up model has not delivered by tackling that. Devolution deals are great, unless the Government have decided an area is not good enough to have one or that it deserves more limited powers than others. Similarly, the “Hunger Games”-style funding by bidding for pots has not delivered. Those who succeeded in round 1 are now trying to work out how to salvage bids that have been eaten up by the inflation crisis. Round 2 threw up some eccentric and disappointing outcomes for many, including confusion about whether some areas could ever have been successful. If not, why were they encouraged to bid?

Indeed, even the winners are losers. For example, it is great news that Norfolk County Council has secured £24 million to improve transport in King’s Lynn; it is less good news that, even taking that money into account, in the last four years alone, that local authority is £146 million worse off in real terms due to cuts to its budget. With levelling up, even the winners are losers.

It does not have to be this way. There is a better model that would deliver for the nations and regions of this country. We can end the deals and the beauty parades, provided we get the powers and resources to all our nations and regions—to the experts in place—to shape their economies and invest in the things they know their areas will be good at in the future and that their young people will work in. We want every community, as part of a combined authority—or on its own if it is big enough—to access top-level powers. We want to go further than what is on offer on skills, devolution, the Department for Work and Pensions and jobcentres, net zero and much more. We want to move funding away from having hundreds of different pots and instead, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford said, have proper funding based on need, with consolidated settlements, so that local communities can plan and spend in a way that reflects their priorities.

There are significant political conversations to have about levelling up in this country, as there are in the east of England, but we must be hopeful as we have those. The hon. Member for Waveney and many other colleagues have shown the clear potential in the east of England. We want the power and resources to be given to those communities to make that potential a reality.

10.28 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Dehenna Davison):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, I think for the first time.

Huge congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) on securing this vital debate. I echo the sentiments that have been expressed across the Chamber to mark 70 years since the terrible storm that took far too many lives.

Huge congratulations to the APPG for the east of England, that incredible cross-party body, on producing an incredibly insightful report, which my officials and I have been pleased to read and look into. It shone the brightest possible light on the region’s towering strengths: energy and clean growth, with the east of England producing more than half of the UK’s offshore wind and power; exports and global trade, with Felixstowe alone accounting for more than 40% of national container traffic; and the life sciences sector, which my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney mentioned. AstraZeneca’s R&D facility is rightly cited in the APPG’s report as an exemplar of the region’s booming sector, not least for its leading role in producing the life-saving covid-19 vaccine, for which we are all incredibly grateful.

For all those brilliant strengths, the report also highlights how the east of England faces its own challenges, too. As my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney highlighted, last year the Government published their levelling-up White Paper, where we outlined 12 key levelling-up missions between now and 2030. I fear, as my hon. Friend did, that I might scratch only the surface of the issues, but I will endeavour to cover as much ground as I can.

I will start with devolution—something very close to my heart and within my brief, so hopefully I have an advantage on my first point. As I read the report, I was a little troubled to find only medium confidence in delivering devolution. I clearly want that to be high confidence, so I will address a few of the points raised today.

We are pleased with our progress on devolution, particularly in the east of England with the historic deals we recently signed with both Norfolk and Suffolk. We all know that local areas know best what they need; they know better than Whitehall and we Ministers in Westminster ever will, and that is what devolution is all about. Transferring money and powers on housing, regeneration and skills will empower new directly elected leaders to drive local growth and focus on their priorities to level up their own areas.

That comes on top of substantial devolution and local growth commitments that we have already made through investments such as the £500 million city deal with Greater Cambridge and the £600 million Cambridgeshire and Peterborough devolution deal, and wider investment across the region through the getting building fund and £1.5 billion from the local growth fund. To reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney and others, devolution deals are only one of the areas where my Department works in co-ordination across Government to deliver on levelling up. That is what the White Paper with its 12 missions was all about: recognising that levelling up has to be a whole Government effort.

An inter-ministerial group was recently established to pull together Ministers from across Government to focus on core levelling-up outcomes and missions to make sure there is a co-ordinated effort. Without such effort, we never will achieve the levelling up that this country deserves.

For years the east of England has been a region that punches above its weight, but arguably below its potential. If we want to realise the full potential of the region, we need to level up skills provision—the region currently falls below the national average. I was concerned to read in the report that participation and academic achievements in the east of England were among the lowest of all regions in England. As we would expect, where there is a lack of skills and too few decent jobs to go around, there is inevitably deprivation as well. That remains a real challenge for the region, which has pockets of significant poverty, including in coastal towns, as highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling), such as Jaywick, Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth.

I was pleased to see the recommendation in the report that the Government should promote skills devolution—something on which we are very much focused. In the current academic year, the Government have devolved approximately 60% of the adult education budget to nine mayoral combined authorities and the Greater London Authority, and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough received £11.9 million in the most recent financial year. As set out in the levelling-up White Paper, devolution of adult education funding has been a core part of all MCA devolution deals to date.

The Department for Education has committed to devolving adult education functions and the associated core adult education budget to new areas from 2025-26 as part of new devolution deals. We have worked across the country with new areas on devolution, including Norfolk and Suffolk, as I have already referenced. We will fully devolve the adult education budget in Norfolk from the academic year 2025-26, subject to readiness conditions and parliamentary approval of the required legislation.

We are also ensuring that everyone, irrespective of their age or background, has access to high-quality education or training, while prioritising the needs of employers. We are investing £3.8 billion more in further education and skills—

**Priti Patel:** Before my hon. Friend moves on to further education, let me ask about skills devolution; we in Essex have wanted this for a long time, so we must have it. What work is taking place to bring businesses into skills devolution? Local authorities, like Whitehall, can only do so much. This is all about ensuring that businesses are connected with a potential pool of labour and a talent base, so that this can come together.

**Dehenna Davison:** My right hon. Friend will recognise that that does not fit within my brief, but I can reference the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, local skills improvement plans and work that is being done on our trailblazing devolution deals to further devolve skills powers, which would take into account local skills needs as outlined by local businesses. More on that will be coming soon, when we announce further details on those deals. We are investing in further education skills over this Parliament to ensure that people can get on the ladder of really good, high-quality training and education that leads to good jobs, addresses skills gaps, boosts productivity and, ultimately, supports levelling up.

Having skills really is not the end of it. Without stable and reliable jobs to go along with those skills, areas such as the east of England could lose their newly skilled and experienced workforce, which we of course want to avoid. The region already boasts incredible companies, particularly in life sciences. The Cambridge Biomedical Campus is the largest centre of life sciences and medical research in Europe, employing over 20,000 researchers, industry scientists and clinicians. I have referenced internationally significant companies such as AstraZeneca, with their £1 billion state-of-the-art global research and development facility, and GlaxoSmithKline.

There is always more to do to make sure that people have the necessary skills and adequate jobs. That is why, in the autumn statement last November, the Government reaffirmed their commitment to Sizewell C, which, once operational, will generate 7% of the UK's energy needs. This investment is vital to the Government's net zero strategy, which is connected to the east of England's 13th mission, which we are working across Government to ensure we deliver. The Government's £700 million investment in the project marks a further step towards energy independence for the UK, while providing a boost to the local economy in Suffolk, with over 10,000 highly skilled jobs set to be created during the plant's lifetime. The skills investment and devolution is on top of other education investment—for example, the £294.9 million extra being provided for mainstream schools in the east of England this year, as well as the three priority education investment areas in the east of England.

As hon. Members from across the Chamber have highlighted, the issues go beyond skills shortages. Poor connectivity is holding the region back. A lack of decent rail and public transport connections between towns and cities means that a lot of people are forced to drive, not just for their commute but for hospital



*[Dehenna Davison]*

appointments, to go shopping, and to visit friends and loved ones. Transport East estimates that well over 40% of the region's carbon emissions are down to private car use. There is a long way to go to bring that figure down over the medium to long term. That throws into sharp relief the need for the Government to redouble our efforts on levelling up when it comes to transport.

I have heard much, loud and clear, about the Ely and Haughley junctions, and will elbow colleagues in the Department for Transport to meet you guys who raised the matter to discuss it further. It is vital that we continue to improve roads across the region, as has been mentioned by a number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton and my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel). We have invested £462 million in local roads maintenance between 2022-3 and 2024-5, and £88 million in transport improvements across the east of England. We are going further to ensure that we improve capacity on the railways and bus services, because that rail capacity is crucial, as we all know.

East West Rail plays a vital role in boosting connectivity and unlocking productivity in the Oxford to Cambridge area, supporting access to jobs, education and other opportunities. It plans to create a direct rail link between Oxford and Cambridge, significantly improving journey times, and delivering benefits for passengers and businesses regionally and nationally. The Government have provided £1.3 billion towards the delivery of connection stage 1 of the project, which will provide services between Oxford, Bletchley and Milton Keynes. In the autumn statement the Government affirmed their commitment to plans for transformative growth for our railways, including East West Rail, and I am told that an update on that project will be provided in due course.

On buses, DfT is providing over £100 million of bus service improvement plan funding in the east of England, with £49.6 million going to Norfolk County Council. That will make a significant contribution to local public transport connectivity in the region. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority received £4.3 million funding from the zero emission bus regional areas scheme, for 30 double-deck electric buses to be introduced on park and ride bus routes in Cambridge.

Let me turn to the APPG's recommendation that simpler, long-term funding mechanisms are required to support the priorities set out in the strategies of the region's two sub-national transport bodies. DfT seeks to ensure that all local transport authorities have stronger plans and capabilities to deliver enhanced local public transport. DfT is currently developing guidance and options to incentivise the refresh of local transport plans, so that places have an up-to-date plan for improving connectivity.

As previously mentioned—this is a bit of a pet project of mine—devolution of powers and funding is an intrinsic part of that work. The recently signed devolution deals in the east of England mark a new relationship between Government and Norfolk and Suffolk. A directly elected leader for each county will be responsible for a devolved and consolidated integrated local transport budget for their area, consisting initially of the local highways maintenance funding, both the pothole fund and highways

maintenance block, and the integrated transport block, helping to provide strong local leadership and better transport outcomes for local people.

I was pleased to read in the report that the APPG agrees that living standards, especially when it comes to pay, employment, research and development, and wellbeing within the region, are all trending in the right direction. In the same breath, I was disappointed by the report's assessment of digital connectivity and pride in place, as I know that my Department, and Departments across Government, are working incredibly hard to ensure we make progress on those areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild) raised the issue of gigabit broadband coverage. In the east of England alone, that has increased from 5% in November 2019 to 61% in January 2022, and since then that coverage has been expanding rapidly, with forecasts predicting it should reach 70% to 80% by 2025. Ensuring that areas in the east of England with the poorest fixed and mobile connectivity are improved is a big priority for my Department and for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. In terms of mobile connectivity alone, the majority of 4G coverage uplifts from a shared rural network will come from the industry-led element of the network, which will target partial notspots in areas where there is coverage from at least one but not all mobile network operators.

As all hon. Members will know, growing people's pride in the places where they live and work is at the heart of the investment we are making through the levelling-up fund. On that basis, I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Clacton and for North West Norfolk on their successful bids, on which I know they and their local authority teams worked incredibly hard. I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney that full written feedback will be provided to local authorities and the MPs who supported the bids, with the option of follow-up verbal meetings to go through the bids and see how they can be strengthened to secure potential future funding.

Our flagship levelling-up funding investment is helping people in a huge number of overlooked and under-appreciated communities in the east of England. Some £253 million has already been allocated; of that, £87 million was awarded in round 1 and £166 million was awarded in round 2. Almost £48 million was awarded to redevelop the station quarter in Peterborough and nearly £60 million-worth of bids were successful in Tendring, Harlow and Colchester. On top of that, the east of England has been allocated a total of £97 million from the UK shared prosperity fund.

I should highlight that the UK shared prosperity fund is one measure that the Government have taken to simplify funding streams and give more autonomy to local areas to deliver, without having to go through competitive funding processes. I hope that will reassure the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin). That is just one of the measures we are taking, and a funding simplification plan is coming incredibly soon.

We all recognise that significant population growth in any area will have an impact on vital and speedy access to healthcare for all residents, as highlighted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham, my hon. Friends the Members for Waveney and for North West Norfolk, and the hon. Member for Bedford. That is why, in the autumn statement, the Government made

up to £8 billion available to the NHS and adult social care in England in 2024-25, including an additional £3.3 billion in both 2023-24 and 2024-25.

The Department of Health and Social Care works closely with NHS England and regional teams to distribute that funding settlement as needed, in order to reflect and address the needs of local populations, including through the agreement of annual plans for each NHS trust. Healthcare funding allocations are weighted heavily towards deprivation, which in turn correlates strongly with need. Per capita, funding for the most deprived local authorities is on average about 130% more than for the least deprived.

Finally, to ensure that we are improving capacity and capability in the healthcare system in the east of England, we are continuing to build five new hospitals as part of the Government's commitment to build 40 new hospitals by 2030. That includes the rebuilding of James Paget University Hospital and the West Suffolk Hospital, a new cancer hospital at Addenbrooke's, a new high-tech healthcare campus to replace the ageing Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow, new hospital buildings at Watford General Hospital and the refurbishment of Hemel Hempstead and St Albans City Hospitals.

I hope that has given a rough flavour of just some of the work that is going on right across Government to ensure that we are focusing on levelling up, obviously with specifics for the east of England. I know how hard the APPG and all Members present have worked on preparing this incredibly insightful report, which my Department and others have valued a great deal. As well as the challenges, some of which we have touched on, it reinforces that the region really is a true economic success story. As has been highlighted, it is a net contributor to the Treasury; few regions can boast of that, and it is something that the region should rightly be proud of. It is an international gateway for global Britain, and it boasts some of the highest levels of employment, pay and productivity anywhere in the UK.

Our shared challenge now is ensuring that the huge benefits of these tremendous assets and opportunities are shared more evenly across the region and that it ultimately achieves its true potential. As my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney and others have rightly highlighted, ensuring that the east of England reaches its potential really is core to the prospects of the UK as a whole. I believe that there is every chance we can ensure the east of England reaches its potential.

The report illuminates the significant progress we have made on our levelling-up mission so far, but it also shows that there is clearly room for improvement. To reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton, we know that the job is not done; we set out those missions to aim towards by 2030 to ensure that we are levelling up in the east of England and right across the UK. The only way we can achieve that is by ensuring that we are working cross-Government, cross-Whitehall and, of course, cross-party to ensure that we are achieving what we need to achieve to truly level up the UK.

On that basis, I look forward to continuing to work cross-party with Members across the House, and with Ministers across Government, to unlock the east of England and the UK's true potential.

10.47 am

**Peter Aldous:** We have had a very full debate. I will go through the contributions made by hon. Members and hon. Friends, and I will try to pull one or two things together out of those.

The hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) highlighted the importance of investment in health infrastructure and services. He is right to do so, because it is something that particularly concerns a great many of our constituents, and we must get that right. We have had a lot of discussion about the importance of rail, which I will come to in a minute. Being at the west of the region, he has highlighted the importance of East West Rail and, generally, in the east of England that can be a challenge.

We look so much north-south and at the roads to London; in fact, very often our road network is focused on the roads down to London. The A12 used to be a toll road from Yarmouth, and it was the main road serving that part of the area, and there was also the A10. Actually, those cross-country routes—whether they are the railways or the roads—are so important. In Suffolk or Norfolk, there is the A143, which links to Lowestoft but actually runs from Yarmouth right down on the county border through to Bury St Edmunds and down to Haverhill. That is a tortuous way to go down, so those cross-country routes are absolutely vital.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) emphasised the challenges faced by Jaywick and also highlighted the railways. Like me, his constituency is served by two railway lines, and he highlighted the slow, tortuous journey to Liverpool Street. From my perspective, on the East Suffolk line from Lowestoft to Ipswich the journey time has not improved since 1859. That is another particular challenge that we need to address.

A lot of our strategic investment in the coming years will be in the railways, but the road network is there and we must not forget it. There are pinch points and particular challenges. The A12 through Essex is heavily overused. Quite frankly, its activity justifies M status, but I do not think that will ever come, and we have to address that. Because of a lack of maintenance, a lot of our main roads are turning into little more than country tracks in some respects, which reminds me that there were most regrettable accidents on the B1062, which links Beccles to Bungay, over the new year period. I talked that through with the local community and the county council. The county council engineer is doing great work. He said, "We have analysed what happened and think there is a need for improvement, and you are now in the top 20% of our priority schemes." I thought, "Great." I said to him, "How many priority schemes do you have?" And he said, "Oh, 10,000". That illustrates that investment in the existing network—

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** I remind the hon. Gentleman that this should be a short winding-up rather than a full second speech.

**Peter Aldous:** I take that on board, Mr Davies. I thought I had a bit more time.

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** Just a few minutes.

**Peter Aldous:** That is fine. My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) gave an impassioned speech, which emphasised the railways. She raised reform of the apprenticeship levy, which is vital, and investment in skills.

My hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild) raised digital connectivity, which, although a medium risk in the report, is a challenge in the east of England because of our dispersed population, which covers a relatively large geographical area. I also have an interest in the A47, which runs from the A1 and, one might say, begins or finishes in my constituency—in Lowestoft. It is good that work has been done on that. He is an impassioned campaigner for the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The James Paget University Hospital, which serves my constituency, is going to be rebuilt. Investment in NHS buildings is important, as is addressing demand and the workforce.

The hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), speaking for the Opposition, raised some interesting points, including the common challenges across the country and how the approach that we have adopted might be an exemplar elsewhere. He also highlighted the particular challenges of coastal communities.

I thought the Minister gave a tremendous speech. It is unfortunate that, as I understand it, we will be losing her. She gets it; there was no camouflaging, and she came straight to the point, for which I thank her.

To sum up—my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham got this right—we have to break out of departmental silos. Levelling up is not just for my hon. Friend the Minister's Department but for all Departments. There were so many issues that were not necessarily for her to address in her remit; they cover the whole of Government. It is about thinking in a joined-up way down here in Whitehall and Westminster, and devolution to local authorities, which will be very important. My right hon. Friend also raised the fact that we have to bring business with us. I think the LEPs have been a success, because they have put business at the forefront. I am not sure about the future of LEPs, but whatever happens, business has to be there, working in partnership and in collaboration with local and national Government. *[Interruption.]* I see that you are getting impatient, Mr Davies, so on that point I will sum up. I thank all colleagues for their contributions to the debate and thank you for chairing it.

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** Thank you so much. We have certainly been levelling up the wind-ups.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered progress on the Government's levelling up missions in the East of England.

10.54 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Essex Mental Health Independent Inquiry

11 am

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** I will call Vicky Ford to move the motion. John Whittingdale will also speak for two minutes before the Minister responds.

**Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Essex Mental Health Independent Inquiry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. Today's debate is important for the future of mental health services across the country and ensuring that the tragic stories that I and many of my Essex colleagues have heard from the families affected by the failings in mental health services in Essex are not repeated. This is not the first time that mental health in Essex has been debated, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) for his previous Adjournment debate. Before I start, I ask everyone to take a moment to think about all those who have died, those who have suffered, those who love them and those who care for them.

As well as other in-patient facilities, many concerns have been raised about the Linden Centre in Chelmsford, where there have been a significant number of in-patient deaths, both on the wards and while vulnerable patients were on section 17 leave or had absconded. The Linden Centre lies just outside the boundary of my constituency, but the patients treated there come from across Chelmsford and, indeed, Essex. For example, Jayden Booroff was suffering from acute psychosis and known to be at high risk of absconding. In October 2020, he was killed by a train just a few hours after he had been able to tailgate a staff member out of the Linden Centre. The inquest concluded that Jayden died following inconsistencies in care at the Linden Centre run by Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, or EPUT. Jayden's mother, Michelle, is one of my constituents. She has told me of her wish to achieve accountability, for responsibility to be accepted and for long-term lasting improvements to services.

I and many of my Essex colleagues represent family members of mental health in-patients who have died under the care of EPUT, which is responsible for the provision of adult NHS mental health services in Essex. Many inquests and investigations have taken place, but it has been very clear for a long time that a fuller inquiry was necessary to understand why so many deaths have occurred and to try to prevent future tragedies.

In January 2021, the Government set up an independent inquiry, to be chaired by Dr Geraldine Strathdee, to investigate matters surrounding the deaths of mental health in-patients in Essex between 2000 and 2020. At the time, when local MPs were briefed on the issues, Ministers believed that a non-statutory inquiry was more appropriate, more likely to get to the truth and more likely to make recommendations for improvement in a timely manner, whereas a statutory inquiry was likely to take much longer to set up and report. It was made clear that, while the inquiry did not have statutory powers, witnesses were expected and would be encouraged to come forward and give evidence.

On 12 January 2023, I and many other Essex MPs were deeply concerned to receive the open letter published by the inquiry chair, Dr Strathdee, stating that she felt



that the non-statutory inquiry into EPUT was unable to fulfil the terms of reference due to the extremely low engagement of EPUT staff. We also heard that rather than the 1,500 deaths we had been informed of, close to 2,000 fall within the scope of the inquiry. It is incredibly disappointing that, of the 14,000 members of EPUT staff whom the inquiry had written to, only 11 had agreed to give evidence. In the specific cases that the inquiry is investigating, only one in four responded. That is a shockingly low figure. It is abundantly clear that, with this extremely small pool of staff witnesses, it is highly unlikely that the full truth would be heard.

Upon receipt of Dr Strathdee's letter, my right hon. Friends the Members for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) and for Witham (Priti Patel) immediately wrote to the Health Secretary to raise their serious concerns that the powers available to the inquiry did not go far enough. I have also written to the Health Secretary to underline my agreement with all the points they raised. Dr Strathdee's unequivocal view, as stated in her open letter, is that the inquiry will not be able to meet its terms of reference with a non-statutory status. I want to put it on the parliamentary record that I join those calls for this to be converted into a statutory inquiry, which will compel witnesses to give evidence, to ensure full transparency and greater public scrutiny of its progress.

**Sir James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): My hon. Friend knows that I did not support a public inquiry—I thought it would take a long time and be an expensive distraction from spending money on the service—but the approach we have taken simply has not worked. Unless the Department and EPUT transform miraculously over the next four weeks, the only real option is a statutory inquiry, for which she has our full support.

**Vicky Ford:** I thank my hon. Friend for his words, which are absolutely spot on, and for emphasising the support among Essex colleagues on this matter.

Having said that, I also recognise the points made to MPs in a letter from the chief executive of EPUT on 19 January. He points out that a public inquiry could bring consequent delays and costs, and the trust needs to be focused on continued improvement to services at a time of rising demand, both in numbers and complexity of cases.

He made a number of recommendations, including an increase in resources and expertise available to the inquiry chair, and ensuring appropriate information-sharing protocols. He also suggested a number of practical steps to drive better staff engagement with the inquiry. He has informed me that, since 2019, absconsions have decreased by more than 60%, the use of prone restraint has reduced by 88% and fixed ligature incidents have reduced by 32%. He has told me that many staff are scared to come forward, and that all board members will come forward now, as an example to others.

Given that, I can understand that Ministers might be tempted to give those suggestions a short period of time, to see if they bring improvements. However, I make two points. First, it is two years since the independent inquiry was announced. EPUT has already had a long time to take action and to support staff to engage. Secondly, given how incredibly low the engagement has been to date, I have serious doubts about whether the process would be effective. Therefore, I suggest that, if

Ministers decide to take this option, they should set a deadline of no more than one month, making it clear that if there is not a massive material change in staff engagement, the statutory route will be actioned. They should also make it clear that the statutory route is likely to include some staff being named, and being compelled to give evidence in public.

**Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate and for her contribution. I also want to pay tribute to the families who are here today. We support the point she makes about a statutory inquiry. I want to thank the Minister for his engagement on that. Alongside that, does my hon. Friend have any thoughts on the role of an independent public advocate for family members? Perhaps the Minister could also comment on that. Their voices are simply not being heard. At the end of the day, we are here to represent them against institutional state failure. Duty of candour for stuff to come forward is important, but the time has now come for an independent public advocate for family members.

**Vicky Ford:** I thank my right hon. Friend for making that point. It is important that the voices of the families are heard. I am about to come on to the point that it is also important that the voices of the survivors are heard. Anything we can do to help to ensure that those voices are heard is vital. In calling for a statutory inquiry, I am not just supporting the calls of the bereaved families, but those of the group that I strongly feel has not, until now, been mentioned often enough. That is the group who, although they did not lose their lives, have been victims of appalling care: they are the survivors. That group also falls within the scope of the inquiry, which is investigating issues beyond in-patient deaths, including the management of self-harm and suicide attempts, sexual safety on the wards, the use of restraint and restrictive practices with in-patient units, medication practices and management, and various other issues, as outlined in the inquiry terms of reference, which were published in May 2021.

One of my constituents shared with me the testimony that she has given to the inquiry. She describes how during her time at the Linden Centre in the mid-2000s, she was raped by another patient, and when she asked for support, she was laughed at by staff members. She describes being able to make suicide attempts, including absconding from the ward and overdosing, as well as being able to ligature on the ward. She has told me of times when staff refused to treat her self-harm injuries and how she herself treated her own serious injuries and the injuries of others. She has also described to me how she was repeatedly restrained, often held on the floor by a number of staff, and forcibly injected.

This survivor reflected to me that she had hoped things might have changed in the years since she was an in-patient, but the recent "Dispatches" documentary suggests to her and many others that that is not the case. This is just one of the appalling stories shared by survivors of the horrific treatment they suffered while in the care of mental health services in Essex. This survivor is absolutely clear about the need to establish answers and uncover the truth of the situation to ensure that nobody else has to suffer the trauma she faced, which will live with her for the rest of her life. This survivor and others who have worked with the inquiry simply want to ensure that this never happens again.

[Vicky Ford]

Before Christmas, I spoke in the Chamber of the House of Commons about my own lived experience. I explained that it is very hard to talk about one's own experiences of mental illness. It brings back all the horrors. The survivors who have shared their testimony are extraordinarily brave. I have asked what support is available for them, and I understand a contract is in place with Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, while psychological support is available to anyone involved in the inquiry. I understand also that some survivors might not be aware of that. EPUT has promised to publicise it, and I will ask the inquiry to ensure that it publicises it too.

Based on all that I have said, the words of the chair of the inquiry herself, and the devastating testimony of bereaved families and survivors, I believe that there is an urgent need to revisit the powers available to the inquiry and reconvene it on a statutory footing to ensure accountability and learning, and, most importantly, to embed long-lasting changes to safeguard lives in the future.

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** Thank you, Vicky. I invite John Whittingdale to speak for two minutes.

11.12 am

**Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con):** I start by thanking my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) for securing the debate and for allowing me to make a brief contribution.

I, too, represent several family members of those who lost their lives while in the care of EPUT. The matter has been continuing for a long time, and the inquiry is considering 20 years of NHS provision for people suffering from mental illness in Essex. We have had a number of inquests for those who died, and we have had Care Quality Commission investigations and police investigations, but there are still unanswered questions. For that reason, I agreed with and supported the establishment of the mental health inquiry by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries), who was then a Health Minister.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford has said, real concerns were expressed to us about the fact that the inquiry would not be statutory, but we were assured by the Minister that a non-statutory inquiry could reach conclusions faster than a statutory one and that there were other advantages to such an inquiry, which might lead to people being more willing to come forward than if the inquiry were under statutory control. I listened to the concerns expressed by my constituents who felt strongly that the inquiry should be statutory, but I accepted the assurances of the Minister. I want to say to the families that they were right and we were wrong, and I am sorry that that was the case. I was therefore greatly concerned when I saw the letter from the chair, who says that she has now concluded that statutory powers are needed owing to the lack of co-operation from staff and former staff, although initially she, too, had thought that a non-statutory inquiry was correct.

I have had a long conversation with the chair of the inquiry. I am impressed by her absolute determination to get to the truth and her independence. As my right

hon. Friend has said, the chair still hopes very much that not only staff members, but all family members who have evidence to give will come forward, particularly as there will be support available. I understand that the family members still believe the inquiry should be statutory. Therefore, I agree with my right hon. Friend that we have reached the point at which, unless we receive co-operation in a very short time, statutory powers are needed.

We need to get to the bottom of this. A figure of 2,000 deaths has mysteriously and suddenly appeared from the trust, and we need to find out what happened to those people. I say to the Minister that I understand the wish of the Government and the inquiry to obtain testimony from all those concerned, but if it cannot be achieved by the present arrangement, we will move to statutory powers.

11.15 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Neil O'Brien):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) for securing this important debate, and I thank her and all the local MPs—my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (Sir James Duddridge) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale)—for their dogged work over a long period in trying to get justice both for those in the Public Gallery and for all the others who are unable to be present this morning.

I know that Members have raised a lot of concerns about the progress of the inquiry, and I want to take this opportunity to make clear our strong commitment to this absolutely vital work. The speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford was stark, and I know that some of the victims, survivors, and friends and families of people who have been affected are in the Public Gallery. It is a powerful reminder of why the inquiry is so important: it has to get to the truth.

The Government are committed to improving mental health services across the country, which is why we launched the independent inquiry in January 2021, covering a 20-year period from 2000 to 2020. Obviously, it is a complex inquiry. Like Members present, I am pleased with the hard work of Dr Geraldine Strathdee, the inquiry chair, since the inquiry started its work. However, I am concerned about the level of co-operation that the inquiry has received, which was set out clearly by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford. It is not good enough, and Dr Strathdee has recently raised concerns about this. She met the Secretary of State and has since published an open letter in which she stated that

“in the event that staff engagement remains very poor, it is my view that the inquiry will not be able to meet its terms of reference with a non-statutory status.”

We take those concerns very seriously.

Dr Strathdee has raised two particular concerns. The first is about the participation of current and former staff, and the second is about the availability of documents for the inquiry. As a result of Dr Strathdee's concerns, the Secretary of State met Paul Scott, the chief executive of Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust,

to better understand how the trust will support the inquiry. The Secretary of State sought assurance on two key issues. The first is what actions the trust will take to encourage more staff engagement with the inquiry, and the second is assurance that the trust will provide all the evidence and information requested by the inquiry, to enable it to fulfil its terms of reference. I know that Mr Scott has also written to local MPs setting out the steps that he thinks necessary to improve engagement, and he feels confident that progress can be made.

On staff participation, I remind the House that it is incumbent on all holders of public office and all health professionals to demonstrate their fitness for office by voluntarily co-operating with independent inquiries. In their guidance on the duty of candour, professional regulators advise that health and care professionals must be open and honest with their colleagues, employers and relevant organisations, and take part in reviews and investigations when requested. Similarly, they must support and encourage each other to be open and honest. I therefore hope that anybody who is asked to contribute evidence will co-operate fully with the inquiry in the public interest and in fulfilment of their professional obligations. The Department is also working closely with the inquiry and NHS England to look at what more can be done.

Dr Strathdee has expressed her concern that an additional 600 cases were recently sent to the inquiry. The trust has advised that they were identified during a validation process. I appreciate that this is not ideal, but I understand that the trust has allocated appropriate staffing and resource to ensure the thoroughness of the searches requested by the inquiry.

As Members have mentioned, the participation of families is equally important to the work of the inquiry, and I am grateful to all who have provided evidence to date. I am disappointed that a number of families who have tragically lost loved ones have chosen not to participate and get their voices heard. I urge them to reconsider, so that the inquiry can be as thorough as possible.

Our view is that a non-statutory inquiry, if it is possible, remains the most effective way to get to the truth of what happens. It is quicker, and potentially involves not having to drag clinicians through the public processes of a statutory inquiry. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham was Home Secretary, she used the non-statutory process to protect those who did not want to be named and dragged through a statutory process. It is faster and more flexible, which is why it was chosen in the first place. Although statutory inquiries can compel witnesses to give evidence under oath, that does not necessarily mean that it will be easier to obtain the evidence we want. However, all that turns on people co-operating with a non-statutory inquiry, and we now need to see a quantum leap in the level of co-operation. We will not hesitate to move to a statutory inquiry if we do not see a dramatic increase in the level of co-operation. Given how long this has gone on, we cannot wait for a long period for a transformation in the level of engagement. While the approach remains non-statutory for now, we will not hesitate to change that approach if we do not see the change we need rapidly.

**Sir James Duddridge:** I have visited Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust in Rochford a number of times and have been incredibly impressed with its

work, notwithstanding its very real problems. What I cannot get over is why people have not come forward to give evidence in a non-statutory environment, because these are caring individuals who want to improve the service. I do not understand why only 11 people have come forward.

**Neil O'Brien:** That is a vital question. There is an excellent chair, and many publicly spirited individuals are already co-operating to get to the truth and improve services for the long-term. We are currently in this environment of the non-statutory inquiry, which allows an informal approach. People do not have to give evidence in the way they would if we went to a statutory approach. There is an opportunity for people to co-operate more with the inquiry, exactly as my hon. Friend says.

**Vicky Ford:** I understand that the Minister is asking for a quantum leap—that is a good phrase to describe the massive change we need—rapidly. Does he agree that rapidly should mean no more than one month?

**Neil O'Brien:** It is not for me to put a date on that in this setting. I have had conversations with a number of the hon. Members here, but my hon. Friend can rest assured from the tone of what I am saying that this will not be a long period of time. We are not kicking this into the long grass; we urgently need this change because, as numerous Members have pointed out, this has been going on for a long time and families who have been through the mill are waiting for justice.

**Sir John Whittingdale:** One of the problems with a non-statutory inquiry is people's reluctance to come forward. If it becomes statutory, certain consequences obviously follow, including the publication of the names of those who are summoned to appear. Will my hon. Friend the Minister think about making his requirement that the co-operation be achieved in a short space of time more public, so that people understand exactly what will follow if they continue to fail to co-operate?

**Neil O'Brien:** This debate goes some way to achieving exactly that. My right hon. Friend is exactly right that the current non-statutory approach has the benefit that those who give evidence do not have to be named. That is why it would clearly be more desirable if we could make the non-statutory approach work, but that has not been the case to date and, unless that changes, something else will have to change too.

To continue making progress in how we address issues with mental health services, Members will be aware that we have recently announced a rapid review into patient safety in mental health settings across England. The review will focus on what data and evidence is available to healthcare services. I am pleased that Dr Strathdee will be leading the rapid review over the next couple of weeks, given her knowledge and experience. However, I assure hon. Members that the work of the inquiry in Essex will continue at the same time.

I firmly believe in the importance of transparency and accountability to improve patient safety, and I wish to take all action necessary to assist the inquiry in its work. This is absolutely the last chance to make progress. If staff engagement and access to documents remain unsatisfactory despite these actions, we will consider whether the inquiry should remain on a non-statutory footing. We simply cannot go on as we have, with



[Neil O'Brien]

inadequate co-ordination and documents not being forthcoming. Everyone in the inquiry knows the situation and that there is not a long period of time for things to change.

I thank hon. Members for bringing forward the debate, because it allows us to set out the situation clearly for the public. I thank all who are here today, all who have co-operated with the inquiry, and all who have lost loved ones or been personally affected by this matter and have had the bravery and grit to come forward and talk about their experiences. We are extremely grateful to them.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.25 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## NHS Hysteroscopy Treatment

[SIR MARK HENDRICK *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Ms Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of NHS hysteroscopy treatment.

It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Mark. I am particularly glad to be joined in this debate by hon. Friends and by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price). When she was responsible for women's health, she took this issue seriously. We had a number of highly productive meetings about it, so it is welcome that we have the benefit of her ministerial experience in the debate.

This is the 10th time that I have spoken in this House about the completely unnecessary pain and trauma that women are subject to when they undergo hysteroscopies. Women who need pain relief are simply not being given it. They are being patronised, belittled and, frankly, betrayed. Effectively, they are bullied into accepting treatment so painful and damaging that they would never have agreed to it had they known what was coming.

I first spoke about how this issue needed to be resolved 10 years ago, at the behest of a constituent who came to my surgery to talk to me about her experience. Frankly, I am horrified that precious little seems to have changed since then. I will share a few of the recent stories that women have sent me since the last time I spoke about hysteroscopies in this place. I have had to choose very carefully: the number of women who have written to me is large, but my time this afternoon is short.

Julie had a hysteroscopy in July last year. She is 71 years old and wears hearing aids. Julie thought she was going in to see a gynaecologist and perhaps to have an ultrasound to investigate unexpected bleeding. She had been given no additional information, despite having waited for that emergency appointment for six long months. I can imagine how frightened she was. As expected, Julie's appointment started with an ultrasound; unfortunately, the scan showed some thickening in the lining of her womb. Julie had removed her hearing aids to avoid losing them, which had happened before, so she could not clearly hear what was being suggested, but she was told that another procedure was necessary. A different nurse came in, and that was the very first time that Julie heard the word "hysteroscopy."

Julie was, of course, a little confused about what was happening, because she could not hear properly, but she managed to make out that she might feel some mild cramping as the fluid and the scope were inserted. However, she describes the pain as utterly excruciating. The nurse tried to talk her through it and take her through breathing exercises, but they did no good—how could they? Julie was in a clammy sweat; she was worried that she would pass out. She was asked whether they could continue, and she was so worried about the ultrasound findings, and the last six months' wait, that she said they could. A second attempt was made. Julie simply could not hold back her tears, or even breathe, through the terrible pain. Thankfully, the nurse asked again whether the procedure could stop, and Julie could say nothing but yes.

Afterwards, Julie was terribly woozy. She was wobbly, and scared that she would faint and fall. She was well cared for at that point—given pads for the bleeding and hot packs to help with the severe abdominal cramping. She lay in the recovery suite for about an hour, crying. Even after that, she was disassociated, trembling and struggling to walk. I remind hon. Members that she is 71 years old. She is truly lucky that she did not fall and break something.

Another woman who wrote to me was so overwhelmed by the pain of her hysteroscopy without pain relief that she fainted and fell from the full height of the operating bench to the floor. After that, she was left with not just serious bruises but lasting dizziness that has led to repeated falls and broken bones. It has physically affected her so badly that she has found it hard to stay in work for the very first time in her life.

In some ways, Julie was lucky, but the lasting impact on her was still significant. She vomited, and when she got home she continued to bleed for more than a week afterwards. She describes herself as stoic. She has had several surgeries before, and she lives with serious arthritis, so she is no stranger to pain. In her words, what she went through was “a brutal, torturous experience”.

The shameful truth is that at no point was Julie offered any form of pain relief at all. She only heard that a hysteroscopy was even a possibility while lying on the examination table with her legs up in stirrups. It is frankly a miracle that she was not so traumatised as to lose trust completely in the NHS, but she has since been back. She has had another hysteroscopy under general anaesthetic and found it an utterly different experience. All the procedures and risks were explained beforehand, and she had outstanding care throughout.

While Julie was in the waiting room for the second, successful hysteroscopy—this points to how commonplace this experience is—she met another woman whose experience was just like hers. The other patient was just as upset, but said she would not make a complaint because she felt she would just be ignored, and that would make her even more stressed. Sadly and understandably, most people who have had similar terrible experiences with the procedure are like the woman Julie met. We never hear their stories.

Let me offer some more testimonies to give voice to those whose pain and distress were completely ignored. Martha was seriously injured during her hysteroscopy last August. She went in for a check-up after she had bleeding for several days after starting hormone replacement therapy. Her GP referred her for the hysteroscopy, but although he explained some of what the procedure would involve, he was, in Martha's words, “blasé”. He showed absolutely no understanding that Martha's medical history and conditions made extreme pain and damage much more likely. When the procedure began, Martha described the pain as “excruciating”—exactly the same word that Julie used.

Martha screamed out, “No, no, stop,” repeatedly, yet when the doctor looked at her, he looked very unimpressed. He asked her whether she would rather he stopped so she could come back and have it under general anaesthetic. She said yes, but instead of listening, he insisted that he have more time—just 30 seconds. He went in again with a smaller scope, but again it caused searing pain.

After the procedure, Martha understandably felt violated, but sadly that was far from the end of her ordeal. She had burning pain for weeks, mixed with a loss of feeling in her groin. She developed repeated bladder infections and double incontinence, and her muscles started wasting. She had difficulty standing and walking. Eventually, Martha was told that she had post-operative nerve damage. To put the cherry on the cake, I understand that the doctor who did this to Martha recorded her pain score as just one out of 10. To me, this sounds very much like fraud—on top of sheer callousness, absolute incompetence and indifference.

Martha describes herself as a fiercely independent woman who does not suffer fools, but she told me she had the overwhelming feeling she had been duped and made a fool of. She says she has always trusted professionals, but never, ever again. She is reeling because the NHS that she supported for decades

“managed to injure me and cripple my life, take my self-respect and my confidence in under 15 minutes.”

Martha tells me—I think she might be right—that the next great women's health scandal after mesh implants will be this.

**Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab):** I am really appalled, and I want to raise a point with my hon. Friend. The situation Martha found herself in is happening up and down the country. A constituent who was due to have a hysteroscopy examination at our local hospital in Salford was told the same thing as in the stories my hon. Friend is telling: “Local anaesthesia can be given if necessary” and “Take paracetamol one hour before.” However, this constituent had a family member who had had a hysteroscopy in a private hospital and was offered a general anaesthetic because the procedure was “too painful” to be performed in any other way. So the NHS patient in a private hospital is offered a general anaesthetic, but the one in an NHS hospital is not. When I wrote to the hospital on my constituent's behalf, I was told:

“a general anaesthetic can be requested, though the medical team advise against it.”

There is a key question that I want to put to my hon. Friend. It is all right to say that the procedure can be stopped or carried out later, but does she believe that the information given to patients is wrong and that that is not acceptable care?

**Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair):** Order. Can I ask that, when hon. Members intervene, they make it short?

**Ms Brown:** I agree with my hon. Friend that there is a massive lack of information. I am sure there is a difference between private and public health in this area, but a friend of mine went to a London hospital and asked whether she could be given a general anaesthetic. The answer she got was, “Of course. Do you think we're barbarians?” There is different practice in different NHS hospitals, and a different understanding of the kinds of issues we face.

I think we all know the upshot of these kinds of experiences: women will end up too afraid to get procedures that they need to have. It will impact on their long-term health prognosis. It will cost the NHS more in the future, as it has to play catch-up on diagnosis. As we know, hysteroscopies are really important. They can be used

[Ms Lyn Brown]

to rule in or out cancer and a host of other important conditions, so women have to be confident about having them. They need to have them, and they need to know that they will not experience what Julie, Martha and so many more women have experienced.

The survey being run by the Campaign Against Painful Hysteroscopy has had over 3,000 responses and counting. Despite that, and despite all the individual stories I receive and raise in Parliament, we simply do not know how widespread the problem is. I am afraid that the reason might be that the NHS really does not want to know, because knowing would strengthen our calls for change and for all women to be treated with respect, to have their pain taken seriously and to be given accurate information and genuine choice. For that to happen, I believe that the Minister has to engage with this issue personally and dig a bit deeper to ensure that accurate and appropriate data is being collected and analysed. We also need independent oversight. I beg the Minister not to be content when, inevitably, the medical profession says, "It's fine" and "Action is being taken," because, frankly, it has been 10 years, and we have heard it all before.

I am sure the Minister will remind us about some of the campaign successes, such as scrapping the best practice tariff, which until very recently financially rewarded NHS trusts for doing hysteroscopies in out-patient environments, where proper anaesthetic is not possible. Sadly, that drive for more cheap, quick hysteroscopies, regardless of the risk to women's health and wellbeing, is still going strong. The target of 90% of hysteroscopies to happen within out-patient rooms has emerged again in a new NHS programme, which, ironically, is entitled "Getting It Right First Time". I can tell the Minister that if women continue to be pushed into hysteroscopies without proper care, the NHS will not be getting it right first time at all. Instead, more women will endure pain for no reason at all during unsuccessful procedures, and they will then have to repeat those procedures under general anaesthetic.

It appears that the target of 90% is the brainchild and objective of the British Association of Day Surgery—well, I am sure there is no vested interest there. It is frankly alarming that we have a clinical lobby group advocating, effectively, against women having a genuine choice over the pain relief they need when they have a hysteroscopy. What is worse is that I understand that some private companies are promoting their no-anaesthetic out-patient procedures within the NHS by bragging that hospitals can save up to £1,000 per patient. You could not make it up. Clearly, there are some very influential people who do not want this campaign to succeed and who prioritise saving money—or making money—over women's safety from pain and trauma.

I know how busy the Minister is, but we ain't going to be successful in our campaign for pain-free hysteroscopies without Government leadership. I was pleased to hear last night that the Minister's office has contacted the campaign group offering times for a meeting. That is good news. I strongly agree with some of the Minister's words in response to one of the anonymous women whose cases I have raised today. Let me quote the Minister:

"It is clearly important that women are offered, from the outset and as part of the consent process, the choice of having the procedure performed...under general...anaesthetic."

I ask the Minister to emphasise that point today, because women cannot give truly informed consent unless they have had a full discussion—including a discussion of their individual risk factors and a choice of anaesthetic—from the very start. In my view, that means that Julie, Martha and so many others have had a surgical procedure performed on them without consent. I am sure we would all agree that that is very serious indeed. When the Minister responds, I hope she will commit to treating this issue as a high priority for women's health. We do not want women to be bullied when they go into the NHS for treatment.

We are eagerly awaiting the publication of the good practice paper from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and other new guidance—I had hoped to have it yesterday in order to inform this debate. I understand that the draft paper recognises that fully one third of women report pain scores of between seven and 10 out of 10. That clearly shows that we need a massive change. The need for real choice cannot just be in guidance; it also needs to be enforced.

Based on the recent stories of women that I have told today, in many cases we are seeing brutality instead of best practice. Women are being violated and betrayed. Their trust in the NHS and medical professions is completely undermined. Surely that cannot be a legacy that the Minister, or the Government, want to leave behind.

**Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair):** Thank you. I remind Members to bob if they wish to speak.

2.50 pm

**Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark. I wish I could say it was a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Ham (Ms Brown). I have genuinely enjoyed working with her on this subject for quite some years. But it is not a joy to follow her in this debate, because it is frustrating that we are still having the same discussion. It feels like groundhog day; it has been four years since I ceased to be the Minister responsible for this issue.

The hon. Member for West Ham reminds me that I started the moves towards the women's health strategy, and established the women's health taskforce, exactly because of the stories that she tells. It was very clear to me, when I started to look at this subject, that ultimately all the female Members of Parliament who are present have had terrible experiences at the hands of the NHS. We are very good at looking out for ourselves. If that has happened to us, then it is something that is being repeated for women up and down the land. It is something that we must address properly.

At the heart of what the hon. Member for West Ham is talking about is the principle of informed consent. Informed consent is the underpinning principle of our NHS. The stories that the hon. Member has outlined this afternoon show negligence around consent. They show women being referred for what is an investigatory procedure, not a treatment, without any proper consideration as to what they need to understand before consenting to such a procedure. The truth of the matter is that women find themselves undergoing a procedure in terrible pain before they even know what is happening to them. In 21st-century Britain, that is not acceptable.



We have made a lot of progress on centring women when we look at health, and ceasing to treat them as walking incubators for babies. We are human beings and we need to have our needs properly considered when we consent to treatment. We now have a women's health strategy, which shows we have made some progress.

However, the hysteroscopy procedure has not received the attention that it deserves. Although two thirds of women who have the procedure go through it with less pain than in the cases we have heard today, a third of women experience terrible pain. That this is not properly explained to them is appalling. I have heard cases where women are just told to take some paracetamol before they go in and there will be no problem. For those women who do experience pain, as the hon. Member for West Ham has outlined, it is very severe. We must ensure that we have proper, well-understood protocols that govern how this procedure is managed, and how women are engaged in it.

The hon. Member for West Ham draws a parallel with mesh implants, and I think that is absolutely right. Again, the issue of informed consent was missing in many of those cases. We found that the mesh treatment was being routinely recommended to women after childbirth, women were not having any risks explained to them, and then, low and behold, they were suffering debilitating problems for the rest of their lives. As we roll forward with the women's health strategy, we must stress-test exactly how much information we are giving to women, so that we can make informed consent an absolute reality.

The truth is, our wombs are not just here to incubate babies; they are part of us. The women here will have all had to go through invasive examinations internally. They are not very nice experiences. I do not know about anyone else, but when I have to do that I have an out-of-body experience where I zone out of what is happening to me. These women cannot do that, because they are suddenly visited with terrible pain. They cannot zone out of the fact that somebody is fishing around between their legs; they are living that, and that is an absolute trauma—a trauma that will stay with them for the rest of their life, notwithstanding the other side effects that they experience.

The women's health strategy has alluded to some of those aspects, but I do not think it has taken up the issue with sufficient seriousness. It talks about the need for conversations about pain relief before a hysteroscopy procedure, but it needs to be a lot more than that: people need to be given sufficient information to enable them to decide whether or not they even want that examination. As many as 10% of women suffer with problem periods, fibroids and the kinds of conditions that would lend to them having such an investigation, but we need to be able to make that informed choice—"Is it really going to make a difference?" Frankly, if you are 71 years old, what difference is it going to make? All it is going to do is establish the cause of the bleeding. You might be better off managing that condition, because if there is going to be no end of treatment following the hysteroscopy, the whole thing is absolutely pointless, with a substantial degree of risk.

I am pleased to hear that the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is updating its best practice guidelines. I ask the Minister to consider inviting the women's health ambassador, Lesley Regan, to carry

out a proper stress test of everything around this issue. I had the pleasure of working with Lesley when I invited her to co-chair the National Women's Health Task Force: she brings considerable expertise, including as a gynaecologist who is a woman. The truth is that far too many gynaecologists are male, and with the best will in the world, I do not think they are ever going to understand, let alone care about, the degree of pain that is being administered to their patients. I am really pleased with that appointment: Lesley is a fantastic advocate for women's health, but I would like her to look at this issue properly so that we have a good set of ideas, advice and principles to help women make informed choices, and to make the medical profession understand exactly what difficulty this procedure involves for some women.

I invite the Minister to put that advice alongside some advice about healthy periods generally. Women need to be encouraged to take ownership of their gynaecological and menstrual health, but again, they can only do that with sufficient information. We will not avoid situations where women rock up to hospital for an appointment and, the next thing they know, find themselves on the trolley in stirrups without properly understanding what is happening to them unless everyone understands what good menstrual health looks like; what the alert factors are for some of the conditions that might invite a hysteroscopy examination; and what potential treatment might follow.

The hon. Member for West Ham has outlined the painful experiences that some people have had, but we all need to understand exactly what is involved in a hysteroscopy. It is an internal examination of the womb, which is undertaken by the insertion of a camera through the cervix. We know from the evidence that the hon. Lady and I have examined that women who have not had children are particularly affected by pain. If we think about what that procedure involves, it seems like a no-brainer that women who have not had children would suffer more pain, so again, I cannot get my head round the negligence with which women are referred for this procedure without proper consideration of the pain involved.

**Barbara Keeley:** I want to emphasise this aspect of the issue, based on what I was told by my constituent: the leaflet did not mention that the procedure can be stopped if the patient is unable to tolerate it. Can the hon. Lady think of another medical procedure that is run without anaesthetic on that basis—that it can be stopped if the patient cannot tolerate the pain? There are not many other examples.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** No, and the interesting thing is that, in theory, a patient should be able to stop anything. That is what informed consent should be about. Again, it illustrates the relationship that we have with our health service. We naturally defer to medical professionals. We assume that they know better than us, and perhaps that is where we need to alter our relationship. These are human beings; they are not gods.

We need to be empowered to take more agency and ownership of how we approach these things. Listen to the description by the hon. Member for West Ham of Julie removing her hearing aids: there is no way that she was in control of that situation. How can a patient make informed consent and have the ability to stop something that is causing them significant distress and

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

trauma in those circumstances? As I mentioned, it is extremely painful, especially for those women who have not had children.

We know that some women are just told to take paracetamol before they arrive, and there is a massive discrepancy from organisation to organisation when women try to exercise their ability to choose whether they have a general anaesthetic. In some cases, women are told that that is not really the best thing for them; in others, as we have heard, that elective choice was made quite easily. To me, that brings a real worry that too many in our medical establishment are not giving their patients the respect that they deserve. That is something that we really need to change in the culture of our NHS. It is all about behaviours, ultimately; we need to look at how we can encourage better behaviours towards patients throughout the system.

In the short time that I have left, I will make some specific asks of the Minister. I have mentioned that I would like her to invite Lesley Regan to properly stress-test this, but we need a proper risk assessment tool for each woman undertaking the procedure, so that both they and the medical professionals they are dealing with can make an informed choice on whether they are more or less likely to suffer the substantial pain that has been outlined in the debate. I also invite the Minister to consider the work of Baroness Cumberlege in “First Do No Harm”. One of the themes running through that work—and again, I mentioned mesh earlier—was the absence of informed consent. One of the conclusions we drew was that we need a proper patient’s voice to be able to stress-test those incidents where there is widespread poor practice in the NHS.

Ultimately, the NHS is a producer-driven system. We have care pathways that are very much process driven and not practitioner or patient driven, frankly. We must help practitioners to help themselves by empowering patients, because they need to have that mutual understanding on the same level. I invite the Minister to consider properly the establishment of a patient commissioner so that we have somewhere to refer these incidents of widespread poor practice.

We have outlined today the serious harm being done to women put through the procedure without appropriate care. That is doing real harm, and if we are going to have an NHS that works for all patients, we need to address incidents such as this extremely quickly.

3.3 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I am grateful, Sir Mark, for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I thank the hon. Member for West Ham (Ms Brown) for raising the issue and, as she so often does, setting the scene so well. She has had a number of debates on this—some of them were Adjournment debates in the Chamber—and on every occasion I have been there to support her. I will come on to explain why I support her and what she is trying to achieve. I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution, and I look forward to the contribution of the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell); I thought I was going to follow her, but today it is the other way round. I very much look forward to the contributions.

Over the years, the hon. Member for West Ham has done her bit to secure debates on raising awareness of issues surrounding hysteroscopy treatment. As my party’s spokesperson on health, it is always a pleasure to be here to support her and her requests. The hon. Lady pushes these requests with perseverance and dedication, and I recognise that in supporting her. We look to the Minister for a positive response to what she is asking for. She has always made her requests in a way that is direct but never nasty, and with determination, which I support.

Many women have contacted my office about issues relating to this procedure that have been going on for years. It is great to be here to add my support to the requests of the hon. Lady and others. I have spoken in these debates before, and I am always shocked at how common these issues are. There have been countless reports on issues such as anaesthesia and pain relief, to the extent that all Health Departments across the devolved Assemblies have taken formal action.

I always try to give a Northern Ireland perspective to these debates. Back home, the then Minister of Health Robin Swann provided an overview of guidance currently followed in Northern Ireland for hysteroscopy procedures, referring to information provided by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and the professional guidance produced by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. He stated that there was a need to “write to the HSC trusts in Northern Ireland to highlight this guidance and remind the service about the importance of the consistent application of the guidance.”

The Cumberlege report plays a role in this area too, and the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) referred to it. The purpose of the report was to make recommendations for improving the healthcare system’s ability to respond to the issues that women have been having with hysteroscopies. The hon. Member for West Ham set the scene well and with thoughtful consideration with regard to the guidance. According to the Campaign Against Painful Hysteroscopy, at least 70—or 35%—of women who have had hysteroscopies this year in English NHS hospitals said they were left in extreme pain following their procedures, with many suffering trauma for several days.

The reason I am here is simple. My wife went through one, and the hon. Member for West Ham knows that. I am here to support my wife, first of all, but also to highlight from a male point of view why I think this is so important and why the hon. Lady is right in what she asks for. Before my wife and I got married, my wife had had some problems, and the doctor—who was lovely, by the way—said to my wife, “You know, Sandra, when you get married and have children, things will be okay.” Well, they were not okay. The years went by and after three children things became worse. I believe it is important that I stand here in support of my wife and other women across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

In a world of many technological advances, we can do more to ensure that pain relief is available and pain is kept to a minimum. The hon. Member for West Ham illustrated that well in the example that she gave. No one could have any doubt whatsoever as to exactly what was happening and why that 71-year-old lady had to endure what she endured. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has been in touch with my office ahead of this debate. I am always thankful for its input,

as I believe it gives a real insight into the problems that are occurring and backs up evidentially what others have said. It has raised a valid point that is often left out of the argument—that the fear of pain puts women off these procedures completely. I believe it probably does. From looking at the evidence and hearing the stories, my goodness me, would someone not be scared? That is it.

Hysteroscopies are used to detect and diagnose a range of conditions and symptoms, such as pelvic pain, repeated miscarriages—which are a reality as well—excessive bleeding, fibroids and polyps or cancerous growths in the womb. It has to be underlined that hysteroscopies are a possible life-saving tool. Unfortunately, the risk of pain puts many women and girls off, which increases the likelihood of problems in later life. The best thing we can do is get the conversation going. The hon. Lady has done that consistently over the years. I want to continue that conversation, so we can ensure that sustainable pain relief is readily available. I hope today we get a positive response from the Minister.

I want to conclude by thanking the hon. Member for West Ham—I mean this genuinely—for her valiant efforts in raising this issue. She has raised awareness of consent, choice and effective communication in this matter, and it is clear that existing provision falls down on all three. It has to get better, as the backbone of many procedures and especially those more intimate procedures where younger women may feel scared and even unsupported. For the mainland and the devolved Administrations, there is more to be done in safeguarding and implementing efficient practice for hysteroscopies and other intimate treatments for women.

I look forward to what the Minister will say in response to the debate. I know that she understands these matters very well and I think the response will be helpful. Again, we look forward to improvement, which is what we ask for. We need to see that process starting today in Westminster Hall.

3.11 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark. I thank all hon. Members for their powerful contributions.

Jan was not one to make a fuss and had never written to her MP before. The fact that she felt impelled to do so is testament to how awful her hysteroscopy was; it motivated her to do everything in her power to prevent other women from suffering the same trauma, despite facing the prospect of terminal cancer herself. Jan sadly died two years ago this week. Her husband came to my surgery last autumn and asked me to take up this work, informing me of the work my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Ms Brown) was pursuing. Knowing her as I do, I know that she will do everything possible to speak up for women and ensure they are heard.

It was 16 November 2020. My constituent was terrified. She had discussed the process with her medical friend, who advised her to tell clinicians on arrival. She did, but was met with derision and disdain. The official guidance says:

“If you feel anxious about the procedure, you should talk to your healthcare professional before your appointment.”

She wished she had not. My constituent was there for an examination of a possible cancer of the uterus. She was naturally very concerned. She did not want to have

to delay a diagnosis for the sake of waiting for a general anaesthetic. She was not informed that she could have a general anaesthetic; it was just her own research that took her to that place. She was told that it could be another two to four-week wait. As we later found out, that would have been a significant period of the rest of her life.

Jan went ahead but nothing prepared her for the pain she was about to experience. She had had no pain like it. Even having given birth vaginally three times with little or no pain relief, she could not comprehend the pain that she was about to experience. The clinician did not stop and did not seek to know her pain level until she was in so much pain that she could not speak. She was trying not to pass out; she was trying to stay conscious. When she was asked, she could not respond. I must say that when I heard the story from her husband, I sat there thinking, “This is assault.” There was no informed consent.

As we know, a third of women experience significant pain in this procedure, although research is poor. Options are not clearly communicated to women and women’s voices are simply not heard. If a third of women are experiencing significant pain, that means the majority are experiencing some level of pain. It is beyond my comprehension why women have to experience pain at all. As we have seen in the “First Do No Harm” report, which many have raised today, the voices of women in healthcare are simply not being heard. We can all reflect on our own experiences of being dismissed—that it is nothing and there are clearly other more important things to deal with. It is simply not good enough. A woman’s voice is disappearing in our health service; it needs to come to the fore and today’s debate will do that.

That was not the end of the story. We sought a review of the case and the department lead carried one out. The review said that there was consultation and listening, but that was a very different story from Jan’s experience. Ultimately, the outcome did not change the situation, but women will be going through that process every day, and we therefore have to change the situation all together.

We have a women’s health strategy. We need to ensure that the woman’s voice is heard in our NHS, because Jan’s was not. Constant verbal feedback is so important when going through any procedure. A clinician should be constantly looking, watching, seeing and understanding their patient. That clearly did not occur. Of course, the clinician should have stopped, but they never should have started. It never should have got to that point.

The way in which patients are counselled for this process needs to be completely re-examined. Having a general anaesthetic should not just be posed as an option, but perhaps be suggested as the most pain-free way of having the procedure. There are other things available, for instance a local or regional anaesthetic, or—if a woman dares or is ill-advised—just an analgesic, but we should focus on ensuring that this is a pain-free procedure for women. But that is not what is advised; that is not the target. It is a target that is driving this experience as well, and it must be removed all together.

Like many areas of women’s health, this is a massively under-researched area of medicine. Can the Minister commission research into hysteroscopies, particularly in post-menopausal women? A doctor came to see me to talk about how the cervix changes as people get older.



[*Rachael Maskell*]

It can cause tightening, meaning the procedure is even more difficult for older women. Therefore, carrying out proper research to understand the changes within the body would seem completely appropriate before the procedure continues, particularly for older women.

In conclusion, we have talked about the need for women to be heard in the health service, but we need to gather that. I hear about the work that is being undertaken, but as we were saying in response to the “First Do No Harm” report, there should be proper logging of who has been through this procedure. We should seek out that voice, because we may see a different reflection of what has happened. In Jan’s words, the experience left her “deceived, patronised and betrayed”. That is simply not good enough for our NHS.

3.18 pm

**Feryal Clark** (Enfield North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Ms Brown) for securing this debate, and for her tireless campaign on the matter. It has been 10 years with almost 10 debates, and she is still going. Numerous Ministers have committed to making this a priority. As we have heard, there have been some improvements, but nowhere near enough to make a difference to the lives of women. I praise the incredible contributions from the hon. Members for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon), and my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell).

As we have heard, a hysteroscopy is a procedure used to examine the inside of the uterus. It involves dilation of the cervix, sending fluid into the uterus to expand it so clinicians can examine the uterus and the fallopian tubes, and the use of surgical instruments to examine the inside of a woman. It is an essential tool for diagnosis and treatment of many conditions affecting women, including unusual bleeding, pelvic pain, recurrent miscarriages, difficulty getting pregnant and many more. When I had my hysteroscopy, I had had several miscarriages and I was desperate for a baby. When I was offered this procedure for further investigation, I read every side of the leaflet and looked into it. Not only did I take paracetamol; I took ibuprofen, to ensure that I did not have the “little discomfort”.

I turned up and there was a lovely nurse, who was very softly spoken. A nurse stands next to the patient to talk them through it, and holds the patient’s hand. If it is a “slight discomfort”, the whole process of having someone standing there trying to be a guide through it, is worrying. It is the most excruciating thing anyone can go through. It may have been a 10 on the scale. I do not understand how even slightly lower than that could be acceptable for any human being.

I was asked things and the nurse kept talking to me, but I could not respond. I was in so much pain. Because I was so desperate for that baby, I would have walked over broken glass with bare feet. I did think about continuing through the pain, but luckily I passed out and the procedure ended. It is not acceptable in this day and age that women have to go through that level of pain for healthcare.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I thank the hon. Member for sharing a very personal story. She lands an important point. When women are desperate to fulfil the urge to give birth to a child—a deeply biological impulse—they will go through anything, as she rightly says. Does that not tell us that the degree of pain we are aware of could just be the surface?

**Feryal Clark:** I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Member. It develops a level of acceptance, which is not right or acceptable. Hysteroscopies are paramount to women’s health, but we have heard horrific accounts from my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham of women’s experiences of having the procedure. That should never have happened to women, and those women affected are right in their fight for justice. There is a lack of information or no information about the choice of pain relief available before, during or after the procedure. Paracetamol is not enough. There is an assumption that the patient will experience only discomfort—in my case, it was slightly more than that—despite some women experiencing intolerable pain. If they do experience that so-called discomfort, the assumption is that it does not matter because it is only short lived.

It is astonishing that the NHS still does not collect data on the number of women who experience severe pain during hysteroscopy. However, the Campaign Against Painful Hysteroscopy, which does undertake surveys of women, has found that more than 90% of women surveyed were traumatised for a day or longer by the pain. Three quarters said they were not aware of pain management options before the procedure was carried out. In 2020, half of NHS hospital trusts in England failed to warn patients that they could suffer pain. Women are simply not given the information they need to make informed decisions, which must include information on potential pain, options for pain management and alternative procedures. Let us be clear: a woman should not have to experience excruciating levels of pain to access essential healthcare.

As we have heard, the national tariff creates an incentive for hysteroscopies to be carried out as an out-patient. We cannot deny the obvious advantages of out-patient care. For example, it allowed women to access hysteroscopies more easily during covid, and can reduce the time women have to wait for diagnosis and treatment, but it does not allow for patient choice and patient voice. Some 61 out of 131 NHS trusts admitted to the Campaign Against Painful Hysteroscopy that they did not warn patients about the risk of severe pain, and this could lead to unnecessary pain for women. Informed consent, choice and effective communication is not the norm when it comes to women’s health; it is barely there. That cannot and must not continue.

While some women are left in excruciating pain, some women hear those stories and decide not to have the procedure—I am not sure which is worse. No woman should feel discouraged from attending a hysteroscopy appointment for fear that they could experience pain, because, as mentioned earlier, hysteroscopies are an essential tool in diagnosis and treatment of women’s health.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists’ guidance states that all pain relief options should be discussed with women. I welcome that those guidelines are being updated, but the clinical guidance currently in

use is over 10 years old. Today is not the first time Ministers have been made aware of the seriousness of the issue for women, so why did the Government not ask for the guidance to be updated sooner? Will the Minister tell us what she is doing to ensure that the new clinical guidance will be in place as soon as possible, for all clinicians to use? We must ensure all women have access to the pain management they are entitled to. How is that being monitored, because it does not seem to be happening currently?

Improvements in hysteroscopy care are included in the women's health strategy, which was published late last year, as the hon. Member for Thurrock mentioned. The Minister is responsible for the women's health strategy, and it is her ambition that women and girls report better experiences of procedures, such as this one. However, the Minister's letter, setting out her year 1 priorities, which she sent around last week, did not mention hysteroscopies. How many women will continue to have the procedure in pain, or not at all, as a result of it not being considered a priority? Will the Minister explain to us, and to all those women who face having the treatment, why it is not considered a priority?

Finally, painful hysteroscopies are just another iteration of no care being given to women and their health. Yet again, women have been given empty promises of improved care. How many more stories must we hear about women in unnecessary pain? How many more times must we hear that women are not listened to in healthcare settings? And how much longer must women wait for the healthcare they so desperately need?

3.28 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Ham (Ms Brown) on securing this important debate. As Minister, I also responded to her debate on the subject last year and I recognise her campaigning on the issue.

First and foremost, I recognise the pain suffered by women during the hysteroscopy procedure. Many women have contacted me to share their stories and distress. The testimony of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Enfield North (Feryal Clark), was powerful in explaining the distress the procedure can cause.

We have seen some progress around the tariff issue, which I will touch on later in my remarks. Last year, the tariff system financially rewarded out-patient settings that undertook hysteroscopies, but that has changed. However, I take the point made by the hon. Member for West Ham about getting it right first time. I may be doing the same with a new initiative, so I will certainly commit to looking at that.

We heard about patients such as Julie, and about how, right from the very start, an appointment letter is sent out that does not provide information about what to expect or the choices that are available. We heard about the procedure itself, including what pain relief is given, and the need to give women informed consent—they can have a general anaesthetic or ask for the procedure to stop. Another 30 seconds is not the answer to “stop”, and that would be my first concern.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) made a valid point about why the procedures are being done in the first place, and the

testimony of Martha lends itself to that. Bleeding after HRT is very common for the first three to six months, and it is usually only after six months, or if there has been bleeding after long periods of non-bleeding, that perhaps an investigation could be considered. My hon. Friend pointed out that sometimes we carry out the procedure where there is not necessarily a clinical case for it. Both the procedure itself and the reason for it need to be justified in those cases.

As the shadow Minister said, hysteroscopy is an essential investigative tool. We do not want to put women off coming forward for diagnosis of their conditions or for investigations into distressing problems—whether it be heavy periods, miscarriages or difficulty getting pregnant—but it is true that women's experiences of pain, and sharing those experiences with friends and family, can put women off or prevent someone from coming back for treatment or further investigation. Many women experience little or no pain, but the percentage that do experience pain is of significant concern.

The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) highlighted the experience of Jan and the sheer scale of her pain. That was very powerful, and I reiterate to Jan's husband, Steve, that her voice has been heard very powerfully in the debate. I am keen that we make progress on the issue, because we, like the hon. Member for West Ham, who comes on an annual basis, have been talking about it for far too long. I am keen to meet with the Campaign Against Painful Hysteroscopy group, and hope to do so fairly soon, to discuss how we can take the issues forward. A general anaesthetic can be used in some circumstances, but there are also a range of other anaesthetics—it does not have to be general anaesthetic—to make the procedure less painful.

For most women, the first issue is choice, having information about what to expect up front and being able to make a decision based on that. That needs to be done in advance of the procedure and not, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock described, when your legs are in the stirrups. That is why the guidance is so important. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists provides evidence-based guidance. It is old, and it is being updated. My understanding is that RCOG is producing a good-practice paper on pain relief and informed decision making for out-patient hysteroscopy that will be published imminently—I understand in days rather than weeks or months. I committed in the debate last year to wait for that, and I hope that it will be through fairly soon. If we can get those good-practice guidelines, it is essential that they are rolled out in practice.

**Ms Lyn Brown:** I do not really know how to phrase this, but part of the problem is that, as we have heard, gynaecologists are basically being utterly insensitive to the needs of the women they are treating. My anxiety is that we will be told, yet again, that it is all okay, and that they have changed this or tweaked that. But the stories that we have heard today are from this year, so there has not been change. I am not sure whether we will be able to manage change unless the Minister is quite firm about the actions that she wants to see.

**Maria Caulfield:** I very much take the hon. Lady's point. The change to RCOG guidance is not the only way we will change this. The hon. Member for Strangford

[Maria Caulfield]

(Jim Shannon) highlighted his wife's experience, which also shows why this is so important. The royal college is important because it can bring clinical change on the ground, but it is not enough just to assume that its updated guidance will be enough to change what happens in practice. Its current guidance already sets out that a leaflet should be provided with information about what a hysteroscopy is, what happens, and what the possible risks and alternatives are, but that does not always happen. Women can choose whether to have their hysteroscopy in an outpatient setting or have a general anaesthetic and come in as a day case. They do not always get that leaflet now, so just changing the guidance does not necessarily mean that we change the practice, and that is the key.

It is important that women are in control when it comes to hysteroscopies, which we are talking about today, and many other issues that we have debated. That is the fundamental principle behind the women's health strategy, which we introduced because women are very often not listened to in all aspects of their healthcare.

The hon. Member for Enfield North touched on the top priorities for the first year of the women's health strategy. The reason that hysteroscopy did not make that list is that we want to wait for the guidance before we act, but it will be a high priority, and work is starting this year.

One of the key priorities is to provide better information to women and girls about their health. We are setting up a space on the NHS website for women's health so that women who are going for a procedure have go-to information. If they are thinking, "I don't know what a hysteroscopy is. I don't know what sort of tests I need. I am going for an ultrasound, but what else might they suggest to me while I am there?" they can go to that site and get reliable information that will help them make that decision. If they are not sent a leaflet and the procedure is not discussed in the clinic, they will be able to know in advance what to expect. We want that to happen this year so that women have more power when making decisions about their healthcare needs.

Waiting times for gynae procedures have not come up much today, but we know that the covid pandemic has had an impact on them. Gynae procedures are part of the elective recovery plan, which is why we are investing in community diagnostic centres to get those waiting lists down as quickly as possible. It is hoped that by having specialist centres such as community diagnostic centres, which are specialists in doing diagnostic tests, we may be able to improve women's experience.

One of the things that will make the greatest difference is the appointment of Professor Dame Lesley Regan as the first women's health ambassador—my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock mentioned her. She is a female gynaecologist, and she completely gets the issues facing women. We also now have the patient safety commissioner, Dr Henrietta Hughes, who was appointed last year. She is a female GP. Dame Lesley has been passionate about this issue for many years and has been working with women's groups on it. I have asked her and Dr Hughes to discuss hysteroscopies. They are planning a roundtable on the issue to get stakeholders round the table to discuss how we can make things

happen in practice. If guidance is issued, how do we make sure that is what is happening on the ground? The roundtable will be chaired by Dame Lesley, and the patient safety commissioner will be attending. I will update Members on their recommendations, which I will take extremely seriously, and I will want to implement them as quickly as possible.

**Rachael Maskell:** I am grateful for the Minister's response. Will she include women from ethnic minority groups? Their experience of the health system is very different, so it is really important that their voices are heard in this discussion.

**Maria Caulfield:** Absolutely. Dame Lesley has been very keen in some of her first work to ensure that we go out to women, rather than expecting women to come to us with their experiences. Often, if we wait for them to come to us, it is the usual voices that get heard. The people who have the greatest difficulties accessing healthcare are often the ones who get missed, so I can absolutely reassure the hon. Lady about that.

That is why we are setting up women's health hubs, which are a particular priority of the women's health ambassador. They are go-to one-stop shops that have experienced women's healthcare professionals. If someone is going for a smear test, contraceptive advice or perhaps a hysteroscopy, there are experienced practitioners there who can support women's health needs and perhaps give a better experience than many women have now. We hope to improve women's experience in those areas.

I say to the hon. Member for West Ham that I absolutely recognise the significance of this issue. It is unacceptable that a test that is so important for women's health is currently such a painful experience. We changed the tariff in the hope that it would encourage the use of general anaesthetics if that is what women want, because we felt that the previous tariff system worked against that. However, I am really keen that we deliver changes on the ground once we get the royal college guidelines and the roundtable with Professor Dame Lesley Regan and the Patient Safety Commissioner, who are there to advocate for women and patients. I hope that will be within the next few months, and I am happy to meet the hon. Member for West Ham, as I will be meeting the patient campaign groups too.

We can change this behaviour. A woman who is having a hysteroscopy should know in advance what is involved and what her choices are. She should feel confident that if she turns up for her appointment and finds it uncomfortable, which she was not expecting, the procedure can be halted and a separate appointment can be made swiftly to make sure that the procedure is as comfortable as possible. I hope that gives some reassurances that I absolutely take the seriousness of this issue on board, and that we want to make a change and a difference for women.

3.41 pm

**Ms Brown:** We have had a really good debate this afternoon about the serious harms to women, the lack of respect and the lack of regard in this area of healthcare. I am really grateful to all the contributors, including the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price)—we will march on with this one, I am sure. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who has been at many of



these debates, offered his support. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) shared a story that I recognise, which was tragic and sad. My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Feryal Clark) did not tell me about her personal experiences before the debate—how brave and amazing that she stood up and told us all. I am genuinely grateful for that.

I think we all agree that we need informed consent, individual risk assessments and compassionate care in our health service. We need proper and independent research into the actions that are being taken, and we need action. We do not need to be back here in a year's time, with me reading out people's stories again, and we certainly do not need to be led in this debate by those who seek to profit from women's pain.

I say to the Minister that the gynaecologist who saw my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North was a woman. A few years ago, the gynaecologist who tried to talk me—a childless woman with a frozen cervix—into a hysteroscopy without an anaesthetic was a woman, and I worry that the idea that this is a pain-free procedure is somehow baked into the gynaecological community. However, I express my gratitude to the Minister for offering to stay in touch on this issue. Hopefully, we can get some resolution to the betterment of women's health generally in the country.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the matter of NHS hysteroscopy treatment.

3.43 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Smaller Musical Genres: Scotland

4 pm

**Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair):** I will call Pete Wishart to move the motion, and then the Minister to respond. As is the convention for 30-minute debates, there will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up because the debate is too short. I will not call any Members to make speeches other than Mr Wishart and the Minister, so other Members can make interventions only.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government support for smaller musical genres in Scotland.

I look forward to serving under you in the Chair, Sir Mark, in this afternoon's short but hopefully important debate. I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

When I was thinking about how to open this debate, I thought I would start with something profound and interesting—perhaps that music is the sustenance and nourishment of the soul. It is the one thing we turn to when we feel happy, and when we are trying to escape or evade any feelings of melancholy. It is what we turn to when we have that special occasion or anniversary, during time with friends, and when going out in the evening. Music is absolutely everywhere, and it has a multiplicity of genres. Music is a great chronicler. It takes you back to that time in your life, that special experience, that moment. It is almost instant recall: a song comes on, and we remember exactly where we were and what we were feeling in that moment. Everybody has a favourite song, or several favourite songs.

Then I thought that as the debate is about musical genres, I could perhaps look at the sheer infinity of music available, and the multiplicity of genres everywhere around the world—at how those 12 available notes have fired human imagination, and how we have managed to sequence and organise them in so many different and profound ways to create a huge catalogue of wonderful works of artistry—songs, compositions and beautiful sounds.

After all that, I thought I would open this debate with what is probably the most profound thing that anyone has ever said about music—what Eric Morecambe said to André Previn as he grabbed his lapels: “I’m playing all the right notes, but not necessarily in the right order.” That sums it up for me: not necessarily in the right order. Music takes us where the imagination dictates and determines. Music is only semi-constructed sonorous chaos, and that is the way it should be.

I have probably bored you before, Sir Mark, by telling you about my life in music. I had 16 wonderful years in the music industry, playing keyboards with Runrig. We were lucky and had great success, but I come from what is probably the smallest of the small genres: I played in a Gaelic folk-rock band. When I started out, we were probably the only Gaelic folk-rock band in existence. We were never going to get played on commercial radio, or on Radio 1—there was not great demand for Gaelic songs about medieval clan battles on Skye, or cuddly

[Pete Wishart]

fishing in the Minch—so it was to the specialist radio stations and programmes that we turned for some sort of support.

The support was there on Radio Scotland, in the guise of the people who championed us and backed us—people such as Iain Anderson, Tom Ferrie and Robbie Shepherd, all providing a fantastic service. That gave us a break, and an audience to build. It helped to develop and shape our career. More than anything else, it gave us hope; here were our songs being performed on Radio Scotland. The songs of this Gaelic folk-rock band—it was never going to be the trendiest band in the world—were being played, and that was so important to us. We went on to become one of the top rock bands in Scotland, selling millions of albums worldwide and sustaining a great touring career. That is what it is all about. That is what small, specialist radio programmes and stations can provide. They give opportunity, but more than anything else, they give hope.

Why this debate, and why today? Because of the simply appalling decision by the BBC and BBC Scotland to cancel “Jazz Nights”, “Pipeline” and “Classics Unwrapped”. These are indispensable specialist programmes that serve a distinct and particular audience—programmes that do not really exist anywhere else, and that the audience turn to for the services that they want, and aspire to be on.

I do not think I have ever seen anything like the overwhelmingly negative response to the decision to axe these three important programmes. It has united the whole of Scotland’s musical community in condemnation. Already, three distinct petitions exist to have the programmes restored and put in the right places, so that they continue to be a feature of BBC Scotland’s scheduling. In the last few minutes I have heard that they have collected a combined 20,997 signatures, such is the interest, and the desire to save these programmes.

The head of jazz at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Tommy Smith, has co-ordinated an open letter, which I think he has sent to the Minister, as well as Ministers in the Scottish Government. The letter is signed by the cream of Scotland’s cultural voice—people such as Nicola Benedetti, who is responsible for the delivery of the Edinburgh festival; Sir James MacMillan, one of Scotland’s prime composers; our national Makar; Scottish Opera; and of course various luminaries from the jazz world. All have voiced their concern about what will happen if these programmes are taken off air.

The letter rightly notes that this decision comes at an extremely difficult time for all parts of the cultural and creative industries. I do not think I need say that to the Minister, because she is more than aware of the distinct challenges that everybody in the cultural sector is experiencing. The pressure on the music industry is acute. I think what that letter said is that we must do everything we can to protect the infrastructure that supports our fragile but world-leading Scottish cultural ecosystem. More than that, what comes across in the letter is passion—passion for the music that these programmes support; passion from those who assemble the programmes and put them together; and passion from the broadcasters who present them, and from the

audiences who lap them up and love every minute. Nicola Benedetti from the Edinburgh festival, one of the signatories, said:

“Axiing these programmes is to perform a heartbreaking disservice to the irreplaceable role they have played in the lives of musicians and music lovers across the country and all parts of society.”

She is spot on.

This chorus of disapproval underlines just how much support there is in our small nation. It is a nation that excels way beyond what might be expected, given the number of people in it, in every sphere of cultural activity—a nation that is internationally renowned, and a brand that is known. We feel this is important. There is a real sense that we in Scotland will do everything we can to defend and protect our cultural output, and ensure that we recognise the distinctive flavour of all its different parts.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this incredibly important debate. A fantastic example of how Scotland’s cultural and music scene can be shared with the entire world is the Celtic Connections festival, which we are right in the middle of, and which is celebrating its 30th year. That forum has nurtured the kinds of bands and different genres that he has talked about, and has brought them to a wider audience, helping people not just in Scotland but around the world to understand and explore the whole range of music that can be connected to through such a festival.

**Pete Wishart:** Absolutely; my hon. Friend is quite right to mention Celtic Connections, because they do not come any better than that. I remember when it all kicked off, back in 1993. It was a few concerts in the concert hall in Glasgow. It is now at practically every venue in central Glasgow, and I think it goes on for 10 days. Of course, like my hon. Friend, I will have the great pleasure of attending a performance on Friday evening. We are all looking forward to that, although I think he will probably have better luck than me at cadging tickets for the club activities in the evening, but we will see how that all ends up. I am looking forward to it. It is a great example of how smaller, niche music is supported, although the festival not small anymore because of the support it has been given over the years.

I want to come to jazz in particular, because it is important. The cutting of “Jazz Nights” comes at a time when Scottish jazz is really doing well. Jazz has flourished in Scotland in recent years, and our emerging artists have started to gain national and international recognition. One of those, of course, is the wonderful Fergus McCreadie, who won the Scottish album of the year and was nominated for last year’s Mercury prize. I do not know if the Minister has had an opportunity to listen to his album, “Forest Floor”; I know that she will rush to stream it this evening, because it is a wonderful example of virtuosity, and it combines a number of genres and disciplines. It is a wonderful piece of work, and he is only in his 20s. I mention him because he is a great example of what “Jazz Nights” did: he got his first break from it. It supported and sustained him; it played his music, and now he is on the point of embarking on an international career. That is the type of thing it should be doing.

We should recognise that Edinburgh is the home of international festivals, particularly the jazz festival. Edinburgh is becoming increasingly renowned as a European, if not world, centre for classical music. No wonder, with facilities such as the redeveloped Usher Hall. It is a great place to watch classical music. Again, if the Minister is looking for recommendations, she should go there some day to see some of the wonderful concerts that it puts on.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My hon. Friend has strayed too far into Glasgow for my liking. Would he agree that the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, based in my Glasgow Central constituency, is a huge part of that flourishing scene, in which there is classical, jazz and pipe music, and that there is now collaboration between those three? It is key that young people hear that music on the radio, and that it reaches a wider audience, because it will not be picked up by the commercial stations. The BBC has a key role in identifying and promoting young talent, which can then go on to great success.

**Pete Wishart:** My hon. Friend is absolutely correct in her assessment and description of the wonderful work that goes on in the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. It has fantastic staff. I have not had an opportunity to visit for a while, so I will put that on my list now; I will definitely go and see it. John Wallace, a distinguished former leader of the conservatoire, asked what the point of cutting all these programmes is. He is right to ask. We must ensure that young artists get to hear themselves on the radio.

When we want to hear these genres of music, we naturally turn to the BBC. The BBC remains the dominant force in UK broadcasting because of its distinctive funding arrangement, and because the licence fee allows it to do things that no other operator can. We turn to it when trying to find the things that we want. Even with all the increased competition over the years, the BBC still accounts for 47% of radio consumption. That privileged position makes it especially important that BBC radio provides programmes that are distinctive and of public value. The BBC has statutory responsibilities and obligations to do so, and Ofcom is there to ensure that the BBC fulfils them. The BBC has a clear commitment to ensure that all genres of music are played, and to serve an audience beyond the mainstream. That is what the BBC is supposed to do. Instead, there has been a reduction in important public value obligations, and a loss of distinctiveness.

Ofcom is consulting, and is expected to produce its final proposals in a few months' time, and a new operating licence comes into effect from April. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is also having its mid-term review of the BBC, and of course we are all expecting the White Paper with great anticipation. The Minister and I discussed that at length when she appeared before the Scottish Affairs Committee. There are lots of things going on. With all this activity and all these reviews, I plead with her not to lose sight of the prime objective of serving all audiences and ensuring that everyone has something that they can listen to. It is so tempting to play to the mainstream only—to appeal to the mass audience. We should ensure that everyone is served.

Let us look at the BBC's obligations and responsibilities as outlined by Ofcom. It says that the BBC should ensure a "range of programming is provided"

across all its services. Specifically on radio services, Ofcom says:

"the BBC should ensure its portfolio of stations offer the broadest variety of output and that the range of musical output on its popular radio services is broader than that of comparable providers".

The BBC's decision to cut jazz, classical and piping programming will vastly reduce its fulfilment of that commitment, and the way that it represents and platforms some of Scotland's most dynamic and emerging music scenes. It is clearly a breach of what is set out in the charter and in regulation. I hope that the Minister will remind BBC Scotland of its obligations and responsibilities.

In response to the chorus of disapproval, the BBC has got in touch with all of us about the subject. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) met the BBC last Friday, I believe, and heard some of its alternative proposals. None of what has been suggested comes close to beating it on satisfaction grounds or to making up for the loss of these programmes. The BBC seems to be proposing a series of amalgamations where it takes these programmes off-spectrum, puts them online and diverts people to other services. That is simply not good enough. It does not even start to address what is being lost.

My appeal to the BBC is to listen to people on the frontline, such as those at the meeting with my hon. Friend. They are the ones who know the genres, how they work and operate and what they require in order to survive, sustain and develop. Is there anything the Minister could do to encourage the BBC to engage positively with them? The BBC has engaged positively in the past, and I know that the people at BBC Scotland are good guys. I believe they have the best interests of our nation at heart. They want to serve these audiences, but they just need encouragement to do the right thing and make sure the services are safe.

This is a hard time to be a musician. I would have hated to be a musician during this period. I was one in the '80s and '90s, which were days of bounty. It is an entirely different regime now. Streaming accounts mean that musicians earn very little from their recorded work. Then there are the effects of the pandemic and a cost of living crisis. I think I saw a survey showing that over 90% of musicians are now concerned about the impact of the cost of living crisis on their ability to perform. There was a report yesterday about the loss of venues and clubs, which is restricting live performance.

We have had the impact of Brexit. Europe is practically closed to new artists with all the different paperwork that is required. This is not a good time. We do not need these difficulties to be compounded with the loss of an opportunity to be played on the radio. We may not get all the right notes in the right order, as specified by our good friend the great late Eric Morecambe, but I hope we can bring some support to the sector and encourage people to think again and look at the damage this might bring to the sector. I hope the Minister will do all she can to ensure that people are aware of the responsibilities and obligations and think again about the damage.

**Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair):** Just before I bring the Minister in, there is the possibility of a Division fairly shortly, but I will apply any injury time from the vote to the debate.



4.17 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Julia Lopez):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark, and I hope we are not interrupted by votes. I thank the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) for calling the debate and for our exchanges last week as part of his Committee's examination of broadcasting in Scotland. I look forward to receiving his recommendations about the best approach. He talks of sonorous chaos in his beautiful speech, and it makes me think about the behaviour of the SNP at Prime Minister's questions every Wednesday.

I absolutely agree about the importance of music, and the hon. Gentleman spoke beautifully about that. Scotland has such a rich and vibrant cultural heritage, and it is a pleasure to speak to that. I know that that music is at the core of Scottish identity, but it is also at the core of British identity. As he was speaking, I was thinking back to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's state funeral. It was opened by a band of pipers, which was extremely moving, and then closed by a lone piper in Windsor. That sound and image was a thing of beauty that has stuck in many of our minds, and that music will be noted internationally as something that both makes up a very strong cultural identity and can move the human soul.

**Alison Thewliss:** The Minister talks about the importance of piping both here and internationally. Is she aware that there is no back-cataloguing of piping, because it is live, meaning that the "Pipeline" programme is, in effect, the back catalogue of the nation's piping, and that is why it is so important?

**Julia Lopez:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I was not aware of that. I know how strongly people feel about "Pipeline". I suspect the BBC has been surprised by the strength of feeling expressed about not just these particular programmes but the local radio changes proposed by the organisation.

Music is an absolutely essential part of our arts and cultural sector, but it is also big business. Pre pandemic, the music sector was worth about £5.8 billion and exported music and services were worth £2.9 billion—I think we are all familiar with how many UK artists make waves internationally. As well as fuelling tens of thousands of jobs, it is a huge source of soft power on the world stage. Scotland's music ecosystem forms a valuable component of that, having produced a wealth of internationally renowned artists, including Lewis Capaldi, Annie Lennox and Calvin Harris. It would be wrong of me not to mention the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, who I believe was the first representative of the House of Commons to have appeared on "Top of the Pops". I am also told that he has sold something in the region of a million records—I do not know whether he can verify that. I confess that I had no idea that Gaelic folk rock, while seemingly niche, has such a broad and dedicated audience. Of course, his crowning glory is being a member of MP4.

Traditional Scottish music is internationally recognised as the sound of Scotland, but it is also recognised for its richness and diversity, which spans and often blends an array of musical genres and styles. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire mentioned the burgeoning

jazz scene, particularly around Edinburgh, and I agree that it is crucial that that music is preserved and remains as culturally relevant today as it has been in the past.

Radio and television are fantastic ways to celebrate culture, and the BBC has played an important role in producing audio and visual content across the UK. The Government believe it is essential that the BBC continues to reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities across the entire country, including in Scotland, and I recognise that audiences value BBC Scotland's showcasing all genres of musical talent that that nation has to offer.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire raised some profound concerns about changes to "Pipeline", "Classics Unwrapped" and "Jazz Nights". I am glad that the BBC is aware of the strength of feeling, and I recommend that hon. Members continue to make that strength of feeling known, because the BBC is independent of the Government and therefore makes its own decisions. Although it is influenced by the funding envelope it receives, my understanding is that a lot of the radio changes are funding neutral. They are part of the drive towards a "digital first" model for the BBC, so it is important that we in this House continue to express what we are hearing from our constituents about the services that are valued the most. They might not have the largest audiences, but they have a profound meaning in a lot of people's lives. They serve particular pockets of culture that are important to our national identity, and I advise the hon. Member to continue to liaise with the BBC and make clear the level of feeling.

We believe it is important that the BBC continues to cultivate the partnerships that have made it such an important mechanism for making sure that local musicians can get an audience. Last year, the BBC extended its partnership with Creative Scotland to December 2024. It is also renewing its collaboration agreement with MG Alba, which I spoke to very recently, and it has been working with the Scottish Government and others to deliver "SpeakGaelic", which is a suite of resources—including a website, podcast, and radio and TV programmes—to support learners.

However, talent must start somewhere and has to be nurtured. Musicians, particularly those practising in lesser-known genres, have to be afforded a platform so that they can excel in the music industry and reach their potential. In response to the concerns that have been expressed by hon. Members, the BBC has set out some of things it is doing to support emerging musical talents, such as "BBC Introducing in Scotland" and the BBC Radio Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year award. I urge the BBC to consider how its changes will impact on its ability to deliver for audiences across our country. As the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire mentioned, it is a requirement of the charter, and it is important that Ofcom holds the BBC to account for its delivery in that regard.

The hon. Member raised a number of other issues in relation to the music industry, which I am very alive to. We are drawing up a strategy in our creative sector vision, which will touch on some of those issues. He raised the issue of streaming, which I know the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee has been looking at in great detail. The Competition and Markets Authority has looked at this issue extensively, and it is also being

looked at by the Intellectual Property Office. We will be coming forward with further workstreams in the coming weeks and months.

We also do a lot of work on music export. There is always more we can do in this regard, but we work closely with the Department for International Trade on the music export growth scheme, which is helping to break new artists into other markets, including the Scottish singer-songwriter Nina Nesbitt. I will continue to work closely with DIT on these kinds of initiatives.

As the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire knows, many aspects of culture are devolved, so spending on arts and culture in Scotland is mainly carried out by the Scottish Government. I know that he has taken up some of his concerns with Angus Robertson, and it is for him to decide how to allocate some of the cultural spend. It may be that he wishes to look at some of the programmes in relation to the musical genres that the hon. Member talks about. We are always keen to work collaboratively with the Scottish Government.

The creative industries are one of the fastest growing sectors in the UK. As I mentioned, we are drawing up a creative sector vision, which will look at a range of ways in which we can ensure that that sector continues to thrive. That includes looking at creative clusters across the UK. Dundee is a great cluster for video gaming, when looking at some of the skills required for the workforce and some of the issues that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire highlighted in his very good speech.

We support culture in a range of ways, including through the cultural recovery fund, which is devolved in the Scottish context. The hon. Member mentioned music venues and it has been a time of profound challenge, with the pandemic closing a number of venues, and a reluctance of audiences to go back to them. The cost of living pressures on households might make going to such venues an item of expenditure that many people feel they can cut out. We are trying to support venues, mainly through the energy support scheme, which will continue in a slightly different form from April this year.

I conclude by thanking the hon. Gentleman for raising his concerns with such passion and beauty. Music is profoundly important for us all. It serves us in many purposes and guides us as a companion through life's journeys. It has an important heritage in Scotland that people value very much. I hope the BBC is listening to the hon. Gentleman's concerns, and is alive to what hon. Members are talking about on the subject of radio cuts. I will continue to raise those matters in the regular meetings I have with the director-general.

*Question put and agreed to.*

4.27 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Council Tax and Revenue Support Grant

4.30 pm

**Chris Loder** (West Dorset) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered council tax and the distribution of the revenue support grant.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Sir Mark. I thank other Members, and indeed the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Jane Hunt), for attending.

People who live in Dorset currently pay over two and a half times more council tax on an average band D property than people who live in London. People of school age living in Dorset, or their parents, will need to pay for their travel to school or college; meanwhile, in London and other urban areas, that travel is paid for. A third of our community in Dorset is over 65, compared with around 10% of the community in London. In Dorset, 85% of services are provided diligently by the council, and will be funded through council tax, compared with a national average of 50%. Why, then, given the rurality of West Dorset, the demographics of its residents and the challenges we face, do we receive a fraction of the Government support that urban boroughs receive?

The Government have a powerful lever of influence on local government finance and its impact on the tax burden of local residents, and that lever is the revenue support grant, which allows the Government to choose and target which areas of the country to help most. Year after year, the residents of rural West Dorset are continually frustrated that preference is given to urban areas, such as those in the capital, over places such as my constituency. The formula for the revenue support grant is in need of a great deal of scrutiny and reform as part of a wide-scale review of local authority funding.

In West Dorset, we are custodians of picturesque rolling green hills, with livestock grazing and productive arable land, and magnificent landmarks and heritage sites, such as the Cerne Abbas giant and the Jurassic coastline. Yet the people of West Dorset and the wider county face one of the highest rates of council tax in the country. My constituents and those living in neighbouring rural Dorset constituencies pay £2,225 for an average band D property, compared with just £866 in the London Borough of Wandsworth—an enormous difference of £1,359. In short, that means that West Dorset's council tax is 150% more than Wandsworth's.

Through diligent financial management, Dorset Council has continued to cut its costs, but many still face high council tax bills. A key reason for that is that the local government funding formula requires urgent reform. In 2019-20, local authorities on average received 50% of their revenue through council tax, alongside 23% from Government grants and 27% from retained business rates. Dorset Council is forced to derive 84% of its revenue from council tax, which itself has increased 12% since 2010-11 and, in 2022-23, totals almost £300 million. In contrast, Wandsworth Borough Council needs only to raise around £70 million in council tax. In previous years, we in Dorset have received zero revenue support grant, compared with a £24 million revenue support grant last year for Wandsworth. We have to ask: is that really fair? [*Interruption.*]

**Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair):** Order. The sitting is suspended for 15 minutes for a Division in the House. If there are two Divisions, it will be suspended for 25 minutes. I will resume the sitting when Members currently present return to their seats.

4.34 pm

*Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.*

4.58 pm

*On resuming—*

**Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair):** Order. The debate now resumes and can continue until five minutes to 6. Mr Loder, would you like to continue?

**Chris Loder:** I would like to remind Members present that, just before the Division, I was talking about the fairness of the specifics of the Dorset Council revenue support grant. For the past three years, Dorset has received exactly zero revenue support grant. This is the first year since my election that we have received any form of revenue support grant. At a slim £654,000, that equates to roughly 0.2% of total council income. Although welcomed, that has come only after others and I spent a long time banging the drum for the situation to change. I am afraid that it is still overshadowed by the £24 million that, for example, Wandsworth Borough Council and other boroughs receive.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I thank the hon. Gentleman for being such an assiduous MP for his constituency, which he clearly is. He is outlining the pressure caused by the rising cost of living. Councils are finding it increasingly difficult to balance their books, and I believe that Government must consider increasing the grants to ensure that the basic service-level provision is in place—that basic services are maintained, and that the parity of grant that the hon. Gentleman has referred to applies across the whole of the United Kingdom. There is deep privation in the hon. Gentleman's area: the same is true in other parts of the country.

**Chris Loder:** I agree that deprivation affects all parts of the United Kingdom—not just urban areas, but rural areas as well, and indeed all four nations of the UK.

Despite Dorset benefiting from £654,000 from the revenue support grant, local councillors have made me aware that while we have finally received a positive revenue support grant contribution, other Government grants have been reduced by a broadly similar amount, meaning that the council is little better off in real terms. It is therefore clear that the way in which local government finances and the revenue support grant are calculated and delivered is in need of urgent review. Unlike others, I am not looking for favour or preference for Dorset, or indeed West Dorset, but I am looking for fairness.

The average age in rural Dorset is much higher than almost anywhere else in the UK, with one third of the community aged over 65, compared with an average of 19% in England and just 10% in some London boroughs. That, alongside rising special educational needs and disabilities among young children, means that 69% of Dorset Council's revenue is spent on social care. Since 2010-11, there has been a 25% rise in the number of

those aged between 65 and 84 in Dorset, and a 20% increase in those aged over 85—with, of course, the associated social care needs. Those changing demographics have caused the council's spending to change dramatically, with net spending on adult social care in Dorset increasing by 15% to £139 million, and children's social care spending increasing by almost 25% between 2010-11 and 2019-20, reaching over £60 million. However, the fundamental funding structure has still not changed.

Care of adults and children is an obvious council priority, and with internal migration having increased the average age in Dorset, that service has taken up more and more of the council's budget in recent years. That has resulted in cuts elsewhere: planning, development, culture, environment and regulatory services, and highways and transport have all seen reductions in net spending over the same period to facilitate the priority of adult and child social care. Highways and transport spending has been reduced by more than half over the past 10 years—a fact that is only too evident, as Dorset is also home to the worst frequency rail line in the country, between Yeovil, the county town of Dorchester and Weymouth. At best, there is a train every three hours, if you are lucky.

Buses have also been impacted, with Dorset Council having to spend its already tightening pool of transport resources on taking over vital community service routes from commercial operators that have pulled out. While concessionary bus passes appear good, they result in operators receiving 92p from a £6.50 single fare. That makes many routes commercially unviable and, paradoxically, reduces bus services in rural Dorset, which cuts off elderly communities from essential health and community services—the very groups of people who are meant to benefit from those concessionary passes. The young in West Dorset are also impacted by the inequalities in funding for transport. While I recognise that transport provision is often the responsibility of the Department for Transport, I am bringing up this issue today because of the situation we are in with the allocation of local government funding. Children throughout London enjoy the perks of free bus and tram travel to go to school or see their friends, but the parents of children in West Dorset are faced with financial obstacles. Some school bus passes cost over £600—and that is just for their child's daily travel to and from their place of learning at sixth form or college.

A 17-year-old living in Dorset will have to find a way to pay to get to their sixth form college or apprenticeship. A 17-year-old living in a London borough will not, thanks to the 16-18 bus pass, which is included in the funding for London. It is also worth noting that per passenger journey in London, TfL receives 10 times the amount of public funding than we do in Dorset. This refusal to give Dorset its fair share, according to its population and characteristics, is pushing the elderly into increasing isolation. That is an increasing concern for me as their MP.

It also places obstacles in the way of our bright, young minds, all while residents and small businesses continue to buckle under the ever-high rates of council tax. It is time that Dorset received its fair share of Government investment and funding and that my hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues show that the south-west is just as important to the levelling-up agenda as the north-east or indeed other parts of the United



Kingdom. The need for funding is especially pronounced following the impacts of the covid-19 pandemic, during which, I am afraid to say, we lost some 20% of our businesses.

A very topical subject being debated around the country is funding for emergency services. Here, too, we see the detrimental impact that the Government's failure to treat Dorset fairly is still having. My constituency and those surrounding it continue to face the difficult plight of county lines drugs gangs. Dorset Police's resources are pushed to breaking point during the summer months, especially when the county's population trebles with holidaymakers and day trippers. Dorset is the sixth-most popular region in the country for visitor trips during the summer, but these can sometimes stretch police resources. I understand that the Minister cannot answer for the Home Office, but I would like him to note this difficulty that we face.

I recognise that these policing matters sit with the Home Office, but I wonder whether my hon. Friend would consider the points I raised at the beginning of the debate. I will refresh everyone's memory on what those are. Why is levelling up not focused on rural areas in the same way as urban areas? Why does rural hardship not seem to matter in the same way that urban poverty does? Why does Dorset Council have to raise 85% of its funds through council tax, when the national average is 50% and even less in some urban locations? Why is it deemed acceptable to put financial obstacles in the way of access to rural education but to remove them for urban education?

Why does Transport for London get £1.7 billion of Government money when needed, yet Dorset Council gets hardly anything? Why, despite known patterns of domestic migration, is the cost burden of rural social care placed on the local community, whereas other communities can get help? Why does Dorset receive such low levels of the revenue support grant, whereas in inner London there are boroughs that charge very low rates of council tax comparatively and are furnished with tens of millions of pounds in Government grants?

In short, it is my intention with this debate for the House to consider two central points. The first is that rural Britain, and specifically rural Dorset and my constituency of West Dorset, should finally receive its fair share of Government local authority support. For too long, Dorset has been overlooked in the allocation of RSG payments, and for too long council tax has had to cover the deficit. It is time that services in Dorset had adequate funding, so that they can continue to support rural and coastal communities in the way they need to. Finally, as I continue to champion relentlessly the needs of West Dorset and advocate for fairness across the board, I believe that the Government need to examine the whole system of revenue support grants, and that there is a need for reform so that local authorities such as Dorset Council receive their fair share of Government funding and support to enable us to thrive.

5.11 pm

**Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Mark. I think I might have caught my daughter's cold, so forgive me if I am a little hoarse—I wish that the Minister had bought two Lucozades. I congratulate the hon. Member for West

Dorset (Chris Loder) on securing the debate and highlighting the regional inequality that his constituents face. That is a reality for many areas across the country.

Council tax is a fraught issue in every part of our country, from Dorset to Durham. Sadly, local communities in rural, urban and suburban areas will have seen their neighbourhoods decline over the last decade while also seeing costs go up. Every household paying their council tax will increasingly feel the strain as we deal with the fallout of the mini-Budget and a looming depression. With the revenue support grant being withdrawn in many areas and rising running costs not being met with adequate funds, council tax seems to be all there is left for local authorities. That is all that they can rely on. As we heard from the hon. Member for West Dorset, more than 80% of local funds are raised through council tax. That is reflected nationally: since 2010, core funding for councils has been reduced by £16 billion, and yet council tax has increased—it has been forced to go up—by over £15 billion. What we see locally is happening nationally.

Following 13 years of relentless, debilitating cuts, councils desperately hoped for respite from the autumn statement, but no such support was provided. Instead, the Government laid more burdens on local authorities by forcing them to take the tough decision on whether to raise council tax further. That was a cop-out—a refusal to own and fix the holes that they have created in our communities. The Chancellor talks—all Chancellors talk—about taking tough decisions, but, to be blunt, they are not taking the tough decisions when it comes to local government. They are instead forcing difficult decisions back on local authorities and local people. After taking 60p from every £1 given to local authorities since 2010, this Government are now pushing councils to charge residents even more money—often for worsening services. That is not sustainable. The Chancellor's plans to raise council tax in the way he has outlined will bring in an extra £80 per person in Surrey but just £39 per person in Hull.

Some have misunderstood levelling up or seen it as a bit of an empty slogan. Has it now come to mean that we are just creating greater economic divides than those that existed before? The hon. Member for West Dorset talked about rural areas perhaps not faring as well as everywhere else in levelling-up fund bids. I have asked before about the transparency over how levelling-up funding bids are allocated. Local authorities have not been told why they have been unsuccessful. As Ministers will know, MP after MP stands up in the Chamber or Westminster Hall to ask for their bids to be looked upon favourably, or to talk about how successful the bids are or where they are in the process. If we had a transparent process, we would know more, and local authorities and local areas could put in stronger bids. We need to end the cycle of beauty pageant crossed with Hunger Games-style bidding wars, which pits area against area, community against community and project against project, with no guaranteed outcome and without even tackling regional inequality. Instead, Labour would trust local areas and move towards longer-term funding settlements for councils and communities to use according to their priorities and make genuine long-term efficiency savings as they can better plan for the future.

After service after service has been cut, it is clear that local funds do not meet those needs. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is not in his place now,

[Sarah Owen]

talked about demand outstripping supply and resources in local areas. We have seen councils' desperate need to revive their youth provision or deal with increased levels of antisocial behaviour. Yet the funding does not make a dent in the amount needed to restore our crumbling high streets, prevent library closures or save local nurseries, and we all know it does not come anywhere close to plugging the gaps in the ailing, failing adult social care sector.

As has been stated, the hon. Member for West Dorset represents a rural constituency with a higher than average number of older residents, and that necessarily means higher demands on adult social care. I am sure he will appreciate that pouring more local taxpayers' money into a broken care system is just not sustainable. Private companies are making huge profits off children in care and through contracts with local authorities that have been stretched so thin that they can no longer directly provide the services that are needed. There has to be another way.

I worked as a care worker. I know the hard graft, the long hours and the low pay, and I know the conflicting demands. Those who had funding support and those who paid privately were pitted against each other—often for minutes—regardless of need. The Government cannot continue to ignore the dereliction of this sector forever. Even the current Chancellor acknowledged when he was Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee that that was not sustainable. When the funding comes, it will be just another sticking plaster and will come nowhere close to healing the wounds of more than a decade of neglect of social care, as well as rising demand. Constituencies such as mine and that of the hon. Member for West Dorset are varied in their demographics and geography but alike in their need for stable, adequate funding. I sincerely hope the Minister can answer some of the questions that have been put to him today.

5.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Lee Rowley):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark. I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) is an extremely vocal and proud champion of his local area in West Dorset. We have already spoken about this issue on a number of occasions in the short time I have been in post. He strongly advocates for his constituency's position and the importance of rural Britain being heard in debates such as this one. I congratulate him on securing the debate and highlighting important points, even though there was a gap in the middle for other reasons.

This is an important issue, and I accept that. My hon. Friend has outlined some of the points that affect his constituency and the supporting unitary authority. It is important we discuss these issues fairly regularly. There will never be a perfect methodology, and there will never be a single answer for everything. There will always be these necessary discussions, but it is important—I say this as someone who represents a semi-rural area as well—that the voice of rural Britain is heard. He has made that voice heard loud and clear today.

In response to my hon. Friend, I want to talk briefly about the broader situation and then answer a number of the points he raised to the best of my ability in the time we have. His point is both broad and narrow. It is broad in that people should have confidence that the system works for all parts of Britain, broad in that we want a local government settlement that reflects need, and broad in ensuring that all parts of our country get the resources we are able to offer. In the usual way, there is a challenge around the allocation of resources in a system that has infinite and worthy demands on it, but very finite resources to support it.

My hon. Friend also makes a more specific and narrow point about the RSG. He has highlighted how that has changed for a number of areas across the country over a number of years. He has highlighted that Dorset has had, for a number of years, a zero or negligible grant. It has gone up slightly this year.

**Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair):** Order. First, I give permission for Members to remove their jackets if they wish. Secondly, I ask the Minister to address his points through the Chair, rather than with his back to the Chair.

**Lee Rowley:** I will do that, Sir Mark. The RSG has been in place since the late 1980s. It has been a feature of the financial and settlement landscapes for a number of years. But, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset has indicated, the utility of the RSG and the way in which it is applied to individual areas, such as Dorset and elsewhere, has changed over recent years. That is to be expected as the local government funding landscape changes over a 20 or 30-year period.

That plays out within the context of a broader settlement, and in order to have these kinds of conversations we have to acknowledge what is within that broader settlement—not just the RSG but all the other grants, and the overall envelope within which it is offered. While I absolutely accept that there are a significant set of challenges at the moment, I hope the sector has recognised—in my experience from speaking with the sector, from unitary councils and districts to county and metropolitan boroughs, it has done—that a significant amount of money has gone into it. While there is still a challenge with inflation, it looks like £60 billion-worth of taxpayer subsidy, in one shape or form, in England will be allocated in the provisional local government finance settlement that was announced for consultation before Christmas. We will make decisions and finalise that for the sector shortly.

That figure represents a significant increase across all councils. We have also provided additional clarity about what is likely to come in the financial year 2024-25, which has been a long-standing request of the sector, irrespective of the way in which it funds its individual services. That has been welcomed by the sector, and I hope we can build on it in future years, once we are through the current spending review period.

Although it has tended to be more relevant for non-unitary councils than unitary councils, we have also given a one-off funding guarantee that meant the provisional settlement contained a floor that ensured that individual councils were able to obtain some uplift prior to deciding what they wished to do or not do about council tax. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) is no longer in his place, but he raised an important point about his

concerns regarding local government finance. I hope that with the provisional settlement and the clarity that we will provide shortly with the financial settlement, we have demonstrated our willingness to respond where we are able.

That is all within an extremely challenging global financial context, which we all know about, even if those on either side of the House disagree in part on the reasons for it. That is all down to challenges that were discussed at the Budget and that have been visible for a number of years—both within the immediate post-covid era and stretching back longer—across many western democracies as debt has risen, as the recovery from the global financial crisis has been attempted and as we seek to accommodate spending decisions that were made a number of years or decades ago, which still have overhang even now. We have to contextualise decisions about the financial settlement as a whole, which will hopefully be finalised soon, and how it is distributed within the very challenging financial context.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset talked powerfully about the particular pressures on children's services and adult social care, and he is absolutely right to highlight that there have been significantly increasing challenges around both those areas in the last decade or so. That is not unique to Dorset, but is absolutely the case in all other councils, as the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) highlighted from the Opposition Front Bench when she spoke of her own experiences of adult social care.

That has been recognised in the last number of years of the financial settlement with the creation of, and then increased funding for, grants earmarked for adult social care and children's care, including the social care grant. Over recent weeks, we have seen an additional amount made available for adult social care through the discharge fund, of which at least a portion will go through local authorities to support additional social care provision within individual localities, to help the NHS get through the winter challenges. My hon. Friend will probably also be aware of the market sustainability and improvement fund, which is due to come in in the next financial year. So there has been a response to the increasing pressures, and one that reflects greater linearity between grants that are provided by the centre and the challenges and pressures that individual authorities are facing. I hope that that further additional context is helpful.

My hon. Friend talked powerfully and at length about the specific aspects of rural funding. He made a strong point, and I will absolutely consider it more. As he will be aware, councils that have a significant proportion of rurality have already received additional funds through the rural services grant over the last few years. As part of the provisional settlement, we confirmed that that will continue in the coming years. I know that there is a debate about the quantum of that grant, but we have sought to do that. Within the funding formulas for other grants, there is a recognition of need, irrespective of rurality. As my hon. Friend rightly indicated, need is not necessarily related only to urban areas, but is also present in rural areas. I hope that, at least in part, the overall funding settlement is able to reflect that.

I want to talk about three points that my hon. Friend raised—I am not sure he will fully agree with me, but I want to touch on each of them. He made a number of

points about the difference, both perceived and actual, between how different parts of the country and different authorities allocate their resources, and about the different funding that comes to different parts of the country, both in terms of what is provided centrally and what is raised. He highlighted a differential between London and other parts of the country, and that is returned to regularly. As somebody who was a councillor in London for eight years and who is now happily back home in Derbyshire as a Member of Parliament, I have seen both sides of the equation. As I say, nothing in life is perfect—no methodology is perfect, and no funding formulas are perfect. However, if there were an equivalent number of Members of Parliament here from urban areas—I know this because I used to be part of this conversation—they too would make a strong case that there are challenges, issues and problems in their areas that need attention. That is not to take anything away from my hon. Friend's point about comparison, but it offers some context.

There are different pressures in urban and rural areas, in different geographical areas and in areas with different demographics. Ultimately, different choices are made. I have served in councils where there are significant choices around how social care is approached and where different choices are made around how leisure services and library services are approached. If we accept the principle of devolution—I know that my hon. Friend was not making this point *per se*—we also have to accept that there will be differences in the choices that are made, while recognising that some of those choices are down to the ability to determine things locally and some are more influenced by the overall process and decisions made elsewhere.

**Chris Loder:** I appreciate that, between the Minister's constituency and mine, there is an £800 difference in council tax at a band D level, so the issues that my constituents face are very much as he is kindly outlining. However, even if we take away the urban areas, which I used as a comparator, there is a level of disparity—his constituency and mine are not totally dissimilar, but there is a clear disparity. We welcome many people to retire in West Dorset, and indeed across the whole county and the whole south-west. That means that local councils often have to bear much greater financial responsibility for social care, but that is not reflected in the financial machinery we have today. From what the Minister said, and from my understanding of the process, there is not really a way to take that into account. Are the Government doing anything to give us some hope that we will have a better machinery in due course to take it into account?

**Lee Rowley:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. I accept that the existing settlement is a complex landscape with multiple different grants, interventions and interactions. At the core of those grants, there is a set of need assessments, need calculations and funding formulas. Some of those funding formulas are a number of years old, some are more than a number of years old, some are more recent and some approach things in different ways from others, so I accept that there is a complex landscape. Local government finance has always been a complicated and challenging landscape, but there is, at the core, a set of needs assessments. There is always a question about whether they could be updated and changed and whether they could better reflect how things are working and what is happening in individual



[Lee Rowley]

localities, but needs assessment is at the heart of local government finance. As I indicated, there has also been a move over the last few years to a greater set of earmarked grants, specifically around adult social care, and they are intended to reflect need to the extent that is possible.

To respond to the second of the points from my hon. Friend's speech, there is then a set of different circumstances in each individual area, in terms of both spend—lots of demand on adult social care in one place, but slightly less in others, and lots of demand on children's services in some places, but less in others, depending on the geography—and the funding available. That is because of a complicated web of where councils started from; decisions that have often been made over many decades; the corporate approach that successive councils and their leadership have made; and reflections of need—however perfect or imperfect they may be. Can I say that that process is perfect? Absolutely not. Can I say that there will not be anomalies or challenges in it? No, because there absolutely will be.

My hon. Friend mentioned his concerns about areas with older demographics and the pressures that that puts on them. He makes a cogent case that rural areas, parts of which are more affluent, although they still contain areas of deprivation, are highly dependent on council tax. However, if there were urban MPs here—he compared his area to at least one such location—they would argue that their areas receive significant revenue from business rates, and Government are removing an element of that and distributing it elsewhere, including to places that are not urban. It is a very difficult, complex set of interactions. I absolutely accept that it is not perfect and that we need to continually look at it, but it seeks to reflect need, notwithstanding the complicated process by which it has got there.

On my hon. Friend's point about whether there are opportunities to review the situation, there is always a need to look at these kinds of landscapes, particularly given the complexity and the fact that some elements of them have been around for a number of years. He will be aware—we have spoken about this previously—of some of the things that were started in recent years, such as the fair funding review.

On the financial settlement this year—I am not taking anything away from my hon. Friend's point about the need to review these areas—having come through three years of significant difficulty in everybody's lives, but particularly in the local government sector, we had to choose whether to make significant changes or offer stability. Through the provisional settlement, we have tried to offer a platform for stability, with significant additional funding, so that local authorities in the coming financial year—2023-34—have some breathing space after the tremendous work they have done post covid and during the inflationary period, which we hope has now peaked or will shortly peak. That will give them the opportunity to plan, think and look at how they can reform and do things differently to get ready for the years ahead.

We will always look at opportunities for review and change. Before Christmas, the Secretary of State indicated to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee that he wanted to do that, and I am doing it as a

new Minister. We are looking at what can and cannot be done in individual areas. I welcome the comments and thoughts of my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Luton North about those kinds of changes, and we will look that in the coming months and years.

I want to make a small plea to my hon. Friend to see things in the round. Although I accept that it is important to zero in on areas of contention and problematic areas, councils should have a significant absolute-terms increase in revenue in the coming financial settlement, and there have also been significant grants, particularly on the capital side. I do not want to tell my hon. Friend things he already knows, but I want to read this into the record: there has been significant funding on both the revenue and the capital sides to Dorset in recent months through the community renewal fund and the UK shared prosperity fund, and I believe that an area near his constituency was successful in a levelling-up bid just a few weeks ago. None of that takes away from his points, but it is important to see the context in which this discussion is taking place.

I absolutely accept that these are challenging times, that no methodology is perfect and that there is a legitimate debate to be had about how local government finance supports all parts of our country, all demographics and all facets and characteristics, including rurality and other things that my hon. Friend outlined. I hope that, in acknowledging all that, we can also collectively recognise that there has been a significant increase in funding this year, which is likely to go to all areas, as outlined in the provisional settlement. I hope my hon. Friend accepts that the prioritisation of stability in this coming year is important, given the challenges we have gone through in recent years. I look forward to working with all Members, including my hon. Friend, to see what changes and improvements are possible in the coming months and years.

5.39 pm

**Chris Loder:** I thank my hon. Friend the Minister, the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is no longer in his place, for contributing. I appreciate the extent to which the Minister was able to answer some of my questions.

There is clearly still a lot of work to do to address fair funding throughout the country, particularly for rural areas. I appreciate all the work that the Government have done. The Government intervention, funding and support that we have seen in the last three years is unparalleled by pretty much anything we have ever seen, certainly in my lifetime and, although I hate to hazard a guess at the Minister's age, probably in his as well—he might be younger than me, so I do not know.

The point is that we in West Dorset are below where we started. I mentioned the situation with our businesses; we lost 20% of them over covid. Our economy has already shrunk. As I said, our children who want to go to sixth form are having to pay £600 or £700 to get a bus to the nearest school, which can be 10 or 15 miles away, in order to study. We should not be in a situation where one part of the country is having to do that and another is not.

I appreciate the Minister's points on stability. I know how important that is, especially when we are going through a turbulent period with inflation and other things. I know that the Minister—and I hope that his colleagues in the Department—will take away from this

debate the fact that, although stability is important, we have a lot to address in our mechanisms for local government and local funding. The fact that there are immense differences between how much the constituents of the four of us in this room contribute towards council tax indicates the extent of the variation. I am advocating that we review those processes and work for fairness. I hope the Minister will take that back to the Department, and I look forward to seeing a much better case for Dorset in the next settlement.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered council tax and the distribution of the revenue support grant.

5.42 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*





# Written Statements

Tuesday 31 January 2023

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Environmental Improvement Plan 2023

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** This Government are committed to leaving the environment in a better state than we found it. Five years ago, the 25-year environment plan—25YEP—set out our vision for a quarter of a century of action to help the natural world regain and retain good health. We said we would refresh the plan every five years, a commitment we set into law in the Environment Act 2021.

Today I am publishing that revised plan: the “Environmental Improvement Plan 2023”—EIP23. The 25YEP set out 10 complementary goals. This improvement plan sets out the interim targets and our plan to deliver those goals, including measures such as:

A comprehensive delivery plan to halt the decline in nature by 2030.

A commitment to creating and restoring at least 500,000 hectares of wildlife habitat, with 70 new projects, including 25 new or expanded national nature reserves.

A new pledge on access to nature with everyone to live no more than a 15 minutes’ walk from a green or blue space.

The species survival fund for domestic species at risk, such as the red squirrel.

Five-year interim targets to drive progress towards our long-term targets. I will look to provide the House with further details shortly.

We also included in the Environment Act a requirement to publish a statement explaining the changes made through our review of the 25YEP.

These changes can be grouped into two themes: content updates where scientific understanding and new policy has developed over the last five years; and structural changes that build on the 25YEP.

#### *Content updates:*

EIP23 brings more specificity to our 25YEP goals by incorporating long-term and interim targets in the four priority areas—air quality, water, biodiversity, and resource efficiency and waste reduction, as required under the Environment Act. Also included are woodland cover and marine targets. These targets will drive environmental long-term improvement to protect and enhance our natural world.

The delivery plans for each 25YEP goal incorporate the previously published environmental land management priorities—climate change mitigation and adaptation; species abundance; water quality; and soil health.

EIP23 shows how our goals are interconnected, recognising the environment as a system. This includes including cross-cutting themes such as green finance and highlighting how actions in one chapter’s delivery plan drives progress towards other goals’ targets.

EIP23 sets our domestic framework in the context of our wider international commitments. COP15—the 15th conference of the parties to the convention on biological diversity—in December 2022, was an important moment for progress on biodiversity. It was agreed that parties would update their national biodiversity strategy and action plan—NBSAP—by COP16. EIP23 fulfils that commitment for England in setting

out actions we are taking nationally to contribute to our global commitments, with further detailed policy commitments published separately and in discussion with devolved colleagues.

EIP23 outlines how driving progress towards the goals will contribute to growth in green jobs, as well as supporting employers across England to create a pipeline of skilled people to fill those jobs. Tree planting, for example, can support job creation and deliver associated economic benefits. Our new target to increase tree canopy and woodland cover to 16.5% of total land area in England is expected to support an additional 1,400 jobs by 2035. This equates to approximately one job being supported for every 5 hectares of new woodland creation.

#### *Structural changes:*

Each 25YEP goal has its own chapter and delivery plan in EIP23. Our Environment Act targets are linked into their relevant goal chapter, showing how they have been designed to fill gaps to complement our broader environmental commitments.

Improving our natural environment requires action from across Government and the wider public and private sector. EIP23 provides that strengthened approach to cross-Government action by including specific actions and commitments across relevant Government Departments within the delivery plan for each goal. Implementation will continue to be managed by cross-Government governance. Specific roles for the public and private sectors and the general public are also accounted for in delivering environmental improvement.

This revised plan makes clear what the Government want to achieve, as well as when and how we will achieve it, and how we will measure progress. This sets the direction for action both in the short term and the long term.

Today I am also publishing the final environmental principles policy statement, setting out how the principles are to be interpreted and proportionately applied, as well as the significant improvement test review report, both on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) and laid before Parliament.

[HCWS535]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Police Funding Settlement 2023-24

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has today laid before the House the police grant report for England and Wales 2023-24 (HC 1066). The report sets out the Home Secretary’s determination for 2023-24 of the aggregate amount of grants that she proposes to pay under section 46(2) of the Police Act 1996. Copies of the report are available from the Vote Office.

The allocations that have been laid before the House today are as set out in my statement and the provisional police grant report of 14 December 2022.

In 2023-24 the overall funding settlement for the policing system will total up to £17.2 billion, a £287 million increase on the 2022-23 funding settlement. Available funding to police and crime commissioners (PCCs) will increase next year by up to an additional £523 million, assuming full take-up of precept flexibility and using latest forecasts.

This would represent an increase to PCC funding in cash terms of 3.6% on the 2022-23 police funding settlement. This settlement demonstrates how the Government are honouring the commitments set out at

spending review 2021 to provide additional funding to maintain the police uplift programme and to provide additional support for the recent pay award.

The table, available as an online attachment, documents funding to PCCs for 2023-24, including precept.

Attachments can be viewed online at:

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-01-31/HCWS537>

[HCWS537]

### **Report of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation**

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman):** In accordance with section 36 of the Terrorism Act 2006, Jonathan Hall KC, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, has prepared a report on the operation in 2020 of the Terrorism Acts, which was laid before the House on 28 April 2022.

I am grateful to Mr Hall KC for his report and have carefully considered the recommendations and observations included within. I am today laying before the House the Government's response to the report—CP 788. Copies will be available in the Vote Office and it will also be published on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

[HCWS536]

## **JUSTICE**

### **Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan**

**The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Damian Hinds):** The Government are today publishing our “Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan”. The delivery plan sets out how the Government will deliver four overarching priorities to improve outcomes for women in, or at risk of contact with, the criminal justice system over the period 2022 to 2025:

- Fewer women entering the justice system and reoffending;
- Fewer women serving short custodial sentences with a greater proportion managed successfully in the community;
- Better conditions that support rehabilitation for women in custody; and
- Protecting the public through better outcomes for women on release.

The delivery plan includes specific and measurable commitments aimed at reducing women's offending and reoffending, in turn making communities safer for the public. We will publish a “one year on” progress report on implementation of our delivery plan.

Effective community support is essential for women in, or at risk of contact with, the justice system, and the Government recognise the vital role played by the women's community sector in supporting vulnerable women and helping to reduce their reoffending. On 1 September we announced that up to £24 million will be invested in women's community services until 2025, through multi-year grant competitions. These grants will allow us to improve the sustainability of women's services by meeting organisations' core costs such as rent and utility bills, to improve the join up of local services, and to test and build our evidence base by investing in new or additional services or interventions.

The Government recognise that community sentences also play an important role in supporting women with complex needs, which often underlie their offending behaviour. While women who commit the most serious crimes will always be sent to prison, custody should be a last resort. A robust and effective community sentence delivers benefits to wider society as well as the individual. An effective community sentence means women will be less likely to lose their accommodation and employment, making it less likely that they will have to call on statutory services. An effective community sentence will enable them to receive targeted support to address their individual needs, reducing the likelihood of reoffending. Targeted community sentences can help to limit the disruption to women's families, particularly their children, in turn helping to address the cycle of intergenerational offending. We are working with courts to raise awareness and increase understanding of the specific issues faced by women who offend, including piloting a women-specific problem-solving court.

Although the number of women in custody reduced by 24% between 2011 and 2021, we are committed to improving conditions for those women who do need to be in custody. We will be funding measures such as family engagement workers, additional support for women in their early days in custody and a social workers pilot with up to £14 million between 2022 and 2025 to improve outcomes, including reducing self-harm. The delivery plan will also highlight wider Government work on reducing reoffending through effective resettlement by focusing on what we know works: a home, a job and access to treatment for substance misuse, focusing on the particular issues that women face when seeking to address the causes of their offending.

Alongside this delivery plan, we are publishing two related progress reports on the Farmer review for women and on the national “Concordat on Women in or at risk of contact with the Criminal Justice System”. Outstanding commitments from both the Farmer review and the concordat will be taken forward under this delivery plan.

[HCWS534]

## **WORK AND PENSIONS**

### **Diffuse Mesothelioma Payment Scheme Levy 2022-23**

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Tom Pursglove):** The Diffuse Mesothelioma Payment Scheme (Levy) Regulations 2014 require active employers' liability insurers to pay an annual levy, based on their relative market share, for the purpose of meeting the costs of the Diffuse Mesothelioma Payment Scheme (DMPS). This is in line with the insurance industry's commitment to fund a scheme of last resort for persons diagnosed with diffuse mesothelioma who have been unable to trace their employer or their employer's insurer.

Today I can announce that the total amount of the levy to be charged for 2022-23, the ninth year of the DMPS, is £20.3 million. The amount will be payable by active insurers by the end of March 2023.

Individual active insurers will be notified in writing of their share of the levy, together with how the amount was calculated and the payment arrangements. Insurers should be aware that it is a legal requirement to pay the levy within the set timescales.

I am pleased that the DMPS has seen nine successful years of operation, assisting many hundreds of people who have been diagnosed with diffuse mesothelioma. The eighth annual report for the scheme, along with the

annual statistics, was published on 22 November 2022 and is available on the [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) website. I hope that Members of both Houses will welcome this announcement and give the DMPS their continued support.

[HCWS533]





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**not later than  
Tuesday 7 February 2023**

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