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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Monday 13 March 2023

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

UK Military Capability

1. **Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the UK's (a) number of military personnel and (b) range of military capabilities. [904014]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): The armed forces' capabilities allow the Ministry of Defence to meet a range of domestic and global commitments. Defence is reorganising and re-equipping to face future threats. However, as I have previously stated, as the threats change, we need to change with them. Any specific changes related to personnel numbers or military equipment capabilities will be determined once the update to the Defence Command Paper has concluded, which I expect to happen in June.

Mr Speaker: I call John Baron—good to see you back.

Mr Baron: While I am conscious that my right hon. Friend has accepted the conclusions of last year's 1922 defence committee report in drafting his Command Paper, I am also conscious of the fact that there is real concern, as we are about to hear, about the integrated review and, indeed, one-off increases. What does he think it will take for this House to sustainably increase defence spending, given geopolitical events?

Mr Wallace: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. First and foremost, we have been sustainably increasing our defence since 2020. The Prime Minister recognises the dangerous world we are in, and in the autumn statement both the Chancellor and the Prime Minister recognised the importance of increasing defence spending. The Prime Minister has obviously talked over the weekend about defence spending. There will be a Budget later in the week, and then I think there will be some further discussions to have.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Of course, the former head of the British Army, Lord Dannatt, said last month:

"The planned cuts in the strength of our army must be stopped...and fresh investment must pour into our artillery, air defence, communications and logistic capability."

What is the Secretary of State, who has overseen some of these cuts, now going to do to reverse and build back the capacity Lord Dannatt and others are calling for?

Mr Wallace: If the hon. Member had been listening, he would know that, in our Defence Command Paper, we are investing in air defence, electronic warfare, signals intelligence and communications—all the things he has just reeled off—but maybe he did not bother to listen originally. [*Interruption.*] I think it is interesting that Labour Members are heckling. We have not heard about a single penny of their defence plans in the last few years. Even the Royal United Services Institute speech by the shadow Secretary of State himself could not put a finger on the money. First and foremost, we are investing in our defence, and we have had a record increase since 2020. That compares with the Labour Government record: in 1997, they inherited 2.7% of GDP, which continued to fall all the way through, and only at the very last minute, when they had a £36 billion black hole, did they try to rectify it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call the Chair of the Defence Committee.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I am conscious that there is a statement to follow, but may I just pause and say thank you to the Defence Secretary and his team for the tireless work they have done in trying to secure additional funding of £11 billion and an increase in defence spending of 2.5%? It was not to be, and our military will be affected by that, not least our land forces. However, I do welcome the AUKUS agreement, which will secure hundreds of highly skilled jobs up and down the country. Is any part of the £3 billion of additional funding for the nuclear enterprise part of the £10 billion reserve for Dreadnought, or is it ringfenced for the AUKUS procurement programme, and is any of the £5 billion coming through subject to VAT, which would of course mean that one fifth of it will go back to the Treasury?

Mr Wallace: My right hon. Friend makes an interesting point about the details of the announcement. Obviously, the details will come forward in the Budget. What I can say is that the £2 billion-plus is new money. It is not part of the reserve or anything else, and it is separate from the £2.3 billion for Ukraine. It also comes on top of the £560 million of extra money for weapons and restocking announced in the autumn statement. On the nuclear chapter, the £3 billion is a recognition of the need for increased defence capability in that space, but also of the need to invest now in infrastructure, which, if we do not start now, will not be fit for purpose when AUKUS starts towards the end of the decade.

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): As we understand from the press, and as the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) said, we anticipate an additional £5 billion for defence between now and 2025. The Ministry of Defence has said that the Secretary of State is delighted with the settlement, which represents a commitment to an upward trajectory. Given the impact of defence inflation and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, what does he make of plans to reduce the size of the Army to 72,500 by 2025?

Mr Wallace: The reduction in the size of the Army was coupled with record investment of £24 billion in the armed forces at the same time. It was also a recognition that the most important thing is to ensure that we give the men and women of our armed forces, whichever service they are in, the correct equipment at the correct time, and create a 360° armed forces. There is no point in playing a numbers game if we do not equip, house, care for and deploy people properly. The hon. Gentleman might want to play a numbers game, but I do not want to turn our soldiers into cannon fodder.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): The whole House will be delighted to see you back in your seat, Madam Deputy Speaker. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State and the entire team for the battle they have fought with the Treasury over the past few weeks, but the £5 billion is disappointing, particularly if £3 billion goes to AUKUS, and £1.9 billion goes to filling up our warehouses. It actually means a cut in defence spending, rather than an increase. Nevertheless, I was encouraged by what the Secretary of State said a moment ago about the Budget on Wednesday, and various other remarks that seem to indicate that there may be more money to come. Am I being over-optimistic?

Mr Wallace: As my hon. Friend will know, all Departments are within their current comprehensive spending agreement, and the next comprehensive spending review is due in 18 months to two years' time. Although all Departments, including those of Defence, Transport, and Health and Social Care suffer from pressures with higher inflation, it is right to ensure that we live within the envelope and, where possible, seek relief for a range of challenges. That is what I have been seeking for the next two years with the Treasury. I have also said consistently that the most important thing is the headmark for the long-term direction of defence spending, so that it is no longer declining, as it has done for the past three decades, but is on an upward trajectory. Since 2020, it has been on that upward trajectory. This grant of extra money continues that momentum, which is incredibly important, and I hope that the headmark will soon be announced in detail.

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

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): In November, the Defence Secretary told the Defence Committee that

“yes, the inflationary pressure on my budget for the next two years is about £8 billion”.

From the media briefing at the weekend, we know he has a welcome £5 billion earmarked for stockpiles and the UK's nuclear programme, but the armed forces will see that funding as a defeat for the MOD in Government. There is no new money for pressures on the core defence budget or to help deal with capability gaps, or even to deal with that inflation. The National Audit Office has already said that the MOD cannot afford the capabilities needed in the 2021 integrated review, so how will the Secretary of State ensure that precisely the same does not happen again with today's 2023 integrated review?

Mr Wallace: What I am going to do, which the right hon. Gentleman's Government failed to do, is ensure that the Defence Command Paper reflects the budget

I have. I have always been consistent that the Government's ambition should match their stomach, and match the money. If we do not get that in tandem, we will discover that black holes grow over the years. The right hon. Gentleman's Government was part of that last time, as were previous Conservative Governments. I have come to this House consistently to take responsibility for what our Governments have done in the past, and I would be interested to see whether he will.

John Healey: In 2010 when Labour left government, we were spending 2.5% of GDP on defence—a level that has been nowhere near matched in any of the 13 years since. The Secretary of State is now the Conservative party's longest serving Defence Secretary, which means he has a track record of his own. He has cut the Army to 76,000 with more cuts to come. The Ajax armoured vehicle is six years late, with still no in-service date. He has cut and delayed new Wedgetail and Sentry planes, and he has growing doubts from allies about Britain meeting its NATO obligations in full. Last month he admitted to the House that forces have been hollowed out and underfunded with Conservative Governments. Will he accept that his extra defence funding today can only mean more of the same?

Mr Wallace: If people came to this House with real, genuine honesty about the track record of the Governments they were part of, the armed forces might be in a better position. What we should strive for is for the men and women of the armed forces to know that their political leaders are prepared to be clear about past mistakes and to talk about the future with some honesty. The National Audit Office report gave a view on the Labour party's governance of defence. I have it here, because Labour Members often forget it. It said that the Department's poor financial management had led to a severe funding shortfall of up to £36 billion in defence spending over the next 10 years.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Not true.

Mr Wallace: So what the National Audit Office says is not true, Madam Deputy Speaker—it made it up. It said that when the Department signed the contract for the aircraft carriers, it was aware that the overall defence budget was unaffordable. Labour Members were party to the crime at the time, but they will not come to the House now and be honest about their role in it and the things that need to be done to fix it in the future.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. We will not have interventions from people who are sitting down. There are plenty of opportunities to ask questions when you are standing up.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker, may I say how nice it is to see you back in your place? It is a very great pleasure.

I commend my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary and his excellent Front Bench team, because I know for a fact that they are fighting for every single penny they can get. However, as has been said, and I must agree, £5 billion is not sufficient to ensure that our core armed forces are properly equipped and prepared for—God forbid—something we all dread, as the world potentially totters towards world war three. What on earth is going through the minds of Treasury officials?

Mr Wallace: In defence of my colleagues in the Treasury, the Treasury is trying to balance an economic situation post covid that means we have to make sure that we cut our cloth and return to an economic credibility that is so important for growing our tax receipts and our income. One role I can play is to come to the House and be honest about the state of our armed forces. I can be honest about what caused the 30 years of challenge that both my hon. Friend and I experienced serving in the armed forces, and honest about what we can do to fix things. That is the first thing. The Defence Command Paper will ensure that we are very clear on where we will spend the money to make sure that the future is secure for the men and women of the armed forces.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the SNP spokesman.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): On military personnel, what is the Secretary of State's understanding of the recruitment crisis in defence, with the Army in particular and especially in the Royal Regiment of Scotland? The 4th Battalion the Highlanders satisfies almost 20% of its vacancies from the Commonwealth. Is it the poor service accommodation, mediocre pay, lack of career opportunities or substandard equipment that is driving young Scots away from a career in the British Army?

Mr Wallace: As an officer in a Scottish regiment, I remember distinctly not being allowed to recruit in towns or schools where SNP councillors ran those schools. I distinctly remember that the SNP was so unwelcoming to members of the armed forces it was having a detrimental effect on recruitment. I would be very interested to know if the SNP has now changed its tone. It certainly has on NATO membership. We remember that it used to not want to be part of NATO; it now does. I do not see the Army categorised as the hon. Member has just described it. If he carries on talking the armed forces down like that, no wonder people are not that keen to join. There has been a recruitment challenge for the infantry for as long as I was serving in the Army. That is over many, many years under both Labour and Conservative Governments. We have to ensure that the offer is improved. That is one reason why we did wraparound childcare to reflect how people live, and why we are investing in both married and single accommodation.

Dave Doogan: The Secretary of State says that he does not recognise the characterisation, but it is based in fact. Sticking to reality, where Germany allocates an extra €100 billion in response to Ukraine, the UK allocates an extra £5 billion. The United States is frustrated that the British Army is no longer a top-level fighting force. The RAF takes 10 years to train a pilot in combat, Army procurement could not order a pizza and get it delivered on time and on budget, and the Navy barely has enough F-35s for one aircraft carrier much less two. Is it not the case, to the great frustration of men and women in uniform, that this Tory Government over the last 13 years have created an ornamental defence force—nice to look at; don't ask it to do very much or sustain it for very long?

Mr Wallace: I am getting lessons from the SNP on procurement, when Ferguson shipyard is clinging on by its fingernails. When push comes to shove, Scotland buys its ferries from Turkey, not from Scotland, when it

has a perfectly good Clyde in which to build them. The hon. Gentleman goes on about all the things that he thinks are wrong with the armed forces, yet he will campaign to break Scotland away from the UK, reduce the Scottish armed forces to a rubber dinghy and tell everyone else that it is all the fault of the English. The reality is that Scotland is a proud contributor to our armed forces—it has been in history and is today. Also, the accommodation, the experience and the equipment that the soldiers have today are far better than many of us had in the early '90s. It would be nice if, once in a while, the SNP in Scotland did more than stand in front of ceremonial troops, and instead got out there and helped to recruit soldiers and helped the schools to talk about what is important about defence, rather than always talk it down.

NATO Obligations

2. **Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to ensure that the UK meets its obligations to NATO. [904015]

12. **Samantha Dixon (City of Chester) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to ensure that the UK meets its obligations to NATO. [904026]

The Minister for Armed Forces (James Heappey): Our commitment to NATO and Euro-Atlantic security is unconditional. In response to Russia's illegal war in Ukraine, we have enhanced our force posture in Estonia and have sent warships and fighter aircraft to south-east Europe and the Mediterranean. We contribute to every NATO mission and declare the UK's nuclear deterrent to NATO. The UK is committed to remaining NATO's leading European ally.

Chris Elmore: A recent report by the Defence Committee raised concerns about the UK's lack of ammunition reserves. The Committee said that the inability to restock our supplies puts at great risk our own defence, along with our commitments to supporting Ukraine. The Minister will say that the Department is announcing today that there are £2 billion-worth of stockpiles, but he cannot magic up munitions off the shelf—they can take years to be created. What assurance can he provide to me and the House that the shortage will not impact our domestic abilities and our wider commitments to NATO?

James Heappey: The hon. Gentleman makes a sensible point. The Select Committee's report is being read at the moment and will be responded to as would be expected. There is an important distinction to make: only a small proportion of the equipment and stockpiles that we are providing to the Ukrainians come from the current active inventory and stockpiles of the UK military. A very large proportion of the ammunition is at or slightly beyond the date by which we would normally seek to dispose of it, and an even larger proportion of it—the majority—is sourced or manufactured from stockpiles or manufacturing capabilities overseas.

Samantha Dixon: Notwithstanding the Secretary of State's earlier unwillingness to play a numbers game, the reality is that Ministers plan to cut the size of the Army to 73,000 by 2025, at a time that NATO has

agreed to increase its high readiness forces to 300,000. Will the updated integrated review halt cuts to Army numbers?

James Heappey: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been clear all along that if the facts change, so will our approach to force structure. It is important to note that force size and readiness are not necessarily directly connected. A future force may require fewer people because of automation and artificial intelligence, or it may not. We are studying the lessons from Ukraine carefully. We came to a clear judgment in the last IR. As we work towards the publication of a refresh of the defence Command Paper, we will look at whether the assumptions of the last Command Paper are still sound.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Could I ask my very good friend the Minister whether the additional money for defence will allow us to provide more teeth arm units, plus the support arm units—enablers—to NATO?

James Heappey: It may do. The reality is that we are still providing a large number of frontline units to NATO, particularly in the maritime and air domains, but my hon. and gallant Friend's principal concern will be about land forces. Even there, the UK continues to provide the most credible high readiness formations to the alliance. He made an important point that we can have as many fighting units as we wish, but without the logistics and the strategic enablers that get them to the front line, they are not worth having. The Secretary of State, Front-Bench colleagues and I have been clear for years that what urgently needs reinvestment is not a regrowth of our fighting echelon but a re-fleshing out of the logistics and the enablers, which—for good reasons—over the last 20 years have not been needed, but now so desperately are.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): On the point about logistics and enablers mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), when we look at our obligations to NATO and to Ukraine, particularly on stockpiling and ammunition, are Ministers looking at what procurement can be done commonly with NATO allies?

James Heappey: Absolutely. As the House might imagine, the UK is not alone in rediscovering the importance of stockpiles and strategic enablers over the last year. It is also not alone in finding out that industrial capacity cannot be turned on just like that, so working with allies around the alliance, both through the alliance itself and bilaterally, is clearly a very attractive option.

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

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): In this weekend's newspapers, a senior British military officer raised doubts about whether the UK could still claim to be a leading NATO member, because of the hollowing out of the Army's war-fighting capabilities. The Minister has so far evaded the question, but with today's funding announcement limited to nuclear enterprise and stockpiles, can he confirm whether it is still his Department's policy to cut troop numbers by 10%, to cut the reserves and to provide no additional funding to plug the gaps in Britain's war-fighting capability?

James Heappey: As the representative of a naval constituency, the shadow Minister does our armed forces a huge disservice in focusing on simply the Army when looking at our contribution to NATO. The UK is the only country to commit its entire nuclear deterrent to NATO; in any given year, the UK commits a number of maritime task groups to NATO—more than almost any other NATO ally; the UK commits handsomely to air policing and other air deployments; and, through the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, the 3rd (United Kingdom) Division and the various high-readiness Army formations, the UK contributes prominently in the land domain as well.

Veterans' Welfare

3. **Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con):** What assessment his Department has made of progress on improving veterans' welfare. [904016]

10. **David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con):** What assessment his Department has made of progress on improving veterans' welfare. [904024]

The Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families (Dr Andrew Murrison): Madam Deputy Speaker, may I say what a pleasure it is to see you back? I declare my interest as a veteran.

On 2 March, I jointly commissioned with the Minister for Veterans' Affairs a review into the role and scope of Government welfare provision and services for veterans. This will include provision by the Ministry of Defence under Veterans UK. The review will focus on examining the effectiveness and efficiency of welfare services for veterans, and help it to do better as part of a programme of continual improvement.

Robbie Moore: Armed forces breakfast clubs provide vital support and social opportunities for veterans and serving armed forces personnel. We have one in Keighley and we are hoping to get one off the ground in Ilkley. Will the Minister join me in praising those who are involved in organising them and set out what additional support the Government can provide for these fantastic veteran-led organisations?

Dr Murrison: I am really grateful for my hon. Friend's question. He is absolutely right that armed forces and veterans breakfast clubs are an excellent initiative that have taken root across 14 countries, with 150,000 members. They provide a sense of belonging and community to many who have served our country. On a personal level, I like a good Yorkshire breakfast and, if the opportunity arises, I would love to visit his breakfast club.

David Simmonds: My constituent Steve Graham served in our armed forces for over 20 years, travelling the world and finally settling overseas, at the site of his last posting. Despite being a UK taxpayer, with a UK home, when he sought to retrain he was required to pay the full overseas rate and treated as a foreign student in order to re-educate himself for his post-services life. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss the case of Mr Graham and other people who may seek to retrain following long service in our armed forces, but find themselves facing significant financial barriers to do so?

Dr Murrison: I have every sympathy with my hon. Friend's point, and of course I will meet him. At the moment, for an adult to be eligible for funding for further education, they must ordinarily be resident in England on the first day of the first academic year of the course, and throughout the three years immediately preceding that date. The matter is primarily one for the Department for Education, as he will know, but I am happy to discuss it with him and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Veterans' Affairs to see what we can do on this matter.

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): What efforts will be made through the recently announced review of veterans' experiences? Following the excellent work of the survey carried out by the all-party parliamentary group on veterans, of which I am a vice-chair, what attention will be paid to the different experiences of veterans in the four nations to ensure the best possible outcomes? Sadly, they appear in many cases to have been overlooked and ignored.

Dr Murrison: I look forward to seeing the hon. Gentleman and his co-chairs later this week, I think, when we can discuss the matter in some depth. I am absolutely sympathetic to the notion that we need to do more for veterans, of course, which is one reason why I have instituted the review to which I have referred. We need to be consciously aware of the lived experience in each one of the four nations of this country.

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

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): A review of veteran welfare services is long overdue, but I might remind the Minister that it is his Government who have been responsible for worsening veterans services over the past 13 years. Veterans' mental health waiting times are a week longer than last year, veterans are having to rely on charitable support just to get by, and veteran ID cards are nowhere to be seen for many. Action is needed now to fix these failures, so will the Minister tell the House when we can expect the review to be completed and its findings to be published?

Dr Murrison: We are recruiting a person to run the review right now. I anticipate the review being completed within three months, if that gives the hon. Lady an idea of timelines. Just so that there is no misunderstanding, may I give an indication of the appreciation or otherwise for the services provided by Vets UK? There were 122 complaints since April last year, versus 1,715 thank you letters. To be clear, the people at Norcross who are working on behalf of veterans—I have visited them; she probably has not—are doing a sterling job and are highly committed to what they do.

Ukraine: NATO Allies

5. **Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab):** What steps the Government are taking to support NATO allies in responding to the invasion of Ukraine. [904018]

7. **Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab):** What steps the Government are taking to support NATO allies in responding to the invasion of Ukraine. [904021]

The Minister for Armed Forces (James Heappey): The UK has provided substantial support to our NATO allies as we continue a united response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Over the past 12 months, the Royal Air Force has been deployed in Romania and Lithuania and across the Mediterranean and has completed patrols over the Black sea. We continue to contribute to NATO air activity across Europe. The Army has been deployed in Bulgaria, Romania and Estonia, where we have our enhanced forward presence battle groups. The Royal Navy has completed a major European deployment from the North sea to the Mediterranean. Our UK armed forces continue to strengthen interoperability with Finland and Sweden in anticipation of their accession to NATO. Beyond the US armed forces, no nation has contributed more.

Fleur Anderson: Are the Government working with NATO allies to set up a full 2023 action plan for Ukraine specifically—for military, economic, diplomatic and humanitarian support to help to give Ukraine confidence in a sustained stream of future supplies, to urgently ramp up our own industry, to encourage allies to do more across NATO and to make it clear to Putin that things will get worse, not better, for Russia?

James Heappey: The hon. Lady asks an excellent question, but I hope that she will not mind if I draw an important distinction. NATO is not involved in the planning of or in direct support of the Ukrainian war effort. That is a really important point, because Putin claims the exact opposite to the Russian public and is entirely wrong to do so. Those who support Ukraine do so as an alliance of friends of Ukraine outwith NATO, but of course NATO is invariably supportive of the work that we are doing.

The hon. Lady is right to observe that NATO has a job of work to do to strengthen its eastern flank, to provide wider deterrence against any sort of growth or escalation in the conflict and to make sure that the lessons of modern peer-on-peer war fighting in Ukraine are learned by the entire alliance, and learned quickly.

Liz Twist: Labour has fully backed moves to bolster NATO allies in response to the illegal invasion of Ukraine. What steps is the UK taking to ensure that our NATO obligations in respect of enhanced forward presence are completely fulfilled?

James Heappey: In the immediate response to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, we doubled the size of the battle group in Estonia as a further show of support for the Estonian Government and recognition of the importance of the enhanced forward presence category. We have also contributed to EFP battlegroups in Poland and Romania in the last 12 months. What will change, and what was announced at the summit in Madrid, is that there will be a new NATO regional defence plan, which will be an evolution of the in-place EFP battlegroups, alongside national defence plans. Of course the UK will be very supportive of the plan in the region that NATO assigns to us, but that is very much under review, and the UK looks forward to hearing the details from NATO once it has finished its work.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Following the very successful Franco-British summit at the end of last week—which was the fruit of an enormous cross-Government effort—does the Minister agree that renewing

the bilateral defence partnership with France, the second largest European contributor to NATO, is an important part of not just strengthening the NATO alliance but enhancing European security, particularly in the east?

James Heapey: I really do. It is noteworthy that while relations elsewhere in Government may have been slightly more fraught, within the UK and French Defence Ministries the relationship has remained very tight, and necessarily so. The interdependence between the UK and France is very obvious. Our industrial collaboration is widespread, and will grow as a consequence of last week's summit—and it is not just in the far east that the UK and France can work together, but in west Africa, where our interests are also very keenly aligned.

Defence Procurement

6. **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the defence procurement system. [904019]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): We are driving the delivery of capability in the frontline. Most of our programmes are delivering on time and on budget. For the second year in a row under my stewardship, the Ministry of Defence has set out an affordable 10-year equipment plan to ensure that our armed forces are being given what they need while living within their means.

Bill Esterson: Defence procurement is essential to the success of a domestic steel industry, but, as the Secretary of State will know, the UK is currently the only country in the G20 in which steel production is declining. Given that steel is a vital industry of national security importance, will the Secretary of State ensure that we do not see a repetition of what happened with the fleet solid support contract, under which an overseas lead contractor had no obligation to use UK steel in the construction of UK Navy ships?

Mr Wallace: We always try to use as much UK steel as possible where we can, and when we do not, it is often because we do not manufacture the type of steel that needs to be used in a certain type of product. As for the fleet solid support ships, whether Navantia is part of the consortium or not, the hon. Gentleman should not listen to the union briefing. He will find that across the provision of those ships there will be plenty of British components—in fact, they will be in the majority—and the full integration of the ships will take place in a yard in Northern Ireland.

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): Will the Secretary of State update the House on the status of the Ajax procurement programme? I understand that the supply chain is being geared up to produce 589 vehicles.

Mr Wallace: As my right hon. Friend will know, the Ajax was decided on in, I think, March 2010, under a Labour Government. As I have often said, it has been a troubled programme. Since I have taken over this office, we have sought to rectify the issue on almost a weekly basis, and with the determination of both the former Minister for Defence Procurement, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin),

and the current Minister, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk). The vehicle has passed its user validation trials and is now undergoing its basic field trials. It is doing extremely well, and I am given a weekly update.

Although the programme is being delayed—and we are doing our best to rectify that—overall it has not cost a single extra penny, because the contract, which was agreed under the Conservative Government after the selection of the vehicle by the Labour party, involved a fixed price. Yes, the programme is being delayed, but we are fixing it, and it is showing good progress.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): May I say first that if the Secretary of State is going to quote the National Audit Office, he should read the entire statement rather than doing so selectively?

In large, multibillion-pound contracts in the private sector, a project lead with expertise is usually put in place for a number of years. In defence procurement, well-meaning and committed individuals with very little expertise in project management are there for a short period. Is it not time to look at the ways in which we project-manage these large multi-year contracts, and to move from what appears to some to be an amateur approach to a more professional one?

Mr Wallace: I do not disagree with some of the right hon. Gentleman's observations. Consistency in these programmes is incredibly important. As he will know, some of them, even when on track, can be 20-year programmes, and consistency is important. It is not just about the senior responsible owners, by whom those programmes are led, but he is right to suggest that we are seeking to see whether we can have more longer-term or permanent SROs. They are accompanied by programme deliverers from Defence Equipment and Support in Bristol, who are more permanent.

There are lots of lessons to be learned about procurement, some of which are within our gift to fix. Some of them, sadly, have been observed as problems for decades, and we only have to read numerous reports from the last Labour Government and my Government to know that they have not always been rectified. Some are out of our control owing to inflation, change of threat or changing technology, or because they involve an international consortium in which we have less control when we start. An example is the Typhoon, which is a four-nation project. Sometimes it is harder to control those projects. Overall, in my experience the key is that we have to manage expectations, get our pricing right, seek consistency of skills and reward that skills base for the long term. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman entirely on that.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Would my right hon. Friend agree that defence procurement is a complex issue but not the total disaster that it is often presented as? When compared with the naval procurement of some of our closest allies—for example, the United States ended up spending \$5 billion per destroyer in the Zumwalt class and the Canadians took over 30 years to procure a ship—the MOD produces Type 26s, Type 31s, aircraft carriers, hunter-killer submarines and more under a fixed price, showing that it tries to do its best in always tight financial circumstances.

Mr Wallace: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who served with me in the Department. I miss his time in the Department. One of the biggest drivers of cost overruns is a decision by the Government of the day to defer decisions about whether they should cut or delete something. Deferring the aircraft carrier under the Labour Government cost £1 billion. Deferring the F-35 buy under this Government cost about £500 million. If we defer things, they cost more in the long run. That is always the battle that the MOD has with the Treasury and others. That is one of the fundamental challenges and one of the cost drivers. However, many other projects are delivered on time and successfully and our men and women in the armed forces have some of the world-leading equipment they need to do their job.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call the shadow Minister, Chris Evans.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): May I join the other voices welcoming you back to your position, Madam Deputy Speaker? I think I speak on behalf of everyone when I say that the House has missed your ability to turn people to stone with just a few words when they fall foul of the rules in this place.

Much of the innovation in the defence industry comes from the small and medium-sized enterprise sector. However, many SMEs tell me that there are real barriers to entry and to gaining access to Government contracts, and that when they do gain that access, they find that some primes are slow to pay, especially when projects are delayed. This leaves them demotivated and demoralised and with a poor experience of working with the Ministry of Defence. How will the Secretary of State ensure that SMEs have better access and are encouraged to be involved in a thriving British defence industry?

Mr Wallace: I recognise some of those characteristics of SMEs. For decades they have said that there is a challenge in engaging with wider Government procurement, whether it is in defence or anything else. I also recognise, as the guardian of the taxpayer, that one of the challenges is that risk is involved. If we commission an SME to build something large, the amount of risk it takes in relation to infrastructure is a challenge; we cannot get halfway through a project and then have the SME fail.

However, I think that changes to the battlefield will open the aperture much wider for SMEs to engage with Defence. What we have seen in Ukraine through Operation Kindred is that the winners are the SMEs. The ability for us to cut through the regulations that normally govern procurement, because we are procuring for someone else in a warzone, has enabled us to effectively go straight to the marketplace and straight to SMEs, and some of the big winners have been SMEs in innovation and space. We will know the results and whether they work when they get to Ukraine.

I think this is an exciting time. I recognise the narrative that the hon. Gentleman mentions, which has been around since I worked in the aerospace sector, but of course we should and must do more. When we have a big exciting project, such as the next generation of fighter aircraft—the global combat air programme—or the carrier alliance, it is important that something sits over the top of it to ensure that SMEs are forced in if the primes get in the way.

Veterans' Welfare

8. **Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): What recent steps Veterans UK has taken to support veterans and their families. [904022]

9. **Dame Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): What recent steps Veterans UK has taken to support veterans and their families. [904023]

The Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families (Dr Andrew Murrison): I look forward to the outcome of the review of welfare services, which was cited earlier. In the meantime, the Ministry of Defence is investing more than £40 million in digitising old paper-based practices, improving processes and creating a single entry point for pensions and compensation by the end of 2024. We have successfully launched a new digital claims service for compensation and pension schemes, making it easier for our people to process their claims. Over time, this will make a very big difference.

Alex Norris: The Minister says the review is under way. Of course, a review is already under way on the armed forces compensation scheme, with its initial findings stating that the processes are burdensome and even distressing for claimants, which is especially concerning as there has been a fall in the proportion of successful claims from 66% to 47%. Can the Minister confirm that the review is still ongoing, when it might report and what he thinks is happening?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Gentleman is correct that the final report will be delivered within, I hope, a few weeks. He will have to await the Government's response, of course, but it ties in with some of the findings of the all-party parliamentary group on veterans, which we discussed earlier. I am concerned about any reports that the service is not as good as it ought to be. I will take that review and the APPG's findings extremely seriously, but I am bound to cite the fact that there were 122 complaints versus 1,715 thank you letters, which I find persuasive in forming a conclusion that the people working for Veterans UK are working hard and doing their very best in quite difficult circumstances in the interests of people who serve or have served our country.

Dame Angela Eagle: It is great to see you back in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker.

My constituents have had similar problems trying to engage with the quinquennial review of the armed forces compensation scheme. They find it slow to make decisions, difficult to engage with and not user-friendly. When the Minister publishes the review's findings, I hope he will come back to the House to explain how he will make the system much easier for veterans to engage with, as my constituents have told me it is very difficult indeed.

Dr Murrison: The hon. Lady is right to raise this. As I said earlier, I cannot overstate how important it is that we are increasingly digitising the service. When people go to Norcross and see the mountains of paperwork that Veterans UK is having to cope with, they begin to understand how vital it is that we properly digitise the service and bring it into the 21st century, which is our intention.

The hon. Lady might like to know, because it is a barometer or litmus test of how the service is doing, that the proportion of armed forces compensation scheme cases going to tribunal has been falling since 2014-15, which balances some of the remarks we have heard about Veterans UK not being up to scratch. We need to review it, which is what we are doing, but I am convinced that the service will be better than it is at the moment, if that is of any reassurance.

Topical Questions

T2. [904040] **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): Today's questions have rightly focused on support for our friends in Ukraine, but it is important to remember that threats are growing elsewhere in the world. The middle east continues to harbour terrorism, which is why the UK still supports the Government of Iraq as part of the global coalition against Daesh.

I want to update the House on a strike that took place a few weeks ago, as is our agreement on strikes under Operation Shader. In late December, an RAF Reaper remotely piloted aircraft conducted a strike against a leading Daesh member in al-Bab, northern Syria. The individual's activity was related to chemical and biological weapons. The Reaper's crew minimised potential risk to civilians before firing two Hellfire missiles, both of which struck the target accurately. These actions are vital to degrading such terrorist threats, protecting British citizens and supporting our international partners.

Mr Carmichael: I think we can all accept that there is a legitimate role for the security services in combating disinformation campaigns from foreign, hostile states. However, a recent report from the campaign group Big Brother Watch showed that in 2020 a number of British citizens had their social media posts featured in monitoring reports produced for the Cabinet Office by the British Army's 77th Brigade. Will the Secretary of State tell the House: is the 77th Brigade still monitoring social media posts of British citizens, and, if so, for what purpose and under what authority?

Mr Wallace: One part of the 77th Brigade's role is to challenge disinformation, not opinion—its role is not to monitor or counter opinion, as that is about the freedom we all enjoy in our society. The 77th Brigade is on the lookout for media manipulation of misinformation or lies from abroad, and where that is found, it is flagged to the appropriate authorities. I am happy to write to the right hon. Gentleman with fuller details about what legal authorities it functions under, but I assure him that if at any stage I have seen anything that I think crosses that line, I have, in writing, made sure that is known and it is stopped.

T3. [904041] **Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Welcome back, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is great to see you.

I was going to put to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State the statistics that he has heard many times about proportions of GDP spent on defence both during and after the cold war—they are a lot higher

than those of the present day. May I instead ask him to bear in mind when negotiating with the Treasury that any investment made in defence now for the purposes of conventional deterrence will be miniscule compared with what we would have to spend if, heaven forbid, the war in Ukraine escalated into a war with NATO? Such spending is an investment; it is not expenditure that should be lightly considered. It is essential for our future security.

Mr Wallace: I completely concur with my right hon. Friend. Defence is not a discretionary spend and not an add-on; it is a core function of any state and especially of this Government. I have been very grateful since 2020 that we have turned the corner on this and started to rebuild that momentum. The extra money that I have got for this week is continuing that momentum, but he is right to say that the important thing here is that deterrence is cheaper than having to go to fight the war if it goes wrong, as we see when we look at the cost to the people of Ukraine and to their economy. We need to make people change this culture that we have got used to since probably the early 1990s where somehow defence is discretionary—it is not. I am pleased that the Prime Minister recognises that, as he did when he was Chancellor in 2020, and we need to continue on that trajectory.

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

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): The House will be thankful and grateful to the Defence Secretary for updating it on the latest Op Shader activity. If there are any questions that cannot be raised this afternoon, we will return to them. On tonight's AUKUS announcement in San Diego, does the Defence Secretary recognise that this has Labour's fullest support? We want Britain to play the biggest possible role in building the new Australian submarines. But beyond the subs, how will he develop the pillar 2 collaboration on artificial intelligence, cyber and hypersonic missiles?

Mr Wallace: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his support for AUKUS, which is a decades-long commitment. People talk about procurement challenges, and when we start this journey on submarines that will be delivered in the 2030s and 2040s, with some going on to the 2050s, it is not a journey we can stop halfway along or stop for a break in. To go back to the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis), let me say that sometimes parts of the Treasury struggle with that concept, so I am grateful for the extra money. AUKUS pillar 2 is incredibly important. It is about the next generation's technology. One of the most important works we are doing—and we met in the Pentagon in December—is clearing away the International Traffic in Arms Regulations challenges that for so many years have held us back in being able to share our own technology with the United States or to collaborate properly to make a step change to give us the strategic advantage we need. We are going to be working on that, and I am happy to brief the right hon. Gentleman in detail on the future of the pillar 2.

T5. [904043] **Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): France is our closest security partner other than the United States, so can my right hon. Friend update

the House on his meeting with his French counterpart? How will we continue to ensure that our historic defence partnership is ready to take on the threats of the future?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend is incredibly right to point out how important France is to us. It is our main partner in Europe. It has similar-sized armed forces, with a similar expeditionary status and ambition. I speak to my colleague almost every two weeks—sometimes every week. I spoke to him twice last week, including my visit at the beginning of the week. A partnership on which we worked was more of the CJEF—the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force—where we work with them, training and exercising together; there is more work on complex weapons through MBDA, which is a great international consortium with factories in Bolton and Stevenage; and we are working together to make sure that we have the same requirements in shared operations, where we can work together in areas such as West Africa, where British, French and European interests are under threat from the likes of Wagner.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving such thorough answers, which I am sure the House appreciates, but I ask him to be a little quicker, because it would be good if we managed to get everybody in. I call Ruth Jones.

T4. [904042] **Ruth Jones** (Newport West) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is good to see you back in your rightful place.

Labour's dossier of waste in the MOD has found that at least £15 billion of taxpayers' money has been wasted since 2010, so can the Minister explain to people in my constituency of Newport West why this Tory Government have failed to get a grip of the defence procurement process and have failed to secure value for money for the taxes that they pay?

Mr Wallace: I would point the hon. Lady's constituents to the 2010 National Audit Office report on her Government which gave some really interesting clues about why procurement was so bad. It said that the Department under her Government contracted for aircraft carriers when it knew that that was not affordable. Or perhaps I could point her to the Public Accounts Committee, then chaired by the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), who said:

"Delays and cancellations to programmes"—

this is about the land systems under her Government—

"have resulted in gaps in armoured vehicle capability that will not be filled until 2025."

There are lots of clues for the hon. Lady's constituents—she should direct them to those reports.

T8. [904046] **Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): May I, too, say that it is great to see you back in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker?

I will try to keep this brief for the Secretary of State. The Clive Sheldon KC review of management information surrounding Ajax has been with the Department for over a month, I think. Given its importance, can the Minister guarantee, first, that it will be published by the Easter recess, and secondly, that it will be published fully unredacted?

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Alex Chalk):

I thank my right hon. Friend for his proper concern about this issue. The Sheldon review was and is entirely independent of Government, and it provided an initial draft to the MOD at the end of January. Since then, Mr Sheldon has been conducting a fact-checking and Maxwellisation exercise as part of the final stages of drafting. The timeframe, in an independent review, is not a matter for the Department. Once received, however, I can say that it will be published with all expedition, accompanied by a statement to the House.

T6. [904044] **Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): It is good to see you in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Prime Minister spoke to journalists earlier today about the integrated review refresh, so we know that there is no target for reaching the 2.5% of GDP for defence spending and that the Army will not get the £3 billion that it needs to avoid making further cuts. Is this a good deal for Defence?

Mr Wallace: First, I am not sure where the hon. Gentleman gets that we will not get the 3% to avoid the cuts. At the moment, it will be a decision on the balance of investments. He will see in the Command Paper how we apportion any savings that we have to make as a result of inflation, but overall, as I have said, our equipment programme and, indeed, our envelope are on track, subject to inflation pressures and extra operational commitments that we have made. He will also be aware that we have had an extra £560 million on top of that for restocking ammunition, and we have also had commitments from the Treasury on new for old and much of the gifting. I believe that the Army will be in a good state throughout this process, and I will make sure that when it comes to the Defence Command Paper, he gets a full read-out of why and how we make those decisions.

T10. [904048] **Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): What steps is my right hon. Friend's Department taking to support small and medium-sized enterprises in the defence sector that are adversely affected by the application of environmental, social and governance criteria, making it very difficult for them to raise capital to invest in their business and expand?

Alex Chalk: My hon. Friend is a champion of SMEs, and rightly so: they are at the heart of a vibrant and flexible UK defence industry. That is why this Department helps to find and fund exploitable ideas from SMEs. To his point, however, there is nothing contradictory between the principles of ESG and the defence industry. On the contrary, strong national defence is the ultimate guarantor of the freedoms that all too often are taken for granted—human rights, democracy and the international rules-based order.

T7. [904045] **Matt Rodda** (Reading East) (Lab): It is good to see you in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thousands of retired Gurkha soldiers who left the Army before 1997 live in considerable poverty, many of them in my constituency. I understand that there are ongoing negotiations between the Ministry and the Government of Nepal, and I would be grateful if the Secretary of State or a Minister could update me on this important issue.

The Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families (Dr Andrew Murrison): As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, I recently set up a joint committee, chaired by me and the Nepalese ambassador, to consider outstanding Gurkha welfare issues. I must tell him that retrospective pension changes in respect of the Gurkhas have been through the system several times, including the High Court, the Supreme Court and the European judicial institutions, and the long-standing position of the UK Government has been upheld. However, I am keen to see that we do everything in our power to ensure that we give Gurkhas and Gurkha veterans living in the UK and in Nepal the very best we reasonably can to support their welfare.

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): I am delighted to hear that the Government are committing £2 billion to resupply the armed forces for the munitions and equipment sent to Ukraine. That is very positive news. What my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said about the importance of investing in Army accommodation will also be very welcome news to my constituents in Tidworth, Bulford and Larkhill. In the spirit of honesty that he spoke about, can he tell us what he thinks it would take to convince the Treasury that we must do more than simply resupply our armed forces, and that we need a bigger Army, not a smaller one?

Mr Wallace: I do not need to do much more to convince the Treasury; the Chancellor and the Prime Minister said at the autumn statement that they recognised that Defence would need more spending. They have crossed that line, and in fact they already knew that: the Prime Minister, when he was Chancellor, gave us the extra £24 billion, and hon. Members will remember that the current Chancellor stood on a platform for a greater percentage of GDP when he stood for the leadership of the Conservative party. The key is now to ensure that we lock that spending in to get a long timeframe, so that we can start the investment and planning that will be required at the next comprehensive spending review and beyond.

T9. [904047] **Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab):** It is great to see you back in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. To be fair to the Defence Secretary, he has been very candid that 13 years of this Government have, in his words, “hollowed out and underfunded” our armed forces, but why should anyone believe that, in their final gasps, the exhausted Government who underfunded them over 13 years will actually put right the hollowing-out they have put in place in that time?

Mr Wallace: Maybe the hon. Gentleman cannot hear: I did not say “13”; I said there had been “30” years of hollowing out, which includes his last Government, a Government I served under as a soldier. His Government spent a lot of money going to war in the middle east, which hollowed us out too, because we were not properly refunded. If he wants to come to this House and start a debate about Defence, I would appreciate it if he did so with a bit of candour about his own Government’s role in it. We have done that—I have had the courage to do that—so maybe he might.

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): I thank Carshalton and Wallington residents who have opened their homes to Ukrainians. Can my right hon.

Friend give me some assurance that the kit we are sending to Ukraine will indeed come with the specialist support and training needed to operate it?

Mr Wallace: In the UK, we have thousands of British armed forces, joined by Canadians, Norwegians, Dutch, Swedish, Lithuanians, Australians and New Zealanders—endless numbers of people—helping the Ukrainians with that training. We ensure that not only do they train there, but when they go to somewhere such as Germany they get combined arms training. It is important that training accompanies equipment and, where we have had feedback, we have corrected the training as well.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Madam Deputy Speaker, I have really missed you. Can I ask the Secretary of State what he makes of what President Xi has been saying over the past few days? I urge him today not to do what people are rumouring that he might do—that, given the present situation, he might be thinking about resigning. Will he stay with us, but fight for more money for our armed forces?

Mr Wallace: As a Tory, you think about resigning most of the time—over the years. I am interested in trying to deliver for the men and women of our armed forces. I went into politics because the men and women of the armed forces needed and deserved better, and I am determined to try to stick that through. But I am also worried about the direction of threat for this country and for the world: not only what we have seen in China, as I think has been quoted—equipping for war, as they announced last week—but we have seen 83.4% enriched uranium being discovered, as the International Energy Agency has published in its report. That is weeks away from 90%, weapons-grade, should that be a decision. I have seen a growing problem with Russia and its violent extremism spreading across Africa. The threat is going up across the world, and we are more anxious and more unstable. I think that means long-term investment from whoever the Governments are over the next 10 to 15 years.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call Flick Drummond to ask the final question.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker; it is lovely to see you back. As a former chair of the south-east region for the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees, I have seen at first hand the long shelves at Norcross where Veterans UK is based. Can the Minister assure me that the digitalisation of veterans’ records will proceed quickly, so that veterans can get quick decisions on their welfare and their welfare claims?

Dr Murrison: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend’s service with the VAPC. Like me, she has been to Norcross and seen the extraordinary files of paperwork. There is no way that we can provide the 21st-century service that our veterans deserve while things are in that state, so the £40 million digitalisation—though it may sound banal—will most certainly make a huge difference. Where we can, we will also address the other things that delay claims; I am thinking particularly of the difficulties we often have with our medical advisers getting reports from GPs in the NHS. I am afraid that that is one of the major hurdles to getting these things dealt with in a timely way, but I am resolved that we should do our level best to make sure things are better going forward.

Integrated Review Refresh

3.37 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will make a statement on the 2023 integrated review refresh. I smile because it is a genuine delight to see you back in this House and back in your place.

Two years ago, the Government's integrated review set out a clear strategy on how the UK would continue to thrive in a far more competitive age. Our approach is the most comprehensive since the end of the cold war. It laid out how we would bring together the combined might of every part of Government to ensure that our country remains safe, prosperous and influential into the 2030s. The conclusions of that review have run as a golden strategic thread through all of our activities across defence and deterrence, diplomacy, trade and investment, intelligence, security, international development, and science and technology over the past two years.

Our overall analysis was right, and our strategic ambition is on track. On every continent of the world, the United Kingdom walks taller today than it has done for many years. We are meeting our obligations as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and as a leading European ally within an expanding NATO. We have strong relationships with our neighbours in Europe, and we will build on the Windsor framework to invigorate those relationships even further. We are deeply engaged in the Indo-Pacific and active in Africa, and enjoy thriving relationships with countries in the middle east and the Gulf.

As I am sure this House recalls, today is Commonwealth Day, and I will be meeting my fellow Commonwealth Foreign Ministers in London over the course of the week.

We have maintained our position as a global leader on international development by pursuing patient, long-term partnerships tailored to the needs of our partner countries, and we succeed because those partnerships draw on the full range of UK strengths and expertise, in addition to our official development assistance. As this House will of course be aware, the severe global turbulence forecast in the 2021 integrated review has indeed come to pass, but events have moved at an even quicker pace than anyone could have imagined just two years ago. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and attempts to annex part of its sovereign territory challenge the entire international order. Across the world, state threats have grown and systematic competition has intensified. There is a growing prospect of further deterioration in the coming years.

Due to the far-reaching consequences for the security and prosperity of the British people that these changes have brought, it is right that I update the House on what the Government are doing to respond. In our "Integrated Review Refresh 2023", we set out how we respond to an even more contested and volatile world. Rightly, our approach is an evolution, not a revolution. I know that the House will agree that our most pressing foreign policy priority is the threat that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine poses for European security.

The UK has provided huge quantities of military support for Ukraine's defence. We led the G7 response on Ukraine, co-ordinating diplomatic activity and working

with our allies to impose the toughest ever sanctions on Putin's Government. Thanks to the wisdom of this Government's original integrated review, we have intensified our training for thousands of brave Ukrainian troops, who repelled Russia's initial onslaught. That momentum must be maintained until Ukraine prevails and the wider threat that Russia and other states, such as Iran or North Korea, pose to the international order with their aggression or potential aggression is contained.

The 2023 integrated review refresh also sets out how the Government will approach the challenges presented by China. China's size and significance connect it to almost every global issue, but we cannot be blind to the increasingly aggressive military and economic behaviour of the Chinese Communist party, including stoking tensions across the Taiwan strait and attempts to strong-arm partners, most recently Lithuania. We will increase our national security protections and ensure alignment with our core allies and a wider set of international partners. We must build on our own and our allies' resilience to cyber-threats, manipulation of information, economic instability and energy shocks so that we remain at the front of the race for technologies such as fusion power, which will define not only the next decade, but the rest of this century.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will say more on Government spending commitments in his Budget statement on Wednesday, but today I can set out a number of immediate and longer-term measures that will help us to deliver on our priorities. We will increase defence spending by a further £5 billion over the next two years. That will bring us to around 2.25% of national income and represents significant progress in meeting our long-term minimum defence spending target of 2.5% of GDP. Today's announcement of £5 billion comes on top of the commitments made by the Chancellor in his autumn statement, on top of the £560 million of new investments last year, and on top of the record £20 billion uplift announced in 2020.

Later today, the Prime Minister will announce, alongside President Biden and Prime Minister Albanese, the next steps for AUKUS, including how we will deliver multibillion-pound conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarine capabilities to the Royal Australian Navy while setting the highest proliferation standards.

We will provide an additional £20 million uplift to the BBC World Service over the next two years, protecting all 42 World Service language services.

We have established a new directorate in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, incorporating the Government information cell, to increase our capacity to assess and counter hostile information manipulation by actors, including Russia and China, where it affects UK interests overseas.

We will double funding for Chinese expertise and capacities in government so that we have more Mandarin speakers and China experts. We will create a new £1 billion integrated security fund to deliver critical programmes at home and overseas on key priorities such as economic and cyber-security, counter-terrorism, and the battle to uphold and defend human rights.

We will establish a new national protective services authority located within MI5. It will provide UK businesses and other organisations with immediate access to expert security advice. A new £50 million economic deterrence

[James Cleverly]

initiative will strengthen sanctions enforcement and impact, and will give us new tools to respond to hostile acts. We will publish the UK's first semiconductor strategy, which will grow our domestic industry for that vital technology, as well as an updated critical minerals strategy.

The 2023 integrated review reconfirms that the UK will play a leading role in upholding stability, security and the prosperity of our continent and the Euro-Atlantic as a whole. It underlines that this Government's investment in our Indo-Pacific strategy is yielding significant results across defence, diplomacy and trade. Through those initiatives and many others that we have set out over the past two years, the United Kingdom will out-compete those who seek to destabilise the international order and undermine global stability. Our approach is imbued with a spirit of international co-operation and a pragmatic willingness to work with any country that does not seek to undermine our way of life.

We live in a competitive age, and the security challenges that the British people face today are the most serious in at least a generation. Time and again in our history, we have seen off the competition from countries that wish to do us no good. We were able to do so because the United Kingdom has always had more allies, and better allies, than any of our rivals or competitors. It will always be the policy of this Government to ensure that that remains the case. I commend the statement to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

3.47 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): It is very good to see you in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of his statement.

Just over a year ago, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine marked a watershed moment for European security. In the time since, 25 NATO countries have revisited their security strategies. Germany announced a fundamental shift in its security policy. Finland and Sweden have taken the historic decision to join NATO. For a year, Labour has urged the Government to revisit the integrated review, so this announcement is overdue but welcome.

We are living in an era of intensifying geopolitical competition in a multipolar world. The interdependence of the global economy is increasingly being weaponised. There has been a blurring of the distinction between foreign and domestic policy. This is a challenging moment for our security and that of our allies, and for our place in the world. The refreshed integrated review, and the decisions that it will inform, are therefore important to us all in this House. We all have an interest in the Government making the right long-term choices for our country.

Any future Labour Government will inherit the consequences of those decisions. Since the invasion, the Government have had our fullest support in providing military, economic and diplomatic support for Ukraine to defend itself, but we have pressed the Government where they have fallen short, and it is in that spirit that we approach the review today.

The original integrated review contained plenty of analysis that was sound and that could enjoy wide support in the House, but it did have serious shortcomings. It made no mention of the risk of the Taliban taking over Kabul, just months before it happened. Nor did it foresee the risks of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, or mention risks related to Taiwan. It had little to say about Europe beyond NATO, and it said almost nothing about the European Union, which was given one substantive reference in the entire document.

In too many areas, from the fight against kleptocracy to the importance of international law, rhetoric and ambition contrasted poorly with Government inaction or hypocrisy. Significant and regretful decisions, such as that to cut official development assistance spending to 0.5% of GNI and the merger of the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, were taken before the review had even been concluded.

In security and defence, there was a clear mismatch between ends, ways and means. With threats increasing and a promise of "persistent global engagement", the Government announced plans to cut another 10,000 troops, scrap Hercules planes and drop to 148 Challenger tanks. Those are the troops now reinforcing NATO allies, the planes used in the Kabul airlift, and the tanks being sent to Ukraine.

In the two years since the integrated review, in too many areas its promises have not matched reality. The so-called Indo-Pacific tilt has apparently been completed, but the UK's diplomatic presence in key countries in the region, including India and China, has been cut by up to 50% over the past eight years. The review promised to maintain the UK as one of the world's leading development actors; however, not only has aid been cut from 0.7% to 0.5%, but it is now being used to prop up the broken asylum system. By some estimates, less than half of bilateral development assistance ever leaves the United Kingdom.

Rather than standing up for international law, Ministers have come to this Chamber to explain how they plan to break it. Successive crises, from the pandemic to the war in Ukraine, have demonstrated the vulnerability of international supply chains, but we have not seen a new diplomatic drive to reflect the shifting resourcing economy. Britain is falling seriously behind. United States chips legislation will provide \$52 billion in subsidies for US chip manufacturers and the EU's Chips Act will provide €43 billion, but the Government have put aside just £700,000 to commission a research project, and they still have not published their promised semiconductor strategy.

Today's refresh is an opportunity to address these flaws and reset the Government's approach. A test of the integrated review is how it contributes to making Britain secure at home and strong abroad, and that is how we will judge it.

The Government will continue to have Labour's full support over Ukraine and reinforcing our NATO allies. Labour's commitment to NATO remains unshakeable and our commitment to Britain's independent nuclear deterrent is total. The review's emphasis on building partnerships and alliances is welcome after a period of drift away from multilateralism. Britain is always a stronger and more effective force for good when it

works with others. That is why Labour's foreign policy vision is for a Britain reconnected. I am glad that the Government have been taking notes.

Nowhere has the sense of disconnection been stronger than in our post-Brexit relationship with the EU. It is good to see, on page 22, the Government finally acknowledge its importance. Labour would go further, seeking a security pact to co-operate on global challenges and keep us safe.

On China, we recognise the scale and complexity of the challenge that its rise represents and the breadth of our interests that are at stake. The initiative to improve understanding of China in government is vital, particularly given that the Foreign Office has been training only 14 people a year to speak fluent Mandarin. We need a strong, clear-eyed and consistent approach to China, working with partners and allies, and engaging with China where our interests align to do so. It feels that after years of inconsistent and shifting approaches, this is at least something we can welcome.

It is good to see a new economic deterrence unit to help enforce sanctions, as is mentioned on page 48, because not a single individual or entity—not one—has been fined for breaching Russia sanctions since the invasion. Sanctions without enforcement are useless. I note the plan for a new Russia strategy, but the Government have not yet implemented all the Russia report's recommendations.

On Iran, the Government are right to recognise the increasing threat, so it was disappointing that they opposed our amendment to create a new mechanism to proscribe hostile state actors such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

In an era of disinformation, the BBC World Service is a unique and unparalleled platform, so the additional funding is very welcome. However, on defence spending, today's announcement provides funds only for AUKUS and Ukraine replenishment. That is why we welcome it, but it does not answer growing questions concerning capability gaps that weaken our national defence and undermine the UK's NATO contribution. The National Audit Office said recently that the Ministry of Defence

"cannot...afford to develop all the capabilities set out in the 2021 Integrated Review".

How does today's announcement ensure the same does not happen now that the new 2023 integrated review has been published?

The reality is that the Government are dragging their feet on the big decisions. The long-term goal to spend 2.5% of GDP on defence sounds, I am afraid, a little bit like a hollow promise. There is no plan and there is no timetable. I can tell the Secretary of State that the last Labour Government left office with defence spending of 2.5% intact. The reality is that too much of the Government's effort is focused on undoing their mistakes: the Windsor framework to fix the protocol they negotiated; a Franco-British summit to repair relations damaged by his predecessor's clumsy diplomacy; a £16.5 billion investment in defence swallowed up by a blackhole in the budget they mismanaged; removing the Chinese state's role in our nuclear power industry, after the Government invited it in in the first place; and trying to strengthen our leadership in international development after the Government squandered it.

We welcome this refresh, but we will continue to provide robust scrutiny where necessary to ensure that our country's foreign policy and defence systems are secure for the next generation.

James Cleverly: I am not a religious man, but I understand that there is a phrase in the Bible about how there is more joy in heaven over a sinner who repents, and it is really good to hear—[*Interruption.*] As I say, I am not a religious man, but I am joyful that those on the Labour Front Bench have finally, perhaps kicking and screaming, come to such a realisation.

Let us take official development assistance. At its lowest point, this Government are still spending a larger proportion of GDP on ODA than at the highest point under the Labour party when it was in government. I remember when the Russian state was instrumental in poisoning British citizens and the leader of the Labour party at the time was saying that we should share our intelligence with the very state that was poisoning British people. I am now glad, finally, to hear a commitment from the Labour Front Bench about maintaining the nuclear deterrent and about support for NATO. It is interesting that we are being criticised for getting defence spending to 2.25% of GDP with a commitment to 2.5% of GDP, because I hear no such commitment formally from the shadow Defence team.

The simple truth of the matter is that the right hon. Gentleman made a number of points about what Labour would do differently, and then said that, broadly, he agrees with this strategy. I am glad that he agrees with the strategy, because we have been working on this, we have been implementing the 2021 integrated review and we have seen the positive impact it has had on our relations in the Indo-Pacific. The signing of the FCAS—future combat air systems—agreement between Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom is testament to that, as is the fact that the carrier strike group's maiden voyage was to that region. The fact that we are seen absolutely at the forefront of the international support to Ukraine in its self-defence against Russia's invasion is also testament to that.

This Government will always be an internationally focused Government. We will always make sure that we act in close concert with our international partners and we will build greater partnerships around the world. That is what this refresh is about. It builds on the work of the original integrated review, and I am very proud that we have put it in the public domain.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): It is a joy to see you back in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I welcome much of this pragmatic refresh, and it is good to see recommendations by the Foreign Affairs Committee embraced, such as making resilience a key pillar, the Mandarin capability, the criticality of critical minerals, deterrence diplomacy, and the importance of science and technology. However, the threat of China cannot be seen primarily as an economic one, because that is to fail to recognise that it is trying to undermine our security and sovereignty. The asks are: greater resolve when dealing with transnational repression. That means shutting down illegal Chinese police stations, and closing down the Iranian regime's cut-outs that are operating in London and across our country.

[Alicia Kearns]

I welcome the creation of the National Protective Security Authority to tackle techno-authoritarianism, but that is support for the private sector. I hope, therefore, that the Government will accept my amendment on support for public sector procurement when the Procurement Bill comes forward in a couple of weeks. Finally, the Government rightly talk about the reconstruction of Ukraine in the refresh. Will the Foreign Secretary commit to using frozen central bank funds? The Government seem to claim that we do not have the law in place to do that, or that it is not legally tested. Tell us what law change is needed, we will make it, and let us test it in the courts.

James Cleverly: The Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee highlighted a number of important areas, and I commend her and the Committee for the work they have done in putting forward ideas. We always take those ideas seriously and, as she recognises, it is no accident that some of the conversations and thinking that her Committee has put forward are woven into this report. We always listen to constructive feedback from colleagues, whatever side of the House they come from.

We are conscious that the threat from Chinese activity is not just in the economic sphere, and I assure my hon. Friend that on our security—not just economic security—we are thinking across a full range of threats and risks. We must also recognise that there is the need and opportunity to engage with China in areas where we can work more successfully. I assure her that protecting ourselves against risks in that economic sphere will not be limited just to the private sector—we will of course look to give advice to the private sector, and more broadly, and I assure her that we will continue to think across the whole range of threats and risks.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Mr Speaker, while the Deputy Speaker is still in the Chamber, may I too welcome her back to her place? It is nice to see you here, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of his statement. There are clear things to welcome in the review, and I think everyone can say that funding for the BBC World Service is a good move. Measures to tackle and counter hostile information and manipulation are things we should be doing, and it is good to see them in the report. It is sensible to develop more expertise on China, although there are gaps in the strategy. It is painfully obvious that we need a reassessed Russia strategy, and it is important to come forward with that in detail. Support for Ukraine must be ongoing, and I repeat the call for frozen assets to be used in the rebuilding process.

The Secretary of State also needs to reflect on where his golden thread has frayed. The Government were flatfooted in the crisis over Afghanistan, and there is still the issue of British Council workers. What lessons have been learned for the future from that debacle? What are his ambitions in rebuilding with the European Union, and where is the detail on dealing with the global climate crisis? It is barely mentioned in the documents. International aid should not be used as a trade lever, yet that is still part of the UK Government's plans. Increased

military spending needs more detail. When will that come to the House? Security expert Edward Lucas has warned:

“Britain’s military cannot sustain a global role”,

describing UK armed forces as a

“clapped-out army, serious problems with...our naval vessels, and an air force short of planes and pilots.”

The presence of nuclear weapons in NATO countries did not deter Putin from invading Ukraine. Why would spending more on new nuclear be a good idea now? Does the Foreign Secretary agree that spending in conventional areas would be better than wasting on new nuclear, or has the £5.5 billion shambles of the Ajax tanks procurement left the Government afraid of that kind of investment?

James Cleverly: On who will ultimately pay for the terrible damage across Ukraine, it is absolutely right that the aggressor pays. We will work closely with our international partners to make sure that those who cause the damage repair the damage. The exact vehicle for doing so will be discussed and decided internationally, because it demands an international response.

On the nuclear deterrent, the hon. Gentleman has very much drawn the wrong lessons. He says that NATO having nuclear weapons did not prevent Russia attacking Ukraine. Ukraine is not a member of NATO and Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons arsenal. It was Russia's failure to abide by the commitments made in the Minsk agreement—[*Interruption.*] He says it did not stop it invading Ukraine. Ukraine is not a member of NATO. I can draw him a map if it helps. Ukraine is not a member of NATO. Our nuclear deterrent is absolutely the foundation stone of the Euro-Atlantic defence, and the UK will always abide by its commitments to its friends and neighbours in the region. We will ensure the standing we currently enjoy as one of the most significant contributors to the Euro-Atlantic defence relationship is maintained and enhanced, in terms of both our nuclear deterrent and conventional means.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Defence Committee.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): Defence posture matters. If we want to play a role on the international stage, then our hard power counts. We have to be honest. The last integrated review saw a swathe of cuts to our land, sea and air assets, which I think many in the House hoped would be reversed today. Page 8 of the review summarises the threat:

“There is a growing prospect that the international security environment will further deteriorate in the coming years, with state threats increasing and diversifying in Europe and beyond. The risk of escalation is greater than at any time in decades”.

We are sliding towards a new cold war and threats are increasing, yet here we are staying on a peacetime budget. My right hon. Friend has two days before the Budget is announced. Please, can we move to 2.5% of GDP now?

James Cleverly: We committed to 2.5% of GDP as a sustainable baseline. We announced the additional £5 billion to address the immediate impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As I said, that is on top of the £20 billion uplift announced in 2020 and the over half a billion pounds of new investment announced last year. We will continue to work with our international allies to ensure

our collective defence posture is one that genuinely deters aggression against NATO and its member states. We have been successful in doing that, but we will, as this document has done, assess the likely and possible threats and make sure that our defence posture aligns with them.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Having ambition and slogans such as “global Britain” are fine, but without resources behind them they are pretty meaningless. Between 2010 and 2021, the Government cut the defence budget by 16%. A £5 billion increase in the defence budget was announced today—the Prime Minister is trumpeting it all over social media—but the Defence Secretary told the Defence Committee, on which I sit, that he needed 11% just to stand still. It is interesting that he is not here to defend it. Can I ask about the £5 billion? Is the £3 billion for the nuclear deterrent new money or part of the existing £10 billion already put aside for the deterrent? If that leaves £2 billion additional expenditure, that is a long way from the Defence Secretary’s claim that we need 11% just to stand still.

James Cleverly: The Secretary of State for Defence was just at the Dispatch Box welcoming the money.

Mr Jones: Where is he now?

James Cleverly: He has gone to Japan, with which we have recently signed a defence agreement for the next generation of fighter aircraft. The slightly childish and raucous calls from the Opposition Benches would have more impact if it were not for the fact that on the Government Benches we are getting on with building those international defence relationships that will keep us, our neighbours and our friends right across the globe safe.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I very much welcome the commitment to spend 2.5% of GDP on defence, and the recommitment with our American and Australian allies to AUKUS. Will the Secretary of State assure me that there will be absolute alignment of our defence and foreign policy positions, to ensure that global Britain delivers in the way that it must for our own freedom and that of our allies?

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend makes an important point. That is why we have moved to integrated reviews, recognising that defence, diplomacy, international development and trade policy are all interwoven. To have a truly effective international posture, all those functions of government need to go hand in hand, in close co-ordination with non-governmental organisations such as the BBC World Service. That is why we had the integrated review in ’21 and the integrated review refresh today. I assure him and the whole House that we will continue to work in close co-ordination across Government to deliver on it.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I welcome what I heard was the recognition that when it comes to China we need to do far more to defend our values, while recognising that there are global public goods that we need to work on together, such as climate change, nuclear proliferation in the Pacific and global development.

Since the last integrated review, the so-called “tilt” to the Indo-Pacific has entailed £3 million extra in FCDO staff, three extra British high commissioners in the Pacific, two extra warships and less than 1% of the MOD headcount. That is not a tilt but a glance in the right direction. Could the Foreign Secretary tell us how big the package will be to finance the tilt needed to an area of £4.3 billion people?

James Cleverly: The right hon. Gentleman seems have embedded in his question the idea that our posture to the Indo-Pacific is a one-off event. It is not; it is a permanent recalibration of our foreign and defence policy. My first set of bilateral visits as Foreign Secretary was to Japan, South Korea and Singapore. The Defence Secretary is flying to Japan at the moment to build upon the agreement that we have made between the UK, Italian and Japanese Governments. We have made a long-term commitment that is being resourced. The carrier strike group’s main voyage to the region is building towards what is a permanent recalibration of our international focus, to recognise that the centre of gravity of world affairs is moving eastwards and southwards. We are responding to that.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I welcome the Foreign Secretary’s crystal-clear commitment that from 2025 we will spend 2.5% of our GDP on defence. I will be interested to know whether Labour will match that. Part of that spending, referred to in the document, is the AUKUS programme, which will be a world-class collaboration between the United States, Australia and us. Does he agree that that not only will help deter Chinese expansionism in the Pacific, but is a perfect example of global Britain?

James Cleverly: My right hon. Friend makes a very important point. When I was running through the list of things that underpin our Indo-Pacific focus, I did not mention AUKUS, because I know that the Prime Minister will do so extensively later on today. My right hon. Friend asked whether I think the Labour party will match that commitment of 2.5% on defence spending. I say no, for two reasons: first, no shadow Defence Minister has made such a commitment; and secondly, the Labour party will not be in office in 2025—we will.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): We have faced our most perilous moments since the second world war and the height of the cold war, and we have seen a clear strategy from Russia, China and Iran to undermine democracy and western values. What we have before us today is a strategy that does not give any sort of signal or sign to Russia, China or Iran that we are serious about taking them on. We need to do what it takes. The Government, and this Parliament, need to decide that and do what it takes. Instead, what we have today is a paltry £5 billion—[*Interruption.*] The Secretary of State for Defence has made it clear that he wanted £8 billion to £11 billion. Back in November, when he was asked about inflation by the Defence Committee, he argued for an increase of £8 billion over two years. Here we have got £5 billion, which does not even cover the inflationary part of the cost. It is an absolute nonsense and the Government should be ashamed of themselves. They are letting down this country.

James Cleverly: I struggle to find a question among that stream of consciousness, but the simple truth is that the Secretary of State for Defence was at this Dispatch Box only few minutes ago welcoming this announcement. The hon. Gentleman says £5 billion is a “paltry” sum. I was just reminded by the Minister for Defence Procurement, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), that that sum is larger than our budget for prisons. The hon. Gentleman’s attitude towards public money demonstrates the classic problem with the Opposition; suggesting that £5 billion is an insignificant sum demonstrates a blasé attitude towards public expenditure, which is sadly the hallmark of the Opposition.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the refresh, which makes the country stronger today. Many of my constituents are concerned about the rise of China. Does the Secretary of State agree with me that China is one of the greatest challenges we will face in the 21st century? Will he confirm that we must build on our relationships in the Indo-Pacific, not just with our existing friends, such as Australia, India and Japan, and that we must find new friends and allies to strengthen our hand?

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend is right that it is important for us to build on our existing friendships and develop new ones in the Indo-Pacific region. Those friendships and partnerships are a good thing in and of themselves, not just in response to China’s activity. He is also right that China has demonstrated a range of behaviours that we oppose. I have raised those directly with representatives of the Chinese Government, so it is right that this review looks carefully at our relationship with China, those areas where we need to defend ourselves and our partners, and those areas where we need to work more closely with them.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): It is a fine, glossy brochure, but we have waited an awfully long time and there is not a lot in it. The harsh realities are that at a time when inflation is denuding the defence budget in the way that it is, and when the Euro-Atlantic posture of the United Kingdom needs to redouble more than ever, the United Kingdom has committed itself to the Indo-Pacific. We have a war in mainland Europe and the response is £5 billion. It is not serious, especially not when £2 billion of that is to replenish stocks, which is non-discretionary so not a policy position, and the other £3 billion is for nuclear. Why is there always money for nuclear?

James Cleverly: I will tell the hon. Gentleman why there is always money for the foundation stone of the Euro-Atlantic defence posture; it is because it is the foundation stone of the Euro-Atlantic defence posture. When he starts to talk about expenditure on the armed forces, my heart goes out to those brave men and women in our British armed forces stationed in Scotland, who pay more tax than any other members of the armed forces in the country.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I very much welcome the review that my right hon. Friend has announced today. He spoke about the relevance of the critical minerals strategy. May I highlight something for him to take back to other Departments that work alongside his? We all recognise the lessons to be learned

from our reliance on Russian minerals, and how we have had to change that, but 95% of the elements used in renewable energy—solar panels or whatever—are processed in China. We cannot escape the science, but we can ask other Departments to diversify how we do renewables. Will my right hon. Friend take back to other Departments the message that we need to look at investing in and working on things like hydrogen combustion, so that we are not entirely reliant on minerals coming out of China?

James Cleverly: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Russia’s use of energy supplies is a tool of coercion—that is something that we have witnessed. We must ensure that we do two things. First, we must wean ourselves off our global addiction to hydrocarbon energy, for the reasons that we have seen. Secondly, we must ensure that, in doing so, we do not inadvertently create a dependency on any one other country, particularly China. Our critical minerals strategy will bear that in mind. It is clear from conversations I have had—for example with leaders of the countries in Africa from which these minerals are mined and shipped to China for processing—that it would be better for them, for us and for the world if more of that processing were done on the continent of extraction rather than on the other side of the world.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): The integrated review refresh recognises the challenge from Iran, which has been behind 15 kidnap and assassination attempts in the UK since January last year. The Foreign Office is widely understood to be blocking attempts to proscribe the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Can the Foreign Secretary confirm whether that is true? Given the seriousness of the threat, can he explain why we have not yet proscribed the IRGC?

James Cleverly: We respond to the threats posed by Iran in the region, against people in the country and internationally. The hon. Lady is right to highlight the numerous attempts that have been made on the UK mainland; I pay tribute to our security services and our policing services for preventing a number of attempted attacks here. The decision whether to sanction or proscribe is always one that we discuss across Government. Any decisions on future designations or sanctions will be made across Government, and I am not going to speculate on what future actions this Government may take.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): The velvet glove of diplomacy must cover the iron fist. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that even 2.5% of GDP on defence will simply not be enough to give the Foreign Office the support it needs to do its job?

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point about the close working relationship between defence, diplomacy and international development. I can assure him that the Defence Secretary and I, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor are in close co-ordination to make sure that the money we spend defending our nation and defending our interests overseas is used most effectively. That will always underpin the decisions that we make. I recognise my hon. Friend’s desire for greater spending on defence, but ultimately we need to ensure that we protect the public purse in a way that protects our interests and values.

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): The 2015 strategic defence and security review estimated that the Dreadnought acquisition programme was “likely to cost a total of £31 billion...including inflation”.

We have learned in the past week that the programme remains within budget. However, the SDSR set a contingency of £10 billion. How much of that £10 billion contingency is being used on Dreadnought? Is the £3 billion announced today for nuclear separate from that £10 billion?

James Cleverly: Future expenditure will be set out in more detail by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as I have said, and the ways in which the Defence Secretary will spend the money allocated to him will be set out by Defence Ministers. I have to say that I am still completely lost as to what the Lib Dems’ defence posture is. When I look back on our time in government together, I certainly cannot help thinking that if we had not had the sea anchor of the Lib Dems in coalition, we would have progressed much more quickly in securing the defence of this country.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): The extra money for stockpiles and for AUKUS is indeed welcome. The Foreign Secretary rightly spoke of a challenge to the entire international order, and when we look at just two areas of capability in isolation—the size of the Army and the capability of the Air Mobility Force—we have to face the unpalatable fact that neither people nor equipment can do two things at once. Will he be working with his ministerial colleagues to ensure that our investment matches, and provides, the capability to be set against the challenges of which he rightly spoke?

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend is very knowledgeable about this subject, and the points that he has made are points to which we listen carefully. I can only repeat that we will continue to work together closely, as we have done for a number of years, to align our foreign affairs and diplomacy posture—and, indeed, our international development posture—with our defence posture to ensure that we use most efficiently and effectively the public funds, the taxpayers’ money, given to us by the Chancellor to protect the British people and our friends and interests overseas.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary referred to a further £5 billion over the next two years, and to the commitment to spend 2.5% of UK GDP on defence. Let me ask him, very simply, when the 2.5% commitment will come into effect, and where that leaves the British Army. Will there be further cuts?

James Cleverly: I thank the hon. and gallant Gentleman for his question. The details of how the Secretary of State for Defence will spend his budget I will have to leave to the Secretary of State for Defence, but the Integrated Review Refresh sets out the broad parameters. The £5 billion brings us up to about 2.25% of GDP, which is well on track to that 2.5% commitment. As I have said, I will leave it to the Defence Secretary to give further details of the nature of that expenditure and the capabilities and equipment that it will cover.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I welcome some of the report, but I want to return to the issue of China, in which, as someone who has been sanctioned, I take a particular interest.

I have to say that I am somewhat confused about what the Government’s position actually is. It was the Prime Minister who, when standing for election, said: “China...poses a systemic threat”

—there was then a backdown to “systemic challenge”—which we would meet with “robust pragmatism”. That “robust pragmatism” means that we have sanctioned no one in Hong Kong while America has sanctioned 10; that we have sanctioned three low-level officials in Xinjiang while America has sanctioned 11, including Chen Quanguo, the architect of that terrible atrocity; and that we did not kick out the Chinese officials who beat people up on the streets of the UK. Now, however, I understand that “systemic challenge” has moved on to “epoch-defining challenge”. The document that the Prime Minister has produced today does refer to that “epoch-defining challenge”, but then goes on to use the words “in the face of that threat”.

Does that now mean that China is a threat, or an epoch-defining challenge, or a challenging Government epoch, or even none of that?

James Cleverly: I reassure my right hon. Friend that in every meeting I have had with representatives of the Chinese Government, I have raised specifically their sanctioning of him and others in this House as being completely unacceptable behaviour. I have challenged them on every single occasion that I have had conversations with the Chinese Government.

I understand the desire to have a simple, short phrase or a single word to describe our posture towards China, but with a country as big, influential and significant as China, it is impossible to distil it down to a simple set of words or a phrase. That is not something we do with any other country in the world. We recognise that international relations are more complicated, so in the IR refresh there is more of a narrative than a single-word description. We want to describe the areas where we can and should work more closely with China, the areas where we need to defend ourselves and our interests against China, and the areas where we want to steer China into a different course of action. So there will always be descriptors, plural. I understand my right hon. Friend’s desire for clarity on this, and he will see through our actions that we will respond robustly to China when it behaves in a way that we disagree with, but we will also attempt to steer China in a better direction.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Given the close way in which we have been working with our European allies to resist Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, is it not now time to seek a formal foreign policy and security partnership with the European Union alongside our leading role in NATO?

James Cleverly: I have just come back, at the tail and of last week, from the UK-France summit in Paris, and our closer defence co-operation was one of the main topics we discussed, as was our broader co-operation with the member states of the European Union on our collective self-defence, but ultimately NATO has shown itself to be the most effective mechanism for the defence of the Euro-Atlantic region. The UK has demonstrated its full commitment to NATO, and through the announcements we have made today and the previous announcements we have made, we will continue to be one of the leading contributory nations to NATO. That is the primary vehicle for our collective self-defence.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and for the presentation of this paper, which shows a far greater strategic awareness of the vulnerability that the whole of the west faces than we would have seen in any document just a few years ago. But is not the ghost at the feast still the money? I very much welcome his commitment to 2.5% of GDP for defence, but when are we going to see our armed forces restored to the critical mass that is capable of deterring the kind of aggression we are seeing in Ukraine and the kind of aggressive policies we are seeing from China? The £5 billion announced today will patch up what we should have been spending already, but it is not going to make a huge difference.

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend is right to say that all defence postures need to be paid for, and that is why I am proud that we have the additional £5 billion that we have announced on top of the money previously announced in 2020. Obviously, when we are talking about expenditure as a percentage of GDP, one of the best things we can do is to grow the economy, which is why I full support the Prime Minister's priority to grow the economy so that we can have a larger defence budget in absolute terms, because it will be a percentage of a growing economy. I highlight the fact that that is in stark contrast to the lack of commitment to a proportion of defence spending from those on the Opposition Front Bench, along with no credible plan to grow the economy. I take the point my hon. Friend makes to heart.

Ms Anum Qaisar (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, following his Department's devastating international aid cuts, the UK Government cannot claim to be fully safeguarding vulnerable communities around the world?

James Cleverly: In absolute terms and in percentage terms, the UK is still one of the largest—[*Interruption.*] In absolute terms and in percentage terms, the UK is still one of the largest official development assistance donating countries in the world. I can assure the hon. Lady that, from the conversations I have with partners around the world, they hugely value the UK's contribution, our expertise and the co-operation we have with them.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Many aspects of this statement are welcome, including the increases in our hard power and soft power capabilities, but does the Foreign Secretary accept that one-off increases are ad hoc, sporadic and make long-term planning difficult? What is required is a fundamental, threat-based review backed by long-term funding. To properly defend ourselves requires long lead-in times across many aspects of our defence.

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend is right. We have published the integrated review refresh to set the framework for the risks and opportunities in the international sphere. Of course, we need discrete responses to one-off events such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but those are within a wider framework of international posture. The Prime Minister has made it clear that this is part of the journey towards our baseline of spending 2.5% of GDP on defence, which is a commitment to which we will adhere.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): Building on the question asked by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), does the Foreign Secretary agree that we need an in-depth strategic audit of every aspect of our country's relationship with China, from defence to diplomacy, technology, education and cyber-security? Will he assure the House that there will be no return to the utterly failed "golden era" strategy?

James Cleverly: I can assure my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) and the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) that we are looking at how China interacts with the British state, both at a Government level and in other areas, including the commercial world, the public sector and education. That is not to say that we should never, or must never, have Chinese investment in the UK, which would be unrealistic and counterproductive, but it must mean that we go into whatever relationship we have with China with our eyes open. We have to properly assess the opportunities, risks and threats, and that needs to be done across Government. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman and other Members that this is exactly how we will approach our relationship with China.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I welcome the document's strength and robustness with regards to Russia's threat elsewhere than Ukraine but, following my quick reading, I am a little disappointed by how little it says about the Arctic. More than half of Russia's navy and all its nuclear defence is in the Arctic, on which it has a 25,000-mile coastline, and most of Russia's economic wealth also comes from the Arctic, yet only one paragraph is devoted to it. Frankly, I think the threat is quite substantial, so I am disappointed by the oft-repeated hope

"for the Arctic to return to being a region of high cooperation and low tension."

Am I right in thinking that is more of a hope than a belief that it will actually happen?

James Cleverly: I have had conversations with my Scandinavian, Baltic and Canadian counterparts on the risk to the Arctic and the high north. Obviously, in a document that we are trying to make modest in page number but wide in aspiration, we have to be disciplined in how much we put across. I can assure my hon. Friend that we are very conscious of that risk. The joint expeditionary force and my conversations with my Nordic, Baltic and Canadian counterparts are testament to that.

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): The extra funding being made available to the BBC World Service is particularly welcome. The World Service does an admirable job of supplying news in a world of disinformation, so why did the Government decide to cut its funding in the first place?

James Cleverly: When the impacts of covid were felt across the world, every Government of every political persuasion had to make difficult decisions, just as we did. I am pleased that we have been able to work with the BBC World Service to ensure it delivers its services in the most efficient manner and that we are able to support it with this increase in funding.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Given that the biggest killer of our people, the most frequent breaches of our border and, arguably, the most significant impact to the integrity of our economy result from the work of overseas organised criminal gangs, why is there hardly any mention of them in this document? Where is the resource to allow the National Crime Agency to deal with threats that are felt on the streets of the Secretary of State's constituency and mine every day?

James Cleverly: My right hon. Friend is right to say that organised criminal gangs have an international component. This document is predominantly but not exclusively focused on state-level threats. However, I assure him that the role of international organised crime gangs is very much part of our interactions with our interlocutors internationally. We did not have the opportunity to put every single element of what we do internationally into this review, and of course a large of part of what he refers to lies within the home affairs area of responsibility. However, we liaise closely to ensure that we discuss with international interlocutors the threat posed within the UK by international criminality.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I refer to my entries in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I was pleased that the Foreign Secretary referred to today being Commonwealth Day, but a little disappointed that there was only a passing reference to the Commonwealth, in that he is meeting Foreign Ministers from member states in the coming week. He was right to highlight the growing influence of China across the globe, which includes economic, political and security interests among many of the 56 members of the Commonwealth. How does he envisage the integrated review refresh in terms of Britain developing a modern, dynamic, refreshed friendship with many of those Commonwealth countries?

James Cleverly: I genuinely thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue. Although we have not made many references to the Commonwealth discretely in this review, the Commonwealth is interwoven through much of what we do. The geographical nature of the Commonwealth means, inevitably, that our Indo-Pacific tilt will be delivered in partnership with Commonwealth countries, as of course AUKUS will be with Australia. This morning, I spoke to the Singaporean and New Zealand Foreign Ministers, and I have had meetings with the Malaysian Foreign Minister. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the UK wants to see the Commonwealth being a meaningful, active and useful vehicle for the member states, particularly the small island states that disproportionately create the membership of the Commonwealth. I reassure him that even if this is not written down explicitly, it is absolutely interwoven throughout this document.

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that soft power can often be as effective as hard power, if not more so, and that it is usually a lot cheaper? I therefore strongly welcome the additional funding for the BBC World Service, but will he go on to look at strengthening the support for other soft power projections, such as the British Council and the Chevening scholarship and John Smith Trust fellowship programmes?

James Cleverly: I suspect that my right hon. Friend, my near neighbour in Essex, knows that he is pushing at the most open of open doors on that. I do not particularly like the phrase "soft power", because it sometimes implies a subordinate relationship to hard power. He is right to say that the UK's projection of soft power—I have to use the phrase as I have not thought of anything better yet—is incredibly powerful and cost-effective. He made the point about Chevening, Marshall and other scholarships. All those things, along with football, arts, theatre and so on, are incredibly powerful and absolutely at the heart of UK foreign policy.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): William Gladstone's third Midlothian speech said that good foreign policy started with "good government at home". We can see that in the US with President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS Act, and even in the European Union being jolted into responding with similar initiatives. But the somewhat vague promises in the document published today of a protective security authority, an economic deterrence initiative, a critical minerals strategy and a UK semiconductor strategy leave me somewhat wanting more. Can the Foreign Secretary expand on those things? If he does not and there is no meat on the bone, we will fail to have met the moment that the White House and the Commission in Brussels have given us.

James Cleverly: There is a phrase, "Always leave them wanting more." Is that not what they say? *[Interruption.]* Politics is show business for ugly people. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that it will remain, as I said in my statement, absolutely at the heart of the UK's foreign policy to work in partnership and with partners. We need to make sure that we maintain our tradition as an open, free-trading nation, working closely with those countries that share our values and protect our interests, as we do theirs. He referred to further iterations which I have highlighted, including semiconductors and our critical minerals strategy. More details will be forthcoming, and he will see that those things are interwoven, not just through the UK foreign policy structure, but in close co-operation with our friends and allies internationally.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): A commitment to promoting freedom of religion or belief was included in the last integrated review, and it is good to hear from the Foreign Secretary that the approach to working on this refresh has been one of evolution. Does he agree that the UK continuing to take a leading role in promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief across the world, and working with like-minded countries to challenge abuses, are even more important today than they were in the 2021 review, bearing in mind the increased abuses that are happening across the world, not least Russia's misuse of religion in its attacks against Ukraine and the growing use of increasingly sophisticated technology to control, coerce and oppress people, and restrict their freedom of religion or belief?

James Cleverly: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work in this area. She is right: freedom of religion or belief is a litmus test for good behaviours by Government. Where those freedoms are impinged, that is typically the canary in the mine for other human rights abuses. She is right that we highlighted that in 2021, and we

[James Cleverly]

have not lost our commitment to it. This is a refresh—we did not attempt to cover off everything that we covered in the '21 integrated review, otherwise the document would have been too large.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that it is no longer Government policy to view the aid budget as a giant cash machine in the sky, and does he recognise that where cuts have been made, they have had a tangible and negative impact? Why will he not show the same ambition to return to 0.7% gross national income for aid spending as he is showing to get to 2.5% GNI for defence spending?

James Cleverly: The hon. Gentleman should listen when we make statements at the Dispatch Box, because we have made the commitment to get back up to 0.7%. As I said in response to the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Ms Qaisar), we remain, both in percentage and absolute terms, one of the largest aid donors in the world.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I welcome the integrated review refresh. On China's capabilities, as, I think, the only Mandarin and Cantonese speaker in the House, I encourage the Foreign Secretary to increase the number of Great Britain-China Centre courses, both for civil servants and for parliamentarians. On the integrated review's assessment of middle-ground powers of growing importance, which include the three south-east Asian nations and ASEAN, which I serve, as he knows, does he agree that although our national interests are not always the same, we all share a strong interest in an open, international order, so we should, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) suggested, sharply increase FCDO Chevening scholarships, British Council scholarships, armed forces' course scholarships, and Westminster Foundation for Democracy programmes in the Indo-Pacific region to make those closer partnerships for which the review calls?

James Cleverly: It is incumbent on us to make sure that we understand China better. I am not fatalistic about our future relationship with China. The job of foreign affairs and diplomacy is to try to influence and improve. We certainly seek to influence China's decisions. It is clear that we need to increase the number of people who speak Chinese and intimately understand China, which is why we have made a commitment to do so. With regard to the schemes that my hon. Friend highlighted, he is absolutely right that the more people understand us well, the better.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Some analysts believe that a war over Taiwan's sovereignty could occur in the second half of this decade. Although the Prime Minister has voiced his wish over the past 24 hours to continue to engage with China, does the Foreign Secretary agree that conflict in that region would have devastating impacts and that we must protect Taiwan's rights as an independent nation?

James Cleverly: The hon. Lady is right that a conflict across the Taiwan strait would be disastrous not just for the region but for the global economy, because of the interconnected supply chains that would be at stake.

The UK's position is long standing and well versed: we do not agree with any unilateral change of posture across the Taiwan strait and we will continue to work to de-escalate where there are tensions and to try to ensure peace in that region.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's commitment to increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP will not only help to keep us safe, but create much more certainty for the 390,000 UK jobs, many of them high paying and high skilled, in places such as Filton and Bradley Stoke, which rely on our defence spending?

James Cleverly: We have fantastic defence industries here in the UK. I think the reason countries are keen to work with us on projects such as AUKUS, the future combat air system and others is that internationally they recognise the huge value added to defence systems by the engagement of the UK, whether at governmental level or in the commercial sector. We value the jobs based in the UK's defence sector, and of course this is about preserving those jobs, which are more geographically dispersed than in other sectors of the UK economy. Good value, high-paid, high-skilled jobs across the whole of the UK is something we will continue to focus on.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State very much for his statement and welcome the Government announcement regarding the increase in defence spending—something for which I, along with many others in this House, have been asking for years. I note that the increase is in response to Russia and other global concerns and that the Secretary of State in his statement referred to the increase in cyber and technology, but it is also important to have an increase of soldiers on the ground. Is it not possible to have both cyber and technology, and boots on the ground?

James Cleverly: The hon. and gallant Gentleman makes an important point: just because new threats have emerged, as we have seen with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the old threats do not go away. We are seeing a full-spectrum attack by Russia, including cyber-attack, missile attack, tank attack and, sadly, first world war-style trench warfare around Bakhmut. We have to understand that it is not a case of either/or; it has to be both. This integrated review refresh recognises that, and I can assure him and the House that we will make sure we cover all the areas where we need to defend ourselves.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): As my right hon. Friend has already said, Britain's soft power is a strategic asset. Does he agree that it is important for two reasons—first, it gives us a strategic advantage in the world, and secondly, it gives us a platform to build relationships with allies to contain and resist the trend towards anti-democratic and authoritarian regimes around the world?

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend is right that the UK is proudly one of the most significant defence contributors to NATO and, as I have said, in absolute and percentage terms it is one of the largest aid spenders in the world. However, the one area where we are without risk of being contradicted is in our soft power. We recognise that, and we will continue to invest in that and to ensure that it is at the heart of our foreign policy.

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): The £5 billion investment in defence spending in the upcoming AUKUS announcement offers substantial opportunities for those engaged in the nuclear enterprise and submarine-building programme, but it also makes clear the challenges we are going to face in skilling up people for that multi-generation-long programme and getting our supply chains ready to deliver on it. Can my right hon. Friend outline what cross-Government discussions are taking place now to make sure we are fit for that challenge?

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is not just a cross-Government endeavour but a cross-society, multi-decade-long endeavour, meaning that we will need people who are perhaps currently in primary school to be developing the technical skills that will still be needed in 20 or 30 years' time. I suggest to careers advisers around the country that advising boys and girls to gravitate towards that area of work is a very good investment, because the jobs are going to be there—they are going to be high-paid, high-skilled jobs scattered all around the UK that are going to be there for a very long time. My hon. Friend is right that this needs to be a whole-of-society approach, and that is exactly the attitude we are taking.

Silicon Valley Bank

4.56 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Andrew Griffith): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the steps His Majesty's Government have taken to limit risks to our tech and life sciences sector.

Following the rapid deterioration of Silicon Valley Bank, and working in concert with the Bank of England, early this morning we facilitated the purchase of the UK subsidiary of Silicon Valley Bank by HSBC. Serving 39 million customers globally, and headquartered and listed here in the UK, HSBC is Europe's largest bank. Those affected are now secure in the knowledge that their deposits are protected and that they can bank as normal. Customers should not notice any changes, while the wider UK banking system remains safe, sound and well capitalised.

Using stabilisation powers granted by the Banking Act 2009, which afforded us the ability to safely manage the failure of banks, we have forestalled disruption in the tech sector and supported confidence in the UK financial system. The resolution action was taken by the Bank of England in consultation with HM Treasury, using its powers to transfer the UK business of SVB to a private sector purchaser. As required by the Act, the Bank of England consulted the Treasury, the Prudential Regulation Authority and the Financial Conduct Authority on its assessment that all required conditions for that transaction had been met.

We have been able to achieve this outcome—the best possible outcome—in short order without any taxpayer money or Government guarantees. There has been no bail-out, and the actions taken are a win for customers, taxpayers and the banking system. The transfer of SVB UK to a buyer has allowed the Treasury to limit the risk to public funds by ensuring that shareholders and creditors, rather than depositors, bear losses. To help achieve that result, the Bank of England has made a related instrument bringing about a mandatory reduction of capital instruments in SVB UK, restoring it to viability. It is my view that in this situation, the system worked as we would hope.

In order to ensure that the sale could proceed, the Government are using their powers under the Banking Act to provide HSBC with an exception to certain ringfencing requirements. That was crucial to ensuring that a successful transaction could be executed, that the bank has the liquidity it needs, and that deposits and public funds are protected.

The outcome will provide security for some of the UK's most innovative, fast-growing firms. The UK's tech and life sciences sectors are world leading, hundreds of thousands of people are employed in them, and they make a very substantial contribution to the economy as a whole. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have been clear throughout that we will look after our high-tech sectors, and that is what we have done. The Bank of England has confirmed that, as a result of the swift, decisive action we have taken, depositors will be able to access their accounts. It is worth reiterating that, as the Governor has said, the wider UK banking system remains safe, sound and well capitalised.

[Andrew Griffith]

In concluding, I place on record my sincere thanks to my fellow Ministers across Whitehall, to officials at the Treasury and to regulators. They worked tirelessly through the weekend to grip the situation, to deliver this solution and to prevent real jeopardy to hundreds of the UK's most innovative companies.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

5 pm

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I thank the Minister for giving me advance sight of his statement today. Labour welcomes the announcement by HSBC that it will be buying the UK arm of Silicon Valley Bank, or SVB UK, in a rescue deal. As the shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), said over the weekend, the UK life sciences and tech sectors play an indispensable role in driving growth and innovation across the economy.

Now that those who bank with SVB UK have some certainty, the Government should examine how we got here in the first place. For example, when SVB UK was granted a separate banking licence last year, what assessment did the Treasury and Bank of England make of the significant liquidity risks arising from its deposit base being a small number of high-value corporate deposits?

The effects of the collapse of SVB are still being felt across the UK market and the Minister said in his statement that HSBC's purchase of SVB has "supported confidence" in the UK financial system. What assessment has he made of the fact that London's FTSE 100 was down today, while the UK bank index fell by almost 5% this morning and by more than 10% over the weekend? What will the disruptions in the banking sector mean for confidence, the wider economy and the ability of high-growth companies to access the credit that they need to thrive?

The Minister also said that disruption in the tech sector has been "forestalled", but what reassurance can he provide today that, under HSBC's ownership, the bank will continue to be able to support early-stage tech and life sciences businesses in the UK? He also said that HSBC has been given an exemption from certain ring-fencing requirements. Will that be a permanent exemption?

Perhaps the most important question, I am sure the Minister will agree, is this: how can we avoid this happening again? With inflation at record levels, the Bank of England has had to take steps to tackle rising prices, but Ministers must make an assessment of the risk that sharp changes to UK interest rates might pose to our financial system. It is time for the Government to launch a systemic review of the risks that sharply rising interest rates pose to the UK financial sector, and I hope the Chancellor will return to the House having made that assessment.

Finally, the events of this weekend further underline the importance of ensuring that UK start-ups have access to the patient capital that they need to grow, as proposed by the Labour party's start-up review. I hope that the Minister will return to the House soon to update us with a broader assessment of the risks to the financial sector arising from sharply increasing rates, and with a plan to address the longer-term problems holding back growth and the provision of patient capital to our growing businesses.

Andrew Griffith: I think concealed within that was grudging support, and I am sure that the hon. Lady would like to add her voice to those of so many in the sector who have welcomed this announcement today, which provides the important confidence and stability that are needed. She raised the point that SVB UK has a separate banking licence, and it is precisely because of that mechanism that our regulators and the Treasury have been able to take the action we have taken over the weekend.

I think the hon. Lady understands the disruption and volatility in the sector, but she should be reassured that the Governor of the Bank of England has confirmed that this is not indicative of systemic risk. I can confirm that, in order that the Silicon Valley Bank, now within HSBC, can provide the broad range of services that our life sciences and tech sector value so much, the exemption from the ring-fencing requirements will be permanent.

The hon. Lady asked about a systemic review. Of course, these are always opportunities for us to learn and look again, but, as I said in my opening remarks, the system has worked as intended.

Finally, and with the greatest of respect, we on the Conservative side of the House need no lessons on patient capital. We are unlocking capital for our important tech and life sciences. Only last week, the Under-Secretary of State for Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott), brought to this House regulations to remove the charge cap and to allow our pension funds to invest in some of the fastest-growing sectors of our economy.

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

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): May I put on the record my gratitude to the Minister, his colleagues and officials, and to people at the Bank and in the City in general, who have obviously worked flat out all weekend to deliver what turns out to be the best possible outcome in these difficult circumstances?

On the importance of the sector to the UK economy, did the Minister and the Bank treat this situation any differently because of the sector in which SVB was operating, or would they have tried for the same sort of solution for a bank in any sector? Was the Minister as concerned as I was about reports that investors required the firms that they were funding to put money into the bank as a condition for investment? Finally, given that other banks have collapsed in the US—other small banks, including one that specialised in crypto—does he think that crypto is in any way contributing to financial instability?

Andrew Griffith: I thank my hon. Friend, one of my predecessors and the Chair of the Select Committee, for her support and comments. The degree of concentration in a particular sector is unusual—it was an unusual feature. The business model of Silicon Valley Bank in the UK was different from that in the US, partly because of the tight regulations that we have here. For that reason, I have not seen any evidence that the banking of crypto-asset companies was something that contributed. Rather, once the Fed had taken its action, we saw the impact on the bank here. That is why it was right for the Bank to act to give us the space to protect that bank and to achieve the outcome that we announced this morning.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): One of the key lessons of the 2008-09 financial crash was that the conduct of business and liquidity issues could very quickly morph into systemic risk with contagion across a variety of transmission channels, so I very much welcome the speedy way in which the SVB UK issue was resolved over the weekend. However, that bank's business model—and it is not alone—involved it holding a large number of low-interest-bearing bonds at a time of rising bond yields. It was required to sell those at a loss, which exacerbated the liquidity problems that it had. Would it not be prudent now to ensure that our regulators have another look at UK banks to ensure that comparable low-interest-bearing assets are stringently priced and marked to market to ensure that tier 1 capital is just that, and of sufficient quantity and quality that any liquidity problem does not morph into an insolvency and system risk problem?

Andrew Griffith: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his recognition of the speed and decisiveness with which the whole Government have come together, worked together and acted to deliver this outcome—that is kind of him and it is appreciated. If I may, we should not conflate some of what we read about the balance sheet in the US with the regulated balance sheet in the UK, which was a separately regulated balance sheet. Again, on the business model in the UK and the backing, and the bonds and collateral that were being held, I am not aware that their forced sale, and the losses on it, were a contributory factor. The reality is that we saw a withdrawal of deposits. The Bank had the ability, because of the relatively ringfenced balance sheet, to protect the bank and take the necessary action. Had the Bank not done so, we could have been in a very different situation, so we were right to act as we did.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee.

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): I strongly welcome the decisive intervention that has been described, which has saved many UK tech businesses and jobs. Will my hon. Friend consider how the responsiveness of UK regulation, which was demonstrated overnight, combined with the strength of the City of London and our tech sector, provides an opportunity to attract more businesses to do their financing in the UK and means that they do not need to go overseas to get the financing that they require to start up and grow?

Andrew Griffith: My right hon. Friend, who does such good work for the science and technology community through his Committee, is absolutely right. The technology and life sciences sectors want our Government to be joined up and decisive, and to remove unnecessary regulations, while still operating in a high-quality regulated environment. We now have the opportunity to go a lot further—to deliver the Edinburgh reforms and to combine our aspirations to be a science superpower with the ferocious financing strength that we have here in the United Kingdom.

Dame Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I commend the quick and effective action. However, although the collapse of SVB in America was partly due to liquidity issues,

there is also the issue of the changes that were made to the threshold at which banks are considered systemically risky, which increased from \$50 billion to \$250 billion. That meant that SVB could continue in America without the very focused regulation that might have spotted this problem earlier. Does the Minister think that the Edinburgh reforms present any similar risks, and will he say a little about the exemption from ringfencing that he announced today for HSBC? Is he content that that does not present any risks either?

Andrew Griffith: I must be very careful not to comment on matters as they relate to the United States. SVB UK was a separate bank. It was regulated here, and it was as a result of that regulation, and the fact that we have taken back control of our financial regulatory rulebook, that we were able to act so decisively. The hon. Lady will forgive me if I do not talk about matters in the United States.

In respect of ringfencing, it was the view of the Bank of England and the Treasury, in the circumstances and to protect public funds, that to provide a permanent exemption for what is a very small part of the much larger HSBC—I think less than 1% of its pro forma clients on an enlarged basis will be former Silicon Valley Bank clients—was appropriate. I do not think it puts inappropriate levels of risk in the system. By streamlining the rulebook, and by bringing back control and dispensing it to UK regulators, with accountability to Parliament—she will know about that through her membership of the Treasury Committee—I think we can have better regulation and deliver better outcomes for the sector.

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend and all who were involved in the rescue. It was vital that we acted urgently to prevent the fear and the risk of contagion that were apparent over the weekend. Does he feel that the fact that SVB UK was a separately ringfenced bank and that ringfencing is a UK-specific regulation brought to bear any protection for SVB UK? He will recall only too well, as I do, that Lehman sucked capital out of the UK when it was in dire straits, which to a large extent caused the ultimate contagion. Will ringfencing continue to protect the UK banking sector as we go forward, even through the Edinburgh reforms?

Andrew Griffith: My right hon. Friend speaks with great authority on these matters, and I can give her that assurance. It was constituted as a subsidiary in the UK, it had its own separate balance sheet and it was regulated as such. Because of that fact, the Bank was able to make the decisive intervention it did. There were assets within the subsidiary to which we were ultimately able to restore viability by successfully finding, over the weekend, a very large bank—Europe's largest bank—to step in and buy, and to put its balance sheet behind, this entity.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): While we are all full of admiration, particularly for all our officials who worked through the weekend to make this happen, I am afraid I find the statement a bit long on self-congratulation and a bit short on explanation. What questions has the Minister asked about why this happened? Why were all these companies banking with this particular bank and what cultural aspects were there to the case?

[Alison McGovern]

What do we need to uncover that will be important for the sustainability of both banking and technological firms in the future?

Andrew Griffith: It is not uncommon for banks to have a particular specialism. Labour Members have worked to bring forward regulations that will help us have more credit unions, which tend to have a geographical concentration, and there are agricultural banks and other wholesale banks, so it is not of itself an unusual feature. In this case, we were able to take action precisely because of the UK regulatory structures and the interventions we can make. We will learn any lessons, but this is a Government who are on the side of technology companies and the life sciences, and we have been proud to deliver this outcome—this important certainty—and to remove the jeopardy they otherwise faced at the opening of business this morning.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What estimate had the Bank of England made of the health of SVB before the events of the weekend?

Andrew Griffith: It would not be right for me to answer on behalf of the Bank of England, if my right hon. Friend will forgive me. We have an independent regulator that looks at these matters. The Treasury Committee regularly takes evidence from the Bank of England, and I am sure it will do so in future.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I am sure that many firms across the United Kingdom will welcome, and breathe a sigh of relief at, the decision that was made over the weekend. However, this was done in haste. I ask the Minister: what kind of due diligence was done by HSBC when arranging this takeover, and is he sure that we are not walking into a situation similar to what we had with Lloyds and HBOS in 2008, when a quick decision led to a domino effect in the banking system and resulted in bail-outs by the taxpayer?

Andrew Griffith: I cannot speak for the due diligence that was done for HSBC, but it has got itself comfortable with it. We should also understand the relative scale of HSBC, which is an extraordinarily well-regulated, global and diverse bank. My understanding is that if we add all of the important clients of Silicon Valley Bank UK, which we had in the front of our mind as we sought to act over the weekend—if I may say so, we make no apology for acting in haste, because haste was absolutely the required procedure in this particular case—they would in their entirety be less than 1% of the overall client base of HSBC. With respect, I do not think that was the case in the examples to which the right hon. Member referred.

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): The sighs of relief across South Cambridgeshire this morning were so loud that they were almost deafening. Dozens of my technology companies, which had been in contact with me over the weekend, thought they were going to be wiped out this morning, but they can now operate as normal because of the decisive action by the Government. I very much congratulate the Minister, the Bank of England and the Treasury on that action.

I have also had questions about whether this is a sign that all the reforms of the financial system in the wake of the global financial crisis have failed or are failing. Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that this is not a sign of the reforms failing, but a sign that they are working, and that without the reforms we would not be able to do a rescue in this way? Can he also confirm that the reforms that are coming through—the Edinburgh reforms—will not make future collapses more likely, or future rescues more difficult?

Andrew Griffith: My hon. Friend knows a great deal about the sector, and it is due to past reforms that we were able to take this decisive action. Parliament has given—in extremis, and with the agreement of the Bank of England, the PRA, the FCA and the Treasury—sweeping powers to enable this sort of transaction to happen at great pace. Let me be clear that it is the shareholders and creditors of the bank, not depositors or the taxpayer, who have lost. In the system that we have, that is the right outcome, and I am pleased we were able to achieve it.

The Edinburgh reforms are designed to give this country the ability to continue to grow and to be internationally competitive with other markets, while adhering to the highest quality regulatory standards, and with the UK at the absolute cornerstone of organisations such as the Financial Stability Board. They will not put any more jeopardy into the financial system. Indeed, having good healthy businesses that grow and are profitable is the best way to avoid jeopardy.

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): First pension funds and liability driven investments, now the collapse of SVB UK. Is it not time for a systematic review of the risks that sharply rising interest rates pose to the UK financial sector?

Andrew Griffith: With the greatest of respect to the hon. Lady, the issue here was a subsidiary of a US bank, and I will not be commenting on US policy, interest rates or anything else from this Dispatch Box. The important fact is that we were able to restore the bank to viability and, over a small number of hours and days, to find a successful buyer. We did that because of the strength of the UK regulatory system, and because of the conviction of this Prime Minister and this Chancellor that this is a critical sector, and one of the ways that we will continue to grow the UK economy.

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): I pay tribute to the exemplary orchestration of all the different stakeholders and decision makers that the Minister led over the weekend. It is helpful to distinguish between decisions taken by the American Government and by ours in respect of this bank. The American taxpayer is guaranteeing the deposits of SVB account holders there; in our case, another bank has bought them and the taxpayer is safe. I pay tribute to the Government for that. I appreciate that the Minister cannot comment on American policy, but in the hypothetical instance of another bank in the UK failing, or another sector getting into trouble, will he give an indication of his thinking on whether the taxpayer would ever need to step in? Will he guarantee that that will not happen?

Andrew Griffith: I am not going to offer my hon. Friend that guarantee, as that would not be prudent or the right thing to do. I can guarantee that this Government

will do everything possible to reconcile the needs of protecting customers, protecting financial stability and protecting the taxpayer. It is of great note that we were able to do that in this transaction, and if such an issue were ever unfortunately to reoccur, all our energy would be devoted to precisely the same ends.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): I very much welcome the purchase of Silicon Valley Bank UK by HSBC this morning, not least because I am a former employee of a company that had exposure to the bank on both sides of the Atlantic and whose chief executive officer was one of the signatories to the letter sent to the Chancellor on Saturday. Statements were made by the UK bank on Thursday and Friday, and if depositors had relied on the assertions made in those statements, and if the purchase had not gone through this morning, those depositors would have incurred losses. Will the Minister confirm whether that constitutes a breach of the regulations? If it does, will there be any sanctions for people identified as having committed those breaches?

Andrew Griffith: I am delighted that the hon. Lady's constituents benefit from the certainty. It was a terrible weekend for everybody who was a depositor or who was in some way dependent on SVB UK. That is why it was so important that we not just achieved this outcome and that the regulatory structure and laws laid down by Parliament allowed us to do so, but that we were able to act decisively. I welcome the fact that another great British bank, HSBC, has stepped in, and I wish it and all the employees well.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on particular things that were said. Fortunately, we are in the position that every depositor has been made whole, and therefore that issue does not arise.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I massively congratulate my hon. Friend and His Majesty's Government on this news. I spent three years of my life pushing the post-crash banking recovery and resolution frameworks through Europe, so I can absolutely confirm that the fact that there are now powers in so many countries to rapidly resolve failing banks without the need for taxpayers' money is in very large part due to the outstanding global leadership of the post-crash Conservative UK Government and the actions of the now Governor of the Bank of England. Can my hon. Friend confirm that going forward, the Government will ensure that our financial services regulators not only work to reduce systemic risk, but back our financial services sector in its efforts to invest in our country and help our economy grow?

Andrew Griffith: I can absolutely give my right hon. Friend that assurance. In doing so, let me also pay tribute to her work as a Member of the European Parliament between 2009 and 2017, when she led on banking reform.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The Minister said that SVB UK was a subsidiary of the American bank, but in this country a separate banking licence was given to SVB UK. May I therefore push him on the risk assessment around liquidity? When the banking licence was given, what risk assessment was conducted, particularly given the concentration of a small number of corporates in the deposits to SVB UK?

Andrew Griffith: That is, with respect, the whole point: it was a separate subsidiary. It did have a separate banking licence here and it did participate in the regulators' stress tests here. There is risk in any financial system. What this House and our diligent regulators are focused on is achieving the right balance of risk. From time to time there will—as there was with the failure of the bank in the US—be factors that lead to challenges in any risk-based system, notwithstanding the good work by the regulators and the stress tests having been applied.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I draw the attention of the House to my historical entries in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as an adviser to a technology venture fund and as a board member of a number of portfolio companies, many of which will have had financing arrangements with Silicon Valley Bank, HSBC and other financial institutions.

On behalf of the technology businesses in Bedfordshire, I add my thanks to the Minister and his team for their swift response over the weekend. He will be aware, however, of general concerns about global liquidity for the technology sector. What is his assessment of how the SVB experience at home and abroad may exacerbate those and test the resilience of the UK tech sector? Although HSBC is a great bank—indeed, I am a customer of HSBC—Silicon Valley Bank succeeded over many years precisely because it was so closely attenuated to the needs of early stage and growth stage businesses. Will my hon. Friend consider what steps he can take to encourage the emergence of new challenger banks to repeat the successes and avoid the failures of SVB in the UK?

Andrew Griffith: As my hon. Friend knows, the Government are seeking to support challenger banks to make sure we have a vibrant and competitive sector. That includes looking at issues such as the level of MREL—minimum requirement for own funds and eligible liabilities—and making sure that we have proportionate banking regulation that is relevant to the risk involved. He makes important points about the culture and capabilities of SVB UK, which is why it was so important that we had to very swiftly find it a home. I have spoken today to the chief executive of HSBC, as well as to the former chief executive of SVB UK. They are both enormously excited about the future. They see this as a platform for mutual growth, taking our brilliant life sciences and technology businesses international and to a new scale. The Government will not rest until we have mobilised capital to turn us into that science superpower.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Minister said, "The system worked." Certainly, it was a huge relief that the estimated 50% of the UK tech sector that banked with SVB UK could today pay their suppliers and staff. However, surely that highlights the lack of diversity of capital available to the UK tech sector, and our dependence on the US. In the last two years, Silicon Valley Bank's deposits tripled, but its exposure to Treasuries, and therefore to interest rate rises, went up ninefold. Is the Minister seriously saying that no one on this side of the Atlantic should have noticed that, and that it had no impact on what happened?

Andrew Griffith: The hon. Member talks about dependence on the US, but if that is her concern she should welcome this deal wholeheartedly, because we have taken a former subsidiary of a US business and made it part of a thriving and successful UK business.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Bravo to the Minister and, in particular, the resolutions team at the Bank of England, who have been honing their skills for many years and finally got the chance to put them to use. Further to the question from my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger), does the Minister understand the relief felt by many that the taxpayer, once again, has not been asked to step in and, in effect, nationalise private sector losses? Does he agree that for a capitalist economy to function, even in the most painful of circumstances, it has to be allowed to do what it does best—recycle distressed assets?

Andrew Griffith: My right hon. Friend is quite right to talk about risk and capital systems' proficiency at recycling capital to productive uses. That is also an enormous focus of this Government and is why our No. 1 priority was to seek to make a private sector transfer of the bank if we could, to protect the taxpayer while also protecting customers and the solvency of the financial system. I am glad that we were able to achieve this outcome. We will continue to do so by having fit-for-purpose regulations in this space.

Ms Anum Qaisar (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Does the Minister agree that the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank highlights the dangers associated with deregulation in the banking sector—something that the UK Government have continually touted as one of the benefits of Brexit?

Andrew Griffith: I do not accept that for one minute. We are only just bringing forward the deregulation. The Financial Services and Markets Bill is not even on the statute book. The regulations that affected this situation are precisely the same regulations that we have inherited from Brussels.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): It is when we act in haste that we need to think about the long-term consequences of the regulatory actions taken. I join others in the House in commending the Treasury, wider Government and the Bank of England. The Minister said that HSBC has been given a waiver on certain ringfencing rules. I ask this as someone who, before arriving at the House, worked at HSBC on ringfencing in detail and many other things: will the Minister explain that waiver in more detail? More importantly, will that waiver on ringfencing apply more widely to other banks caught by ringfencing regulations?

Andrew Griffith: As my hon. Friend well knows, the Government are undertaking a review of ringfencing. There is a call for evidence on how we could reform that, following the work of Sir Keith Skeoch into how we mesh the ringfencing arrangements put in place back in 2008 with the more modern resolution arrangements. We will learn the lessons that we can from this but, as I said at the beginning, in this case we have been able to achieve an outcome that has protected customers, the taxpayers and the financial system.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I, too, had many representations over the weekend from early stage tech companies in and around Cambridge, and they will be

much relieved by the news today. To echo the point made by the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller), the reason they banked with SVB was its close understanding of their particular needs. What guarantee can we have that HSBC will be able to replicate that?

Andrew Griffith: How this bank is run going forward is a matter for HSBC. However, HSBC is a prodigiously successful global institution that has bought SVB on the back of a desire to grow and support that sector, and it sees that this Government are firmly on the side of that sector. We see the aspiration and the opportunity now that we have taken back control from Brussels, and we are going to make an enormous success out of our tech and life sciences sectors; we are on their side.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): I welcome the Minister's statement, and I congratulate him and all those who have worked to resolve this matter so quickly. The collapse of Silicon Valley Bank will have left its customers worried about managing their cashflows; obviously, cashflow problems cause the majority of businesses to fail. In his statement, he mentioned that customers would continue to have access to their deposits. Will that be seamless and continue right away, so that business continuity is safeguarded?

Andrew Griffith: I thank my hon. Friend and I again pay tribute to the hardworking officials from the Treasury and the regulators, and to my colleagues across Government, who pulled together rapidly to deliver this solution. There may be teething issues as the integration takes place, but having spoken to HSBC and the management of SVB UK, they are open for business today and serving their clients. That is the outcome that the Prime Minister and Chancellor were absolutely right to seek in time for this morning's opening of business.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): I would like to press the Minister on his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney). At least two tech companies in my constituency were almost affected; I am grateful to the Economic Secretary for acknowledging my urgent letters over the weekend. One of those companies, based in St Albans, moved £200,000 from its US account to its UK account based, in part, on the statements made about SVB being an independent entity, regulated in the UK—statements that bank made to try to give the reassurance that it would not be affected. However, it then did become affected. Will the Minister clarify whether SVB would or should have known that those statements were either incorrect or misleading? If he is not prepared to comment on that particular example, will he commit to a process to look into that issue? Does he believe that there should be consequences in future for banks that make incorrect and misleading statements that put companies at risk?

Andrew Griffith: As I said to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney), I do not think it is appropriate that I make comments from the Dispatch Box about the veracity or otherwise of statements made by an individual; I hope the hon. Lady respects that. It is, of course, right that anyone in a position of leadership in business takes responsibility and acts in good faith.

Although there may well be lessons to be learned in time, the important point is that her constituents and their companies are able to operate, have access to their deposits and continue to do their work of growing important sectors of the economy. I hope the whole House will welcome that.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Congratulations to the Chancellor, the Minister and all those involved in resolving this problem, which tech companies in Gloucester and Gloucestershire will greatly appreciate. Does the Minister agree that this shows the importance of having Europe's largest bank, the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, regulated and headquartered here in London, and that this also shows that this Government will always support business? Lastly, since the Chancellor extended start-up loans in September, will my hon. Friend confirm that this Government have effectively helped create and sustain 33,000 new businesses?

Andrew Griffith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Our actions demonstrate that we are on the side of business. We mean it when we say that we want to make the UK the best place to start, grow and run a business, and, I will add, to list a business, because he is quite right that HSBC is an enormously successful global business that is headquartered in the UK and proudly listed on the UK stock exchange.

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): In the light of recent events and the risk of contagion, can the Minister spell out exactly what action he is taking to ensure that we do not see a contraction in the availability of credit to these specialist, fast-growing companies? What more will he do to facilitate access to appropriate credit to help our groundbreaking tech industries to develop?

Andrew Griffith: It is a core focus for the Government to ensure that our scaling-up businesses get access not just to credit, but to capital at every level through their life: the Prime Minister has made that a core priority. That is why we are bringing forward many reforms that will open up capital markets to growing businesses, and it is why we will continue to look at reforming packets of trapped capital, whether that be in respect of insurers, through the reform of solvency II, or through looking again at pension arrangements to make sure that savers and potential future pensioners can benefit from the wonderful opportunities from emerging businesses in the tech and life sciences sector.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): If SVB UK had not been bought, there would have been a huge impact on the most high-tech jobs in our economy, and indeed on the jobs of the future. I pay tribute to the Minister, the whole Government and the Bank of England for their work over the weekend. I also thank the Minister for engaging with me. Does he agree that because of the outsize impact that the failure of SVB might have had,

it is all the more important that the Government look at what made SVB so appealing to these vital jobs and at how we do more of it where it is right and less if it is dangerous?

Andrew Griffith: I completely agree. My hon. Friend knows a great deal about the subject, which reflects his background; he is absolutely right.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his statement. The Government are to be commended for the speed with which they have acted; it is indeed good news. I very much welcome the purchase of SVB by HSBC, which looks set to protect UK investors and start-ups alike, but what further assurances can the Minister give this House about what the 3,500 British customers will receive in terms of the long-term plan? How long is the Government's commitment to steadying the ship?

Andrew Griffith: The Government are always committed to steadying the ship. That is why we take a prudent approach to running the economy and why the Prime Minister's priorities are to reduce inflation, to pay down debt and to grow. To grow requires capital. That is why we have a long-term commitment to good regulation, which will minimise the prospect of events like this happening again. It is also why, with the expertise on the Government Benches, we are so focused on ensuring that we have the right ecosystem to allow our brilliant entrepreneurs, our scientists and our innovators the fertile capital with which to grow to their potential.

Mr Louie French (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): For transparency, I draw hon. Members' attention to my former career in the City, as per my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I welcome the swift and decisive action by His Majesty's Government in solving this issue and in reducing the risk of potential contagion to the wider economy. Will my hon. Friend ensure that sufficient regulatory work is taking place to stress-test the liquidity of UK banks and the Government bond markets, given the clear risk highlighted by this case and by the leverage in recent liability-driven investment cases?

Andrew Griffith: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend and the House that commitment. We will learn lessons if there are lessons that need to be learned, but we should not look past the fact that today we have protected customers, protected the taxpayer and protected the security of the financial system. That is so important to our businesses. Many, many people will go home from work today much more confident, with the jeopardy of the weekend having been removed as a result of the decisive action that this Government have taken.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I thank the Minister for his statement and for responding to questions for more than three quarters of an hour.

Illegal Migration Bill

Second Reading

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): The reasoned amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition has been selected.

As Members can see, there is a great deal of interest in this debate. The first few speeches will come in at six minutes, but if everyone else could start to think in terms of four or three minutes, that would be very helpful. I now call the Secretary of State to move the motion for Second Reading.

5.45 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman) *rose—*

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. On the first page of the Bill, the Home Secretary has made the phenomenal statement that it may not be compatible with the European convention on human rights. Section 19 of the Human Rights Act 1998 confers on the Government a duty to ensure that “the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the Convention”. Ensuring that compatibility is not only a basic moral requirement of the Government, but a practical necessity. The Government have said that this is critical legislation, and they are therefore presenting to the House clauses that they know will probably be ruled unlawful by a court of law. Surely, Mr Deputy Speaker, if the Government want to have a fight with the courts, they should have a fight with the courts, and not waste the House’s time with this nefarious legislation.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am grateful for the point of order. This is not something on which the Chair can adjudicate, but I am sure that it will be part of the debate, which I think we should start now.

Suella Braverman: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The British public know that border security is national security, and that illegal migration makes us all less safe. They know that the financial and social costs of uncontrolled and illegal migration are unsustainable. They know that if our borders are to mean anything, we must control who comes into this country and the terms on which they remain here. That is why stopping the boats is my top priority, it is why the Prime Minister made stopping the boats one of his five promises to the British people, and it is why, according to the opinion polls, the British people back the Government’s Bill: they back it by more than two to one.

This does not mean that, as some assert, the British people are xenophobic. Since 2015, the British people have provided refuge for nearly half a million people through global, safe and legal routes. The British people are fair, compassionate and generous. Millions of legal migrants, including my parents, have experienced this warmth at first hand. But the British people are also realistic. They know that our capacity to help people is not unlimited.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Does the Home Secretary think that the British public want to see children and

pregnant women detained in immigration detention centres? I do not believe for a minute that they do, but that is what is in the Bill.

Suella Braverman: This is what the British people want to see: they want to stop people dying in the channel. That is what this is about. It is naive to suggest that it is lawful and appropriate to make this journey. People are dying, and we need to stop it. Since 2018, some 85,000 people have illegally entered the United Kingdom in small boats, 45,000 of them last year alone. They have overwhelmed our asylum system. Local authorities simply do not have the housing or the public service capacity to support everyone.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for giving way so early in her speech. Is she personally satisfied that there is enough provision for vulnerable children in the proposals that she is presenting tonight?

Suella Braverman: I will go into this in detail, but yes, vulnerable people will be receiving appropriate safeguarding and welfare support.

The British taxpayer cannot continue to fork out £6 million a day on hotels to house illegal arrivals. Let us be honest, the vast majority of arrivals—74% in 2021—were adult males under the age of 40. The vast majority were not pregnant women or young children. All travelled through safe countries such as France in which they could and should have first claimed asylum. Many came directly from safe countries such as Albania. When we try to remove them, they turn our generous asylum laws against us to thwart removal.

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): Does the Home Secretary agree that when 70 Labour MPs, including the Leader of the Opposition, signed a letter campaigning for the release of dangerous foreign criminals who we want to remove from the UK, they exposed themselves as pro-open borders and unlimited immigration and put themselves on the side of the criminal rather than on the side of the public?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend puts it very well. What we have here is naive do-gooders who would rather campaign to prevent the removal of foreign national offenders, one of whom tragically went on to kill another, than vote in favour of our measures that would have toughened up the sanctions on foreign national offenders.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Suella Braverman: I am going to make some progress.

The reality is that the system is simply unfair. It is unfair on the most vulnerable, it is unfair on those who play by the rules and it is unfair on the British people, so we must change the law and we must stop the boats. For too long, those of us voicing concerns about the effects of uncontrolled, unprecedented and illegal migration have been accused of inflammatory rhetoric, but nothing is more likely to inflame tensions than ignoring the public’s reasonable concerns about the current situation. The public are neither stupid nor bigoted. They can see at first hand the impact on their communities and it is irresponsible to suggest otherwise.

Speaking of acting responsibly, I want to put something on the record. It is perfectly respectable for a child of immigrants like me to say that I am deeply grateful to live here and that immigration has been overwhelmingly good for the United Kingdom, but also to say that we have had too much of it in recent years and that uncontrolled and illegal migration is simply bad.

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in the last couple of years, when we have seen exponential growth in this human trafficking across the channel, the money that people can ill afford to spend on these criminals has been used to make their trade even more effective, putting yet more lives in danger?

Suella Braverman: My right hon. Friend puts it very well. We now have a sophisticated, well resourced, multibillion-pound trade of illegal people smuggling and human trafficking. It is pan-national and it needs to stop.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Suella Braverman: I am going to make progress.

Despite the reasonable concerns that we have raised on several occasions, I am, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) before me, subject to the most grotesque slurs for saying such simple truths about the impact of unlimited and illegal migration. The worst among them, poisoned by the extreme ideology of identity politics, suggests that a person's skin colour should dictate their political views. I will not be hectored by out-of-touch lefties, or anyone for that matter. I will not be patronised on what are the appropriate views for someone of my background to hold. And I will not back down when faced with spurious accusations of bigotry, when such smears seep into the discourse of this Chamber as they did last week. Accusations that this Government's policies, which are backed by the majority of the British people, are bigoted, xenophobic or a dog whistle to racists are irresponsible and frankly beneath the dignity of this place. Politicians of all stripes should know better, and they should choose their words carefully.

Those who cast their criticism of the Bill in moral terms ignore certain truths. First, they ignore that we have a moral duty to stop the boats. People are dying in the channel. They are taking journeys that are unsafe, unnecessary and unlawful.

Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am sure you will agree with the Home Secretary that we should all choose our words carefully in this debate, so what part of "carefully" does her statement about an "invasion" constitute, or the exaggeration by the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom) in her use of the word "exponential"?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I think in this particular case it is a matter for the individual person making the speech. I will say at the outset, though, that we are clearly dealing with a very emotive subject and I ask everybody to use temperate language rather than inflaming the situation. [*Interruption.*] We will leave it there.

Suella Braverman: I appreciate your instruction to all our colleagues, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The way to stop these deaths is to stop the boats. Secondly, the critics ignore the fact that our policy does in fact guarantee humanitarian protection for those who genuinely need it. Our policy is profoundly and at its heart a humane attempt to break the incentive that sustains the business model of the smuggling gangs. People pay thousands of pounds to make these journeys to the UK.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): As the Secretary of State probably knows, I chair the all-party parliamentary group on international freedom of religion or belief. Many people across the world are persecuted, discriminated against or abused physically, and have to leave their countries. Some of those, as she will know, are living in other countries, and it is taking so long to process their applications so that they can get here. She probably shares my opinion that it is important that true asylum seekers get the opportunity to come here. Can she assure me and the House that those who are persecuted or discriminated against will have the opportunity to come here for asylum?

Suella Braverman: We have a proud and extensive tradition of offering refuge to hundreds of thousands of people who apply according to our system and our criteria. I am proud of the refuge and security that we have provided to people fleeing the very circumstances to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

By ensuring that people do not remain here, we are removing their incentive to make the journey in the first place. But crucially, if people are truly in need of protection, they will receive protection in Rwanda. Critics overwhelmingly fail to acknowledge that fact. Let us be clear: Rwanda is a dynamic country with a thriving economy. I have enjoyed visiting it myself, twice, and I look forward to visiting it again.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Is the Home Secretary also worried that the criminal gangs that are exploiting people in this dreadful way for great profit may also be linked to other types of serious crime and helping to finance other destabilisation?

Suella Braverman: I am afraid that my right hon. Friend raises a very worrying fact about what we are seeing. When I have spoken to police chiefs around the country, they tell me that criminality—particularly drug supply and usage—is now connected to people who came here illegally on small boats in the first place.

Thirdly, Rwanda is a fundamentally safe country, as affirmed by the High Court. It has a proud track record of helping the world's most vulnerable, including refugees, for the United Nations.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): People who are same-sex attracted and trans people are not covered by anti-discrimination laws in Rwanda. Does the Home Secretary think that makes it a safe country for gay people and trans people?

Suella Braverman: I am sure the hon. and learned Lady has read the High Court judgment, which is an exhaustive and authoritative analysis by senior, learned

[Suella Braverman]

judges of how our world-leading Rwanda partnership complies with international obligations, including the European convention on human rights and the refugee convention. It has been deemed to be a proper, lawful partnership. I refer her to the judgment.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Suella Braverman: I have to make some progress. I have taken quite a lot of interventions, I am afraid.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Suella Braverman: I will take one last intervention.

Richard Graham: I am very grateful to the Home Secretary. I find it odd that so many Opposition Members are trying their best to trip her up on a policy that is incredibly important to every community in this country. [Interruption.] Although they try to shout me down, let me say that my Gloucester constituency is a happy, cohesive, multiracial and multi-ethnic society with a primary school that has more than 50 different nationalities. I know, because I speak to them, that most ethnic minority communities are very sensitive to getting the balance right. If we get it wrong, they will feel the backlash more than anyone else. It will not be felt by SNP MPs who do not have asylum seekers in their constituencies. [Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I want not just temperate language but temperate behaviour.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Can you advise on how we might correct the record? The perplexing and misleading statement made by the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) is profoundly unhelpful in the context of this debate.

Richard Graham: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. No one in this House wishes to cause any offence. If I have done so, of course I apologise. We have two hotels full of asylum seekers in my constituency, and I would be very interested to know how many hotels full of asylum seekers there are in the constituencies of SNP Members. [Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I have a couple of points before we resume. Interventions are now eating into the time allotted to Back Benchers, so some simply will not get in. Points of order are doing the exact same, so I caution Members, if they are to raise points of order, to make sure they are for the Chair. [Interruption.] The answer to this point of order, as the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) knows, is that Members are responsible for their own contributions. If anything untoward is said, they should correct the record at the earliest opportunity, which I believe Mr Graham has done.

Suella Braverman: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham). He is absolutely right about Scotland where, until recently, only Glasgow was taking asylum seekers. Compared with the other nations of the United Kingdom, Scotland

has taken a disproportionately low number. He is also right to talk about the risks we face as a country that is harmonious, happy with itself and cohesive. If we do not deal with this problem, we will face serious problems of community tension and challenges to community cohesion.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Suella Braverman: I am going to make some progress. A lot of Members want to contribute to this debate.

The United Nations has confirmed that, globally, there are 100 million displaced people. Our critics simultaneously pretend that the United Kingdom does not have any safe and legal routes and that these routes should also be unlimited. The small boats crisis demonstrates that countless economic migrants are willing to take a chance to come here in search of a better life. How many of them do the Opposition think we have to take to stop the boats?

The Opposition have not been able to answer that question. Those arguing for open borders via unlimited safe and legal routes are, of course, entitled to do so, but they should do so honestly. They should not try to deceive the public by dressing up what is an extreme political argument in the fake garb of humanitarianism, nor should they pretend that the UK does not have safe and legal global routes. In recent years, our country-specific routes have provided refuge for 150,000 people leaving autocracy in Hong Kong, 160,000 Ukrainians fleeing Putin's horrific war and 25,000 Afghans escaping the Taliban. Another 50,000 people have come to the UK via routes open to people from any country, including the UK resettlement scheme, which includes community sponsorship, the mandate resettlement scheme, and, crucially, the family reunion route for those with a qualifying family member in the UK.

We are proud of those safe and legal routes. When we stop the boats, we will look to expand those routes. The Bill introduces an annual cap, determined by Parliament, on the number of refugees that the UK will resettle via safe and legal routes. This will ensure an orderly system that considers local authority capacity for housing, public services and support.

The Bill enables the detention of illegal arrivals without bail or judicial review within the first 28 days of detention. We can maintain detention thereafter under current laws, so long as we have a reasonable prospect of removal. This reflects the existing common law position, consistent with article 5 of the ECHR. The Bill places a duty on the Home Secretary to remove illegal entrants and, significantly, narrows the number of challenges and appeals that can suspend removal.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The former Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), said:

"Anyone who arrives illegally will be deemed inadmissible and either returned to the country they arrived from or a safe third country."

As a result, 18,000 people were considered inadmissible to the UK asylum system and just 21 people were returned. That is just 0.1%. What has changed with this Bill, and what percentage of those deemed inadmissible does the Home Secretary expect to be returned?

Suella Braverman: I have to correct the right hon. Lady on the fallacy under which she is operating. We are returning people who do not have a legal basis to be in this country. There are many ways to look at the numbers. Since the Prime Minister's announcement, for example, we have returned 600 people to Albania. Last year alone, we returned 14,000 people. It is a fallacy to suggest that there are no returns and that we are somehow not removing people who do not have a right to be here.

Only those who are under 18, who are medically unfit to fly or who are at real risk of serious and irreversible harm will be able to delay their removal. Any other claims will be heard remotely after removal. When we passed our world-leading Modern Slavery Act 2015, the impact assessment envisaged 3,500 referrals a year.

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): I wonder if my right hon. and learned Friend would make a point of clarification. She has implied that people will be unable to claim asylum in the UK and will be removed immediately, or potentially after 28 days' detention. Paragraph 5.1 of our memorandum of understanding with Rwanda requires the United Kingdom to be responsible for the initial screening of asylum seekers. Will she explain what that screening will be, if not the screening of claims?

Suella Braverman: We have an extensive system of screening for everyone who arrives in the UK via a small boat. That is effectively what our Manston centre is designed for. People undergo security checks, biometric checks and any other identity checks, so we undertake an extensive screening process here.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab) rose—

Suella Braverman: I am sorry, but I am going to have to make some progress. When our world-leading Modern Slavery Act 2015 was passed, the impact assessment envisaged 3,500 referrals a year. That Act of Parliament was an important step forward in protecting vulnerable people from the abuses of human trafficking and modern slavery, and I am incredibly proud of it. But last year there were 17,000 referrals, which took on average 543 days to consider. The most referred nationality in 2022 were citizens of Albania, a safe European country, a NATO ally and a signatory of the European convention against trafficking. In 2021, 73% of people detained for removal put forward a modern slavery claim, which compares with a figure of just 3% for those not in detention. We have also seen a number of foreign national offenders who, after serving their sentences for some of the most despicable crimes, such as murder and rape, have, on the point of removal, put in a last-minute claim of modern slavery to thwart their deportation. The fact is that our modern slavery laws are being abused.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Can the Home Secretary tell this House how many of that 17,000 increase was made up of British people, including British children? Until this year, they made up the largest group of people who have increased in the numbers—we are talking about British children. Will she also point out to the House exactly who makes the referrals into the human trafficking system in our country? Is it, in fact, done under her auspices, as Home Secretary, and those of the Home Office? Can people claim it, or is it actually her office that has to say whether they can do so?

Suella Braverman: What we have seen is that a large and growing proportion of modern slavery claims have been made by people who have arrived here illegally. And, as I just mentioned, there are foreign national offenders, people who have served their criminal sentences, who have upon the point of removal put in a last-minute modern slavery claim precisely to thwart their deportation. We work very closely with local authorities and other bodies to ensure that referrals are made into the mechanism. This is why the Bill will disqualify illegal entrants from using modern slavery rules in this way.

Given the mischaracterisation of the Bill by Opposition Members, I would like to make a few things clear. The Home Secretary's duty to remove will not be applied to detain and remove unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Consistent with current policy, only in limited circumstances, such as for the purposes of family reunion, will we remove unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from the UK. Otherwise, they will be provided with the necessary support in the UK until they reach 18.

With respect to the removal of families and pregnant women, it bears repeating that the overwhelming majority of illegal arrivals are adult men under the age of 40. Removing them will be our primary focus, but we must not create incentives for the smugglers to focus on people with particular characteristics by signposting exemptions for removal. It is right that we retain powers to adapt our policy so that we can respond to any change in tactics by the smuggling gangs.

Those critics who say that this Bill will be found to be unlawful said the same thing about our partnership with Rwanda—the High Court disagreed. Some of the nation's finest legal minds have been and continue to be involved in the Bill's development. The UK will always seek to uphold international law and we are confident that this Bill will deliver what is necessary, within those parameters. Section 19 of the Human Rights Act requires Ministers to give a view on the level of legal certainty on a Bill's compliance with the European convention on human rights. That is a unique UK requirement, not part of the ECHR itself. A section 19(1)(b) statement simply means that we are unable to say decisively that this Bill is compatible with the ECHR. It is clear that there are good arguments for compatibility but that some of the Bill's measures are novel and legally untested. Those on the Opposition Benches seem to forget that section 19(1)(b) statements were made by the Labour Government on the Communications Act 2003 and by the Lib Dems on the House of Lords Reform Bill in 2012. That did not mean that those Bills were unlawful and this statement does not mean that this one is either.

Claims that the Bill will breach our refugee convention obligations are simply fatuous. The convention obliges parties to provide protection to those seeking refuge. It does not require that this protection be in the UK. Illegal arrivals requiring protection will receive it in a safe third country such as Rwanda. Moreover, article 31 of the convention is clear that individuals may be removed if they do not come "directly" from the territory where their freedom is threatened. Denying those arriving illegally from France, or any other safe country in which they could have claimed asylum, access to the UK's asylum system is, therefore, entirely consistent with the spirit and letter of the convention.

[*Suella Braverman*]

The Opposition say that this Bill cannot work because we lack the capacity to detain all small boat arrivals. We are expanding detention capacity, with two new immigration removal centres, but clearly we are not building capacity to detain 40,000 people, nor do we need to. The aim of the Bill is not to detain people but to swiftly remove them. Australia achieved success against a similar problem of illegal maritime migration. It reduced annual crossings from 20,000 to hundreds in a matter of months, in large part by operationalising swift third country removals. It did not need tens of thousands of detention places either. If we can demonstrate to people willing to pay thousands of pounds to illegally enter the UK that there is a reasonable prospect that they will be detained and removed, we are confident that crossings will reduce significantly.

In addition, arguments that our approach cannot work because Rwanda lacks capacity are wrong. Let me be clear: our partnership with Rwanda is uncapped. We stand ready to operationalise it at scale as soon as is legally practicable. It is understandable that Rwanda has not procured thousands of beds to accommodate arrivals while legal challenges are ongoing.

Yvette Cooper: The Home Secretary has just admitted that Rwanda does not have thousands of places. She will know that the Rwandan Government have talked about taking a few hundred people and that the Rwanda High Court agreement says that cases need to be individualised, yet she is expecting to find locations for tens of thousands of people expected to arrive this year. She has no returns agreement with France or any other European country, so where is she expecting to send the tens of thousands of people expected to arrive in the UK this year?

Suella Braverman: The right hon. Member should read our agreement with Rwanda before she makes a comment such as that. If she did read it, and if she read the judgment from the High Court, she would see both that our agreement with Rwanda is lawful, proper and compliant with our international obligations, and that it is uncapped and potentially Rwanda could accommodate high numbers of people that we seek to relocate there. Rwanda has the capacity to resettle tens of thousands of people if necessary.

Critics of this Government's plan to stop the boats would have more credibility if they offered up a plan of their own. Let us look at what the Opposition plan is. They would increase the funding to the National Crime Agency to disrupt trafficking upstream; never mind that the Government have already doubled the funding for the NCA precisely for that purpose. The Opposition say that they would go harder on the people smugglers; never mind that Labour voted against our Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which introduced life sentences for people smugglers. The Opposition speak about establishing a cross-channel taskforce; never mind that we have already set up a small boats operational command, with more than 700 new staff working hand in hand with the French.

The Opposition say that they would get a new agreement with the French; never mind that only last week our Prime Minister struck a historic multi-year deal with

the French to increase the number of gendarmes patrolling the French beaches. The Opposition say that we should do more with partners around the world; never mind that the Government have returns agreements with Albania, Georgia, Nigeria, India, Pakistan and Serbia. As for our world-leading agreement with Rwanda, we all know what the Opposition would do about that—they would scrap it.

The Opposition say that the Government cannot be trusted with our borders, but the fact is that the Leader of the Opposition and some 70-odd Labour MPs—a third of the parliamentary party—signed letters to stop dangerous foreign criminals being kicked out of Britain. Tragically, one of those criminals went on to kill another person in the UK—a shameful day for the Labour party. How easy it is for the Opposition to say, “Never mind the British public”, believing that they know better, arrogantly, dismissively. The truth is that they do not have a plan. What is even worse, they do not care that they do not have a plan. If they listened, they would hear a clear, reasonable and resounding message from the British people: we like controlled immigration, we welcome genuine refugees, but we do not want uncontrolled or illegal migration—enough is enough, stop the boats. That is the call from the British people—that is their cry for action to all of us who serve them in this place. This is a Government who listen—they listen to the people and, aided by this Bill, we will stop the boats.

6.21 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “That” to the end of the Question and add:

“this House, while affirming support for securing the UK's borders, reforming the broken asylum system and ending dangerous small boat crossings, declines to give a Second Reading to the Illegal Migration Bill because the Bill fails to meet its core objectives, lacks any effective measures to tackle the criminal activity of people smuggler gangs, fails to eliminate the backlog of outstanding asylum cases, will increase the number of people in indefinite accommodation in the absence of return agreements, leaves victims of modern day slavery without any protections while frustrating efforts to prosecute traffickers, fails to reform resettlement schemes to prevent dangerous journeys and undermines international co-operation to provide support for those fleeing persecution and conflict.”

Most people want to see strong border security and a properly managed and controlled, fair and firm asylum and refugee system, so that we have proper grip along our borders and so that we do our bit, alongside other countries, to help those fleeing persecution and conflict. That is what Labour believes in but, right now, after 13 years of Conservative Government, we have none of those things. Our border security has been undermined because they let the criminal, smuggler and trafficking gangs rip, and the asylum system is in chaos, letting everyone down. All that they can offer is this Bill, which makes all those problems worse.

Last year, 45,000 people travelled on dangerous small boats, up from just 280 four years ago. That is criminal gangs, making £180 million a year from putting lives at risk, yet over the same period convictions of people smugglers have halved. There has been a massive increase in the gangs who are operating along the channel, and a massive drop in the number of criminals caught. The Government are still refusing to go after the gangs, and the deputy chair of the Conservative party thinks that we should not even bother.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con) *rose—*

Yvette Cooper: I will give way to the hon. Member if he will now support our proposals for a cross-border police unit to go after the criminal gangs.

Tom Hunt: I actually have another question. Would the right hon. Member explain why the Leader of the Opposition, when he was a human rights lawyer, once said that there was an undertone of racism in all immigration law? Does he continue to believe that?

Yvette Cooper: Immigration law is important, but the problem is that, at the moment, a huge amount of immigration law is not even enforced. There has been an 80% drop in the number of people who have been unsuccessful in the asylum system and been returned—an 80% drop since the Conservatives came to office. At the same time, our asylum system, under the Tories, is in total chaos. Only 1% of last year's cases have had even an initial decision. Home Office decision making has been cut by 40%, the backlog has trebled in the space of just a few years, and thousands of people are in costly and inappropriate hotels.

Mrs May: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way. I am also grateful for the kind comments that she made about me in an interview at the weekend regarding modern slavery work. She has just referred to the backlog in asylum cases. If she thinks that the current figure means that the system is in chaos, what is her description of the system under the Labour Government of which she was a member, which had a backlog in asylum cases of between 400,000 and 450,000?

Yvette Cooper: The former Prime Minister and former Home Secretary is experienced enough to know that that is not an accurate characterisation of what happened. By the time the Labour Government left office, the backlog of initial decisions was just a few thousand. Now it is 160,000, and in fact it has trebled in the past few years as a result of the complete failure of the Conservatives.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Yvette Cooper: I will give way to the former Prime Minister; she and I have asked each other questions for so many years that I have to let her do so again.

Mrs May: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady, but does she not accept that, between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, when Labour was in government, the number of asylum cases that were in the legacy—the backlog—rose to between 400,000 and 450,000?

Yvette Cooper: The important point that the former Prime Minister addresses is that in the late '90s there was an issue about what had happened with the Bosnian refugee crisis and many others. In fact, it was the action that the last Labour Government took that got a grip of the system and addressed some of the challenges. We took action to make sure that we could have both border security and a system that provided for refugees and those in need of asylum. The former Home Secretary will also know, because she was responsible for introducing the modern slavery law, which I support, that the Bill rips up many of the provisions at the heart of that

legislation. I hope that she and I would agree that it should be possible for our country to have strong border security, and to have strong, fast, and effective measures, which, at the moment, the Government do not have, to deal with asylum cases swiftly and speedily, but also to make provision for those who have fled persecution and conflict, and provide support for those who have been trafficked and those who are the victims of modern slavery. I hope that she agrees with me that the Bill does the total opposite.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend, like me, get really annoyed when she hears Government Members talk about a Labour Government 13 years ago? Does she, like me, wonder why the Government, having been in charge continuously for 13 years, like to look all the way back, rather than address their own failures?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right that the Conservatives have to take responsibility for 13 years in government—13 years in which we have seen refugees left in limbo, even though they have fled persecution and conflict. Those who are not refugees and have no right to be here are never returned; there has been an 80% drop in returns of unsuccessful asylum seekers. At the same time, there has been a 40% drop in refugee family reunion visas, the Afghan resettlement scheme has been shamefully frozen and children are left with no way to rejoin family. Time and again, Ministers just want to blame someone else. All the Conservative Members just want to blame someone else, but they have been in charge for the last 13 years. They keep telling us the asylum system is broken—well, seriously, who broke it?

We need urgent action to stop the dangerous boat crossings that are putting lives at risk and undermining our border security. This Bill is a con that makes the chaos worse. It will not do the things the Prime Minister and Home Secretary have promised. It will not stop the criminal gangs or dangerous crossings; in fact, it makes it easier for those gangs. It will not return everyone; in fact, it makes it harder to get return agreements. It will not clear the asylum backlog; in fact, it will mean tens of thousands more people in asylum accommodation and hotels. It will not deliver controlled and managed safe alternatives; instead, it will cut them back.

The Bill will also rip up our long-standing commitment to international law. It will lock up children, remove support and safe refuges from women who have been trafficked, and deny citizenship to people like Mo Farah. The last law the Government passed on this subject, just nine months ago, made everything worse—dangerous crossings went up, delays went up—and now they seriously expect us to do all the same things again.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): The UK was one of the instigators of the 1951 refugee convention, because before the war the UK Government failed to allow Jews fleeing the persecution of the Nazis into this country. The Board of Deputies of British Jews this week said:

“Today's British Jewish community is descended from refugees... We have significant concerns at the potential for newly proposed migration legislation to breach...the Refugee Convention.”

Does my right hon. Friend agree that we could be in breach of the convention if we pass the Bill today—in breach of international law and our own legacy in this area?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right. Those are damning words that we have heard from the Board of Deputies and many other organisations on the impact this legislation will have.

At the heart of the Bill, there is a con. The Prime Minister has pledged that anyone who arrives in the UK without the right papers will be detained and swiftly removed, “no ifs, no buts”. But where to? Not to France, because the Prime Minister failed to get a returns agreement, and he has failed with other countries as well. The Bill makes it harder to get returns agreements, because it undermines compliance with the international laws and standards that those other countries are committed to upholding—standards that we used to be committed to upholding.

People will not be removed to Rwanda either; the Home Secretary has admitted already that that scheme is failing. The taxpayer has already written a £140 million cheque. The Home Office says it is unenforceable, with a high risk of fraud and no evidence of a deterrent effect. The Israel-Rwanda deal increased trafficking, rather than reducing it. At most, the Rwandan authorities say that they may take a couple of hundred people, but 45,000 people arrived last year.

The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick) indicated dissent.

Yvette Cooper: The Immigration Minister shakes his head, but he said in a statement in December in this House that the initial promise was to receive 200 people and the further preparations had not been made.

Several hon. Members rose—

Yvette Cooper: I give way first to my hon. Friend.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I am pleased with the moderate way in which my right hon. Friend is putting forward a very sound argument, in absolute contrast to the rhetoric that we got from the Home Secretary, and she hits an important nail on the head: on the front page of the Bill, we have the statement of the Home Secretary that she cannot certify that the provisions of the Bill

“are compatible with the Convention rights”,

yet in the schedule to the Bill, countries or territories to which a person may be removed include fellow signatories to the European convention on human rights. What legal advice has my right hon. Friend seen that we would be able to do that or that they will accept returns from the United Kingdom?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend makes an important point. In order to have co-operation on return agreements, on alternative arrangements for processing or on any of those things, there must be proper standards in place, and other countries must respect those standards if they are to make agreements with us. Therefore, pulling away from the European convention on human rights makes those agreements more difficult, despite the fact that having those international agreements in place is one of the most important steps to dealing with the challenges we face.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) rose—

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con) rose—

Yvette Cooper: I will give way to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) and then to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Paul Holmes).

Caroline Lucas: Does the right hon. Lady share my deep concern about the placeholder clause 49, which seeks to legislate to ignore ECHR interim orders lodged against this Government’s inhumane, morally abhorrent plans, to get around the fact that what the Government are doing is not compatible with our convention obligations? Does she agree that that will undermine our global standing and make it harder to make returns agreements or anything else that she describes?

Yvette Cooper: I think it adds to the chaos within this piece of legislation that the Government have not worked out what they want to do. As a consequence, they are undermining our reputation as the kind of country that stands up for the rule of law and leads the way in expecting other countries to follow the law and to do their bit as well.

Several hon. Members rose—

Yvette Cooper: I give way to the hon. Member for Eastleigh, who has been patient. I will then make some progress before I take further interventions, because I am conscious of the time.

Paul Holmes: As is her right, the shadow Home Secretary is outlining her objection to this piece of legislation. She asked my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt) whether he would back her proposals, so could she do the House a favour and outline her proposals—or is this another example of her consistently opposing and not coming up with any fresh ideas herself?

Yvette Cooper: Indeed, I am very happy to. I hope the hon. Member will support our proposal for a cross-border police unit to go after the criminal gangs and bring up those convictions, which have totally collapsed on the Conservatives’ watch. I hope too that he will support our proposals for a fast track for Albania and other safe countries, which Ministers are not doing. *[Interruption.]* This is interesting, because the Immigration Minister says, “Oh, we are already doing it,” except that they are not. Only 1% of the cases from Albania have been decided. The Home Office is not taking fast-track decisions on safe countries such as Albania, for all the promises the Government made. Even where they have the powers to take action, they are not doing it. I hope the hon. Member will also support our proposals to work on not just return agreements with France and other countries, but family reunion arrangements and reforms to resettlement schemes to make those work.

Instead, we have a Bill that is a con and that will make things worse. We have been clear that the Home Secretary has nowhere that she can say she is going to return people to. Last year, the Government made exactly the same promises when they said that 18,000 people would be inadmissible because they had travelled through safe countries, yet just 21 people were returned. Of those the Home Secretary said were inadmissible, just 21 were returned. Now she wants to say that everyone is inadmissible, but if she still manages to return just 0.1% of them, the reality is that she will have tens of

thousands of people left. She is simply creating misinformation and conning those on her Back Benches, who have been cheering for the things she says but will see them unravel in practice.

The Home Secretary says this legislation means that she can return people to designated safe countries such as Albania, but she can do that already. She does not need this law to do that. She already has the power to fast-track Albanian and other cases. We have been calling for it for months, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees proposed it two years ago and the Prime Minister even promised it before Christmas, but it is not happening and 99% of those cases are still in limbo.

Just 15 people who had arrived in small boats were returned last month. That is the equivalent of 180 a year, when over 10,000 people came from the designated safe country of Albania. The real problem is that Conservative Home Office Ministers just do not have any grip on the system that they are supposed to be in charge of.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): My focus goes back to clause 49, which looks specifically at interim measures of the Strasbourg court. We know that those measures have no actual effect in UK law, but UK courts may take them into account when passing their own judgments. Do the shadow Home Secretary and the Labour party support me in wanting to see that clause beefed up to make sure that the Home Secretary is under a statutory duty to remove unlawful migrants?

Yvette Cooper: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should have put that question to the Home Secretary, because he appears to disagree with his own Conservative Government's policy and to be off on another bit of freelancing for himself, further undermining any possibility of getting international agreements, whether on returns or on anything else. He is planning to make it even harder to get the kinds of returns agreements we need and to get the kind of international co-operation we need as well.

Ministers say that they plan to lock everyone up before they are returned, and the Bill says that everyone is included. Children, unaccompanied teenagers, pregnant women, torture victims, trafficking victims, and people such as the Afghan interpreters and young Hongkongers we promised to help—all locked up because they arrive without the right papers. The Home Secretary has not said where, or how long for. It might possibly be at RAF Scampton, but the Tory right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) does not want that. It might possibly be at MDP Wethersfield, but the Tory right hon. Member for Braintree (James Cleverly)—the Home Secretary's Cabinet colleague, the Foreign Secretary—does not want that either. In other circumstances, there might be pressure on the Home Secretary to put the site in her own constituency, except for the fact that she does not actually have one right now.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): A responsible Opposition must have a plan. We all agree that we have to stop these boats, but the Opposition's plan appears to be to process asylum applications even more quickly, so that more people will come; to process them in France, where an unlimited number will want to come; or to

have this ridiculous idea of a cross-border police force. Everybody knows that on average, people get caught once on the beaches by the French police, they are not detained and they come back the very next night—they all get there. The right hon. Lady knows perfectly well that the only way that we are going to stop these boats is the Government plan: to detain them and deport them to Rwanda.

Yvette Cooper: The right hon. Member is just kidding himself if he thinks that any of the Government's plan is actually going to happen, or if he thinks it is actually going to work.

Clause 9 deals with what happens to all of the people who cannot be returned—the tens of thousands of people who, according to the Government, are expected to arrive after 7 March. It says that the Home Office will provide those people with accommodation and support: in other words, they will go back into asylum accommodation and hotels, but they will never get an asylum decision. Tens of thousands of people will be added to the Home Office backlog every year, only it is going to be a permanent backlog that the Home Office is never even going to try to clear. Those who would have been returned after their asylum claim was refused now will not be, and those who would have been granted sanctuary will be stuck in limbo instead. That is tens of thousands of people just added to the asylum backlog, costing billions of pounds more—up to £25 billion over the next five years.

As for the backlog the Prime Minister promised to clear, it is going to get worse, not better. Effectively, the Government have concluded that the Tory Home Office is so rubbish at taking any asylum decisions on time that they have decided to just stop doing them altogether, and they are hoping that no one will notice. Last week, I said that the Government might have decided not to call this an asylum system any more, but everyone is still going to be in the system nevertheless. Well, I got that wrong, because I have read the Bill's explanatory notes again, and they say that:

"Subsection (2) amends section 94 of the 1999 Act...so that the term 'asylum-seeker' covers those whose asylum claims are inadmissible by virtue of Clause 4 of the Bill."

In other words, the Government are amending the law so that all the people who they are going to exclude from the asylum system are still going to be called asylum seekers after all, and are still going to be in the asylum system.

You could not make it up: more chaos, more people in the asylum system, even fewer decisions taken, more people detained with nowhere to detain them and more people stuck in limbo, with no one credibly believing that anything in the Bill is going to act as any kind of deterrent to any of the criminal gangs. The Government are chasing headlines, but it is all a huge con.

What is the price of that con? What is the price of those empty headlines—of cancelling asylum decisions, rather than getting a grip? The Government are damaging our international standing, our chance of getting new co-operation agreements to tackle the problems, and our commitments to the rule of law. They are saying that Britain, uniquely, will not take asylum decisions, yet are expecting other countries to keep doing so. They are saying that Britain, uniquely, will not follow the refugee convention, the trafficking convention or the

[Yvette Cooper]

European convention on human rights, yet are urging other countries to follow those conventions. Think, too, of the price for the people we promised to help—for the Afghan interpreters who worked for our armed forces but who missed the last flight out of Kabul, and who the Government told to find an alternative route. If those people arrive in the UK now, the Conservatives plan to lock them up, keep them in limbo, and treat them as forever illegal in the country they made huge sacrifices to help.

Think of the Ukrainian family who travelled here via Ireland, as I know some people did in the early days of the conflict, without the right papers. They could have been the family staying with me, or the family staying with the Immigration Minister. I have listened to teenagers talking about how they had 20 minutes to pack before they fled their homes, not knowing whether they would ever return or see friends and family again. Under this law, those teenagers who arrived with the wrong papers would be locked up, denied any chance to ever live or work here lawfully in the future. That is the Tories' position: in the interests of a plan that is actually a con and will not even work. It will not work to deter the criminal gangs; it will not work to remove people, because the Government do not have the returns agreements in place, and it will make it harder to get those returns agreements. In exchange for that con that makes nothing any better, they believe that no one who arrives in Britain without the right papers in their hands should ever be able to seek protection here or live here, no matter their personal circumstances.

Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): I am most grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way. Which parts of France are such that people need to flee from there to seek refuge in this country?

Yvette Cooper: As the hon. Member knows, the majority of people who are seeking asylum and arrive in France stay in France, rather than seeking to travel to the UK. However, we believe that we should be seeking to get a returns agreement with France, alongside new arrangements on issues such as family reunion, but at the moment, the Government have so undermined their relationship with France and other European countries that they have totally failed to get any of those agreements in place, and they are making it harder to do so with this Bill. If the hon. Member believes that returns agreements are needed, or if he believes that new, alternative arrangements around family reunion or other issues are needed, he should oppose the Bill, because it will make it harder to get any of those agreements in place. The Bill is undermining the international co-operation and international law that all of those other countries depend on.

Consider what the Bill means for the young Vietnamese woman who has been trafficked into sexual exploitation, repeatedly raped and beaten by the criminal gangs who brought her here and who control and dictate her life. Under the Bill, if the police find her when they bust the brothel, she will not be able to get modern slavery support any more: she will not be able to go to a safe house or get help from the Salvation Army. Instead, she will just be locked up in one of the Home Office detention centres. If she co-operates with the police for a bit, she might get some temporary support, but if that

police investigation is closed, her world comes crashing down again. Here is what the Prime Minister tweeted about all of that:

"If you come to the UK illegally...You can't benefit from our modern slavery protections...you will be...DENIED access to the UK's modern slavery system".

Think on that. Bringing people into the UK illegally in order to control and exploit them is exactly what trafficking is. Cross-border trafficking is, by definition, a major form of modern slavery, yet this Government are proposing to just wish it away—to exclude it entirely from the modern slavery system, as if the very fact of crossing borders somehow stops it from being slavery at all. The message from the UK Government to the criminal trafficking and slavery gangs is this: "Don't worry, so long as you bring people into the country illegally, we won't help them. In fact, we will help you: we will threaten those people with immediate detention and deportation, so that you can increase your control over those trafficking victims." This Bill is a traffickers' charter.

The previous Prime Minister but three, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) promised to end modern slavery, and I respect the work that she did, but this one—the current one—wants to enable it. How low has the Tory party fallen? It is even worse for children. This Bill allows the Home Secretary to lock them up indefinitely, with all safeguards removed. It allows her to remove unaccompanied children without even considering the details of their case and whether they have fled from persecution. Once they hit 18, the Bill requires her to remove them, even if the only family or support they have in the entire world is here in the UK, and even if they have been exploited and abused by criminal gangs. The Bill denies them any protection from modern slavery and makes them forever illegal in the UK.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Does the shadow Home Secretary share my concern that there was not pre-legislative consultation with the Children's Commissioner? Why does she think that was the case?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right, and the Children's Commissioner is appalled by some of the measures in the Bill and the lack of consultation, too. Remember those hundreds of children missing from asylum hotels, who have almost certainly been picked up by the smuggler and trafficking gangs? This Bill makes it even harder to get those kids back, and it makes it even easier for those gangs to increase their control. It means no sanctuary, or just temporary support at most for Eritrean girls, who will most likely have been raped or exploited, or for the 12 and 13-year-olds I met a few years ago, brought here by gangs from Afghanistan, or for children who endure what happened to Mo Farah. They would be denied refuge; they would be denied citizenship; they would be locked up and threatened with return. The Home Secretary may not want to admit it, but that is what this Bill does. It denies citizenship forever for people like Mo Farah.

The Tory party once voted to introduce safeguards on the detention of children, and it was right to do so. The Tory party once voted to introduce the Modern Slavery Act 2015, and it was right to do so, but what has happened to the Tories now? How low have they fallen and how far down are they trying to drag our proud country? That is what this Bill is: an attempt to drag our

whole country down. They know that the Bill will not work to stop boat crossings or the gangs. They know it will not clear the backlog and that it will make the chaos worse. They know it will stop children and trafficked people getting help and will play into the hands of criminal gangs, and they know it will undermine our reputation in the eyes of the world as a country that believes in the rule of law, but they do not care, because this is about political games. This is about a lame Prime Minister making promises that he has no intention of keeping. All he wants is a dividing line, all he wants is to pick a fight, and all he wants is someone else to blame. He does not care if our international reputation or some very vulnerable people pay the price.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady accept that many on the Government side of the House—me included—will vote for this Bill this evening, but with the clear understanding that we wish to see amendments to it as it progresses through Parliament, particularly in relation to women who are trafficked and to children? Our votes are being given in good faith tonight, in the expectation that the Bill can be amended. Does she accept that?

Yvette Cooper: I do recognise that there are Members on the Government Benches who are deeply troubled by many of the measures in this Bill. I recognise that, and I think that reflects quite how far the Conservative party has fallen, and I am sorry that that has happened. This is an area where we should be able to build consensus, not division. In past eras, there has been consensus, for example on support for Syrian refugees. If we go back generations, there was consensus on support for the Kindertransport. There has been that support in place. We have also had past consensus about practical, sensible measures around border security, too.

It should be possible to build that consensus, and we would work with the Government to do that, but that is not what we are getting from the Conservative party, the Conservative Government, the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary. Instead, we have a Home Secretary who is happy to ramp up the rhetoric, rather than ever to build a calm consensus around a practical plan that sorts things out. How desperate have things become if what they are doing is ramping up hostility and hatred towards the victims of trafficking and slavery? That is not leadership. Britain is better than this.

Labour will vote for action to stop the gangs and to prevent these dangerous boat crossings. We will vote for a new cross-border police unit, for fast-track decisions and returns to clear the backlog and end hotel use, and for new agreements with France and other countries on returns, on family reunions and on reforming resettlement. We will vote for action that rebuilds border security and restores a properly functioning, credible asylum and refugee system that is properly controlled. We will not vote, however, for more chaos. We will not vote for a traffickers' charter that lets criminal gangs off the hook, that fails to tackle dangerous boat crossings and that locks up children and leaves some of the most vulnerable people undermined. We will not vote for this Bill tonight.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Theresa May will get six minutes, then we are on to the Scottish National party spokesperson, and then there will be

two others with six minutes. The speaking limit will then drop immediately to three minutes in order that we can get as many people in as possible.

6.56 pm

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): Having been Home Secretary for six years I understand the pressures to deal with illegal migration. In my day, people were getting into the backs of lorries and the backs of cars of British tourists returning across the border at Calais. I did a deal with the French, and the numbers went down. I have to say that I suspect it is partly because of the success of that policy that we now see people coming in small boats. I welcome the new deal that has been done with France, because it will have an impact, but what should be clear from this situation is that whenever we close a route, the migrants and the people smugglers find another way. Anybody who thinks that this Bill will deal with illegal migration once and for all is wrong, not least because a significant number, if not the majority of people who are here illegally do not come on small boats; they come legally and overstay their visas.

As well as working to reduce illegal migration, I introduced the Modern Slavery Act 2015, as has been mentioned. That world-leading legislation dealt with traffickers and people who were being enslaved here in the United Kingdom, including British citizens, but it was never just a Bill about slavery in the UK, as we saw with the prosecution under that Act of a British woman for trafficking women from Nigeria to Germany.

I must say there has been some loose talk about people smuggling and human trafficking, and using the two terms in the same breath as if they are the same—they are not; they are two separate crimes. Someone paying their own money to be smuggled across the border is not a victim of human trafficking, which includes coercion and exploitation. Nobody wants to see our world-leading legislation being abused, but the Government have to set out the clear evidence if they are saying that there is a link between that Act and the small boats, and so far I have not seen that evidence. Remember, nearly 90% of modern slavery claims are found to be valid. That does not include recent applications, but that figure should give cause for concern.

I am concerned that the Government have acted on Albania and the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, when neither has been in place long enough to be able to assess their impact. I do not expect Government to introduce legislation to supersede legislation recently made, the impact of which is not yet known.

Beyond those issues, I have three main concerns with the Bill. The first is the blanket dismissal of anyone who is facing persecution and finds their way to the UK, but illegally. Examples have been given, but a young woman fleeing persecution in Iran, for example, would have the door to the UK shut in her face. The UK has always welcomed those who are fleeing persecution, regardless of whether they come through a safe and legal route. By definition, someone fleeing for their life will, more often than not, be unable to access a legal route. I do not think that it is enough to say that we will meet our requirements by sending people to claim asylum in Rwanda. That matters because of the reputation of the UK on the world stage, and because the UK's ability to play a role internationally is based on our reputation—not because we are British, but because of what we stand for and what we do.

[Mrs Theresa May]

My second concern relates to the implications for modern slavery. I am grateful for the fact that No. 10 has offered to discuss that with me, and I hope that we can find some resolution, but as it stands, we are shutting the door on victims who are being trafficked into slavery here in the UK. If they had come here illegally, they would not be supported to escape their slavery.

The Home Office itself recognises the damage that the Bill would do, stating in the explanatory notes to clauses 21 to 28, on public order disqualification:

“These provisions are subject to a sunset mechanism so that they can be suspended should the current exceptional illegal migration situation no longer apply”—

in other words: “We know this isn’t ideal, but we’ve got lots of people coming illegally; we’ve got to do something, so the victims of modern slavery will be collateral damage.” I welcome the acknowledgment that this part of the Bill could be reversed, but it could also then be reinstated. The Home Office knows that the Bill means that genuine victims of modern slavery will be denied support.

My third concern is one that has been echoed by other former Home Secretaries of both major parties—namely, whether the policy will work. For it to work, a number of things have to fall into place. There has to be no possibility of successful legal challenge. It requires the provision of extra detention capabilities and the assurance that no one will be able to abscond. It requires the individual legal cases relating to deportation to Rwanda to be resolved in the Government’s favour. It requires Rwanda to process more than the fewer than 250 asylum claims that it currently processes every year, and to provide accommodation for and accept the many thousands of extra people. It requires returns agreements on returns with countries around the world, and the ability to ensure those returns.

Dealing with immigration is never easy. There is never a simple answer to any problem, and it is never possible to take one’s eye off the ball. It requires constant vigilance and also international co-operation.

Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for mentioning human trafficking. I conducted a Court of Appeal case on an unduly lenient sentence, and we got the sentence increased. It is vital that everybody understands the difference between human trafficking and people smuggling. If we do not get such basic terms right, how on earth will we get the policy right?

Mrs May: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for his work and his recognition of the difference between people smuggling and human trafficking. It is imperative that we use careful language in relation to these issues, and that we recognise that the Bill removes support from the victims of trafficking and modern slavery.

I know that the Government are working hard to find a solution to the problem of the small boats, but I think that a number of points shed doubt on the approach that is being taken. I look forward to working with them on this issue to ensure that we can deal with the problem of dangerous sea crossings and save people’s lives while maintaining our reputation as a country that welcomes people fleeing persecution and, crucially, our reputation as a world leader in dealing with modern slavery.

7.3 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): This refugee ban Bill is nothing but an abhorrent dog whistle, and my colleagues and I on the SNP Benches do not support it. We do support, however, the refugee convention, the European convention on human rights and the Human Rights Act 1998, and a functioning and fair immigration system, which is a million miles away from what we have just now.

A mosaic based on a Norman Rockwell painting hangs at the United Nations. It features the faces of people of all backgrounds and is inscribed with the caption:

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

It is called “the golden rule”. Britain fails completely and utterly in the application of that golden rule.

I ask hon. Members and everyone listening to close their eyes. Place yourself in the shoes of a person so terrified that they must flee for their lives—a person of faith who finds themselves in the wrong country, perhaps; or a woman activist facing repression in Iran; a mother desperate to protect her daughter from female genital mutilation; a boy hiding after seeing his family murdered, and facing forcible recruitment or death. You leave the world you know, travelling across mountain and desert, in trucks and cars, or on feet bleeding and sore. You face setbacks, abuse and exploitation, and use every resource you have.

Finally, you step into a flimsy dinghy, because it is the only way to cross the English channel to get to the uncle who you know lives in the UK. He is your only family member who is still alive. There is no other route. When you arrive—so close to him—what happens? You are seized, imprisoned, not permitted access to a lawyer or given the chance to plead your case. You are whisked away from sanctuary so close that you can almost touch it. This Tory Government are prepared to ignore the plight of that persecuted person of faith, those women, that child, and so many others in circumstances such as theirs. Those people will have no chance of ever finding sanctuary in the UK. The door will be closed permanently. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

The Bill is being rushed through with no proper impact assessment, on the back of legislation that is barely even in place—barely even cold—brought in last year. The Home Secretary clearly declares on the front page of this Bill:

“I am unable to make a statement that, in my view, the provisions of the Illegal Migration Bill are compatible with the Convention rights, but the Government nevertheless wishes the House to proceed with the Bill.”

This is the illegal Illegal Migration Bill. It is not legal, not just, and not compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998, which gives effect to the European convention on human rights.

As much as the Government would have us believe it, the ECHR is not a Eurocratic creation but a system championed by Winston Churchill. One of its key drafters was David Maxwell Fyfe, a former Conservative Home Secretary and one of the prosecutors at Nuremberg. The Bill is bang on form for a UK Government who have previously sought to break international law in “specific and limited ways”, but it is even more dangerous than that. The Bill undermines the fundamental international obligations that the Government’s predecessors established

under the 1951 refugee convention following the horrors of world war two. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has condemned the Bill, stating:

“The legislation, if passed, would amount to an asylum ban—extinguishing the right to seek refugee protection in the United Kingdom for those who arrive irregularly, no matter how genuine and compelling their claim may be, and with no consideration of their individual circumstances.”

I am sure that we have all been inundated with briefings and contacts from constituents and organisations on this despicable piece of legislation. I will try my best to reflect the many concerns that have been raised with me. Overwhelmingly, I thank the constituents of Glasgow Central, who—as one would expect from the city that gave us the Glasgow Girls, the Glasgow Grannies and the neighbourhood solidarity of Kenmure Street—are resolutely opposed to this cruel Bill.

The Bill is unfair in many respects, but particularly in having retrospective effect. Parliament has only just begun the process of debating this hideous legislation, yet it will impact on people who arrived from 7 March, when the Bill was introduced. People cannot yet know for certain what the Bill will look like, yet they are already severely impacted by it.

The provisions affecting children are among the more disturbing parts of a very bad piece of legislation. Clause 3(2) states:

“The Secretary of State may make arrangements for the removal of a person from the United Kingdom at a time when the person is an unaccompanied child.”

An unaccompanied child. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Children and Young People’s Commissioner Bruce Adamson has stated his clear opposition to this Bill. He said:

“The UK is required to ensure that children seeking refugee status receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance, under Article 22 of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UNCRC also requires the UK to ensure that children are protected from exploitation and abuse, and afforded support for recovery. This Bill violates those obligations and many others. Its enactment would place the UK in clear breach of its international law obligations under a range of human rights treaties.”

The Bill reaches into Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Clauses 15 to 18 seize powers and undermine the clear protections that Scotland’s devolved institutions have established to protect all our weans.

Barnardo’s has rightly queried why the Bill gives the Home Office the power to accommodate children when hundreds of children are currently missing from Home Office accommodation and unaccounted for. It also wants to know whether an unaccompanied child who has arrived in the UK irregularly will be routinely placed into specialist foster care as a matter of policy or whether they will be eligible for adoption. If two siblings are trafficked into the UK when one is 12 and the other is 18, will both be detained and removed from the UK and denied any protection? If an unaccompanied child is trafficked into the UK and granted protection through the national referral mechanism, and a family member who they may not even have met arrives in the UK irregularly at a later point, will that disqualify the child from modern slavery protection? This whole area is deeply problematic, and even more so as the Bill allows for removal as soon as an unaccompanied child turns 18.

It is clear that the inadmissibility rules in the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 do not work. Expanding inadmissibility creates a situation where there is no right of appeal: “Do not pass Go. Do not collect a meagre £8 a week in an overcrowded hotel. Go directly to immigration jail and await removal.” There are some very tight grounds for a technical appeal, but the potential for people to be removed to places where they will be at risk of persecution is real. I would love to know how the Home Secretary will know the details of a person’s claim if it is not going to be fully assessed.

The Bill talks in clause 6 about the potential for a person to be at risk of persecution due to their sex, their language, their race, their religion, their nationality, their membership of a social or other group, their political opinion or

“any other attribute or circumstance that the Secretary of State thinks appropriate.”

Yet if there is no application, declaration or assessment, no ability to seek legal advice, and a presumption of inadmissibility, how will she know?

The former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who I often disagreed with when she was Home Secretary and Prime Minister, is correct to be concerned about many of the mechanisms in the Bill. It is beyond all logic and reason that the Home Secretary should rip up these important protections. The Bill will also override the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015, against our will.

The Immigration Law Practitioners Association says that clauses 21 to 28, concerning modern slavery and trafficking, clearly breach the UK’s obligations to victims of trafficking under article 4 of the ECHR and the European convention on action against trafficking. The provisions will deprive victims of their right to recovery, expose them to re-exploitation and facilitate the work of trafficking gangs. I have met people who have been supported through TARA—the Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance—in Glasgow, and I have seen how damaged some of them have been. It breaks my heart to think that this Government would lock them up and give them no support whatsoever.

Amnesty International has stated that the Bill creates a “charter for human exploitation”, placing many of the most marginalised people firmly in the hands of human traffickers, modern-day slavers and other abusers. The Bill widens the power imbalance between those being abused and their abusers, and it makes it far more difficult for people ever to break free. In so doing, they would risk being removed from the UK permanently, and you can bet that their abusers will use that threat over them. Why on earth would the Home Secretary consider this a sensible idea?

The clauses on entry into and settlement in the United Kingdom are brutal. There is no entry and no chance of settlement, permanently—forever. A person can never enter the UK if they once met the four conditions the Home Secretary is setting for illegal entry, or if they are a family member of that person. Talk about holding the child accountable for the sins of the father. I understand that that applies even if the child was born here. That will surely have the wider impact of hitting people well into the future who may wish to come as tourists, to work or to study. They may have no knowledge of the previous banning order. Why would the Home Secretary

[*Alison Thewliss*]

wish to deny them that opportunity? What message does she think this pulling up of the drawbridge sends out to the world?

Clause 51 outlines the capping of safe and legal routes. These proposed routes are to be brought forward in regulations. The Home Secretary is dangling a carrot that that may happen at some point in the future—maybe, perhaps, in the fullness of time, when parliamentary time allows. Aye, right. We need those safe and legal routes now. They are part of the solution to the small boats crisis. People who come by that route do so because there is no other option. People cannot claim asylum from abroad; they literally need to place their feet on this island. It is not by some coincidence that there are no Ukrainians paying people to come by dinghy; they can get on a plane from Poland and fly to the UK without the risk of being returned there. It is cheaper. It is safer. It is humane.

The Glasgow solicitors firm McGlashan MacKay mentioned that it was dealing with some people from El Salvador, for which there was a visa waiver scheme, so those people could get here safely. The Home Office shut it down.

Afghans do not have the privilege of getting on a plane and coming here. Just 22 people, including eight children, have been resettled in the UK under the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme, via referral from the UNHCR. Pathway 2 is the only route open for resettlement for Afghans who are not already in the UK.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): The hon. Lady mentions safe and legal routes. I am very keen that we need greater definition in the Bill, and I am also keen that we need greater safeguards for vulnerable children. Like the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the hon. Lady has focused exclusively on extreme cases of people who may fall foul of the Bill, and that is why we need those additional criteria. However—again, just like the shadow Home Secretary—the hon. Lady has made no mention of people who come across the channel who are not genuine asylum seekers and have no genuine, credible claim to come to the United Kingdom. She seems to assume that everybody coming across the channel is one of those vulnerable people. They are not, so what would she do about those people genuinely abusing our hospitality?

Alison Thewliss: The hon. Gentleman knows that the vast majority of people who come over are accepted as asylum seekers and get their refugee status. He also knows that without those safe and legal routes, the question that he asked the Home Secretary at the Home Affairs Committee remains unanswered. Under the Bill, the Home Secretary will not even ask to find out whether these people are genuine; everybody is deemed to be some kind of fake.

Returning to the Afghan scheme, which does not work, I spoke on Friday to my constituent Zakia, who has been trying to reunite with her sister since the fall of Afghanistan. Her sister has had the Taliban enter her home and beat her. She has played by the rules—as the Home Secretary set out and says that people should—and she has made an expression of interest, yet still nothing.

If the Home Secretary was in that woman's shoes, would she really sit tight in Afghanistan and wait for the Taliban to murder her? Because that is what happens to women in Afghanistan. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Capping safe and legal routes—routes that do not even exist right now—would suggest that if you are person x+1, well that is just too bad for you. It is not based on need. A few years ago, I was made aware that the visitor visa scheme for Iranians was essentially being run as a lottery, with the names being drawn of lucky winners. This Government could not run a raffle, and I do not trust them to establish this scheme in a timely or fair manner.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Alison Thewliss: If the hon. Gentleman would like to give me some experience from his constituents of how difficult it is to come from Afghanistan, I would be glad to hear it.

Scott Benton: The hon. Lady is speaking of safe and legal routes. Given that there are more than 100 million displaced people globally, I wonder whether she will be kind enough to confirm how many of those people an independent Scotland would take, what tax rises she would make to fund their public services, and how many additional people she is willing to accept in central Glasgow.

Alison Thewliss: If the hon. Gentleman knew anything at all, he would know that my Glasgow Central constituency has the highest immigration case load of any constituency in Scotland, and we are proud that that is so. I would like to know how many are being housed in his constituency. I will say, too, that Scotland has taken the highest proportion of Ukrainian refugees and the highest proportion of Syrian refugees. We have a proud history in Scotland, and we would do much, much better than this pathetic excuse for a Government.

Let me turn to the practicalities of the Bill. There is no proof that it will work any more than the Nationality and Borders Act or the hostile environment worked. We were told at the time that those things were the solution to the problems that we had, but they have evidently failed, because the Government are back here legislating again.

There is no return agreement with the EU or anywhere else. Ironically for the Brexiteers on the Conservative Benches, leaving the EU has made this much more difficult. The Bill lists European economic area countries and Albania, but a deal does not exist. There are already countries around the world where the UK Government will not return people, and others where there are no flights and no means of return. The Bill will create an underclass of people stuck in immigration limbo indefinitely.

The Bill will detain everybody arriving in a small boat for 28 days. The UK's current detention capacity is 2,286 beds. The number of people crossing in small boats last year was 45,755. For context, the prison population in England and Wales in 2022 was just over 81,000 people.

Where on earth does the Home Secretary suggest that the number of people she wishes to detain are kept, as well as those who are deemed inadmissible but unreturnable? Will they be in facilities such as Manston, with children

sleeping on the floor; in dilapidated and crumbling facilities such as Napier barracks, where covid and scabies were rife; or in hotels, which is lining the pockets of companies such as Serco and Mears but costing the Government a fortune and putting vulnerable asylum seekers at risk, such as those being housed in Erskine in Scotland, where they are being targeted by far-right groups?

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): My hon. Friend is indeed right. The Erskine Bridge hotel is potentially the largest such hotel in the UK, and we have another hotel in Renfrewshire, unlike the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham). This Government and Conservative Members assert that Scotland does not play its part, but that is clearly not the case. Meanwhile, Patriotic Alternative, the neo-fascist group, is blaming the SNP for these hotels being used in the first place, leading to security threats against my staff. Does my hon. Friend agree with me that any Conservative Members who support anything Patriotic Alternative has said should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves?

Alison Thewliss: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend's sentiments. We should all be very worried about the rise of these groups and how they are being fed by the rhetoric of leaders and MPs across the way. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are laughing over there at the suggestion. It is terrifying, and it is scary. People will get hurt, and they should know much better.

Perhaps if the Home Secretary cannot fit people into more asylum hotels or shabby barracks, she will place those who have survived war and persecution on the streets and just let them wander the streets, because they will not be allowed to do anything else. The Home Secretary seems to envisage this as some kind of deterrent, but she fails completely to recognise the reasons why people flee, and the ties of family and English language that people have. Afghan interpreters have said to me, "We're here, because you were there." As Enver Solomon, chief executive officer of the Refugee Council has said:

"The plans won't stop the crossings but will simply leave traumatised people locked up in a state of misery being treated as criminals and suspected terrorists without a fair hearing on our soil."

All of this comes at a financial cost, as well as a humanitarian one, and we would have imagined that the Conservatives at least cared about that. This includes about £6 million per day on hotels—including for one of my constituents who contacted me today, who has been in a B&B for 20 months waiting on a decision from the Home Office—which is exacerbated all the way by the Home Office incompetence that I see, week in and week out, at my surgeries. It includes £12.7 million to compensate the 572 people the Home Office detained unlawfully last year, at least £120 million on the failed Rwanda deal, and £480 million to France over the next three years on top of the £250 million already given since 2014. The Refugee Council estimates that it will cost in the region of £980 million to detain people under the scheme proposed in the Bill. It is chucking good money after bad policy, and it is sickening that it costs so much to treat our fellow human beings so badly.

My constituent Patricia put it to me so clearly on Saturday. She said:

"I am not 'asylum', I have a name, I'm a human being and every human being has a right".

People do not need to be an exceptional athlete like Mo Farah, the chief executive of the Scottish Refugee Council like Sabir Zazai, a councillor like Roza Salih or Abdul Bostani, or even an Oscar-winning actor like Ke Huy Quan. Refugees are entitled to the right to lead an unremarkable life in peace and safety, to get an education and to provide for their family. It is not asking too much; it is the least anyone could expect. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

The SNP wholeheartedly and unequivocally condemns this cruel, shoddy, tawdry Bill. We urge the Government to scrap it, to focus instead on tackling the asylum backlog that leaves so many of our constituents in a costly and damaging limbo, and to lift the ban and let refugees work and contribute, as they so wish to do. It has been telling that the Labour party has been so weak in its opposition to this Bill as to be played off the park by football pundits, commentators and actresses such as Cate Blanchett. My credit to the principled stance taken by Gary Lineker and his colleagues in thoroughly Kenmuring the BBC, and I bet if he had tweeted in favour of the Bill, he would not have faced the red-card worthy simulation of outrage from the Tory Benches. It seems that if you are a Tory donor, you can run the BBC, but if you oppose this pathetic excuse for a Government, they do not want you to work there.

Scotland stands against this Bill. We would not have such cruel provisions in an independent Scotland. We wish to be known for our kindness, our hospitality and our compassion, not our hard-heartedness and our cruelty. We would do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Say it loud, say it clear, refugees are welcome here!

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. There is a six-minute limit on the next two speakers, and then the limit will be three minutes.

7.25 pm

Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): As I listen to this debate I, frankly, get more and more depressed. What we hear is an artificial juxtaposition between an open-door policy of letting everybody into this country and a suggestion that we on this side of the House are cruel and callous and do not care about people. Can I deal with that second point? It is utterly, utterly wrong. As Justice Secretary, I worked very hard to make sure that the Nationality and Borders Act could make its way through this House, and I yield to nobody in my determination to make sure that those who seek to exploit others and to profit on the back of people who are vulnerable, and who are clearly not asylum seekers but economic migrants, must be dealt with. I think this party should make no apology for wanting to make sure that that issue is addressed fair and square. That is what the people who put us here expect us to do, and that is what our constituents want us to do.

What our constituents are fed up about is the seeming inability of the system to enforce the laws we pass in this place, to get on with the job of lawful deportation and to make sure that people who overstay their visas do not stay here. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) said, the main cause of unlawful migration is the overstaying of visas. That is not to minimise

[*Sir Robert Buckland*]

the small boats issue, but it is to put it into context. The small boats crisis, as we describe it, is actually the product of the successful approach we took to the control of lorries and the appalling incidents we saw in which many people lost their lives as a result of suffocation and other horrors. As a result, we plugged that loophole, and I am pretty sure that if we succeed in plugging this loophole, another one will emerge.

From all the evidence I know from asylum seekers I speak to in my constituency, and I do so regularly, this is a price-driven market. It is simply cheaper to come in on small boats than it is to come here by other means at the moment, and herein lies the source of the problem. The Government are seeking once again to use law where I believe it is primarily operations that matter more than anything, particularly the ability of this country to strike sensible agreements—not just with France, but with other members of the European Union—to have a managed system of return. Frankly, a quota system would make eminent sense in dealing with what is an international problem. We came together on Ukraine. Why on earth can we not come together on this?

That would make sense of clause 51, and the Government's wish to have a debate in this House on a cap or a quota. I think that is a sensible measure, but it will only work if we extend safe routes of passage in a controlled and measured way. We have to do more on safe and legal routes. In fact, doing that would strengthen the Government's case against those people who are choosing small boats. It is as plain as a pikestaff to me. However, that must happen in tandem with this legislation. It is no good passing this legislation unless we do those other operational things.

To deal with a particular clause, perhaps not in Second Reading tradition, I have great concern about clause 3 on the detention of children. I note that this is a power, not a duty. When powers are put into Bills, it is usually because policy makers have not actually decided what to do and whether to use them. It is a holding mechanism in order for the Government to make a decision. My strong suggestion to them, when we come to amend the Bill, is to ditch that clause and look carefully at the way we deal with unaccompanied children, families and women. There is nothing worse than ineffective authoritarianism and that is the danger of such provisions.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, if the Government were to look at proposed new section 8AA(4)(b) in clause 29, and particularly the phrase “compelling” evidence, and to bring forward criteria that defined compelling evidence, that might reassure a number of us on the Conservative Benches that the Bill would not prevent illegal sex trafficked young women from seeking provision and protection under the Modern Slavery Act 2015?

Sir Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend is right. It is going to be vital that there is clear guidance. We have been here before. When it comes to modern day slavery, there has been a question about the interpretation of guidance. I know it is a vexed question for the Government, that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Immigration is assiduous in these matters and that he will want to get it right, but we will have an opportunity in Committee

and on Report to do so. The Bill as presented is not yet in the state that it needs to be in if it is to have the effect that I think the Government want it to have.

On the interaction between the Bill and the European convention on human rights, I hope that the Bill is not being used as some sort of battering ram to make a wider political point about the validity of the European convention. The European convention is not the problem in this case and those who think it is are setting up a massive Aunt Sally when it comes to the actual issues. Whether we are in the convention or not, domestic law, our rule of law tradition and the procedures we have under various immigration Acts—some of which I was involved in passing through this House—will inevitably impose principles of natural justice on any process. The idea that, through a blanket approach, we will engineer a battle with the courts and a battle with the European convention is misconceived and a journey on which I urge the Government not to embark.

There is no need to talk about withdrawal from the convention that British Conservatives wrote. What we need to focus on relentlessly, in dealing in a grown-up and mature way with a serious situation such as this, is ensuring that, internationally, our reputation as reasonable actors and people with whom other countries can do business, and as a place where people will want to invest, is enhanced by our approach to these issues. That is why the tone of this debate is so important. I am concerned that, in some of the utterances I hear from my party, that tone is not appropriate. We have to do better. We have to rise to the level of events. We have to get it right.

7.33 pm

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): To follow up on that point about the issue of tone, despite the strong views held about this Bill both in this House and outside by actors, football commentators and archbishops, I believe there is consensus that we all want to stop people crossing the channel in unsafe, small boats, and risking their lives in some of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. The Government's flagship immigration Bill underpins one of the Prime Minister's five priorities to the British people. It is so important. That is why I asked the Leader of the House whether the Home Affairs Committees could carry out pre-legislative scrutiny to test the robustness and evidence supporting the Bill. Sadly, that has not been possible. It is also disappointing that we have not had an impact assessment—an equality impact assessment, or a child rights impact assessment—accompanying the publication of the Bill.

I also hope there is consensus across the House that the UK should do its bit to support those fleeing persecution and torture, sharing that responsibility with our international partners. We need to put this into context. Not every displaced person in the world wants to come to the United Kingdom and we are not facing an invasion. We know that countries such as Turkey take the lion's share of refugees and nearly 70% of refugees end up staying in the region they come from.

So what exactly should the Government be doing about small boats? Last summer, the Home Affairs Committee published our report into channel crossings. We made the important point in the report that no one magic bullet will solve the problem. As I made clear last week, the Home Secretary is right that our asylum system is broken, but it is not the migrants crossing the

channel who broke it. Poor resourcing, antiquated IT systems, high staff turnover, or too few staff have resulted in this backlog of 160,000 cases. Tackling the backlog has to be the most important priority for the Home Office.

Another key message from our report was the need for detailed, evidence-driven, fully costed and fully tested policy to tackle this problem, rather than simple headline-grabbing announcements on Rwanda, for which there is still no body of evidence regarding the potential deterrent effect. Other recommendations included the importance of establishing a returns agreement with the European Union, extending family reunion, and creating safe and legal routes. We all know that people may travel without papers using irregular methods, but have a solid case for seeking asylum that needs to be considered under our international obligations. The Bill currently would deny that opportunity.

Positively, at the end of last week, we saw further agreement with the French on tackling small boats, albeit we still need that returns agreement with the EU. Although it is encouraging that the Government are improving their relationship with the EU, we now find them stress testing our international obligations and potentially breaking international law.

On the Bill's specifics, its proposals present a huge logistical challenge for a Department that is not known for good project management or for being on the front foot. It has three essential pillars: detention, deportation and deterrence. Each raises serious and fundamental practical issues to which we need clear answers in order to understand how the Bill will work.

The Institute for Government has helpfully summarised the key questions. First, does the Bill adhere to the UK's international obligations? Secondly, how does it change existing policy on inadmissible claims? Thirdly, where can the Government send asylum seekers who are deemed inadmissible? Fourthly, what does the Home Secretary consider to be a "reasonable prospect of removal"? Fifthly, what will happen to people who the Government cannot remove to another country? Sixthly, how will the Government accommodate people they have detained and how will they pay to do so? Seventhly, will the Bill deter people from crossing the channel in small boats?

I have many concerns, particularly on the provisions relating to unaccompanied children, children and families being detained, and victims of trafficking and modern slavery. The Salvation Army stated in its briefing on the Bill that modern slavery is not an immigration issue; it is a safeguarding issue. The men, women and children trafficked against their will to the UK and enslaved should not be punished for being victims, but that is what the Bill will do.

On deterrence, during the Select Committee's visit to France earlier this year, we heard evidence that people who have arrived in northern France, having travelled thousands of miles in some cases, will not be put off when they can see the British coastline from the French beach, and have little or no knowledge of Home Office policy or British laws. Therefore, we need fully to understand how the plan for detention, deportation and deterrence will work in practical terms. I am concerned that the Bill potentially leaves the Home Office in a legal quagmire, with up to tens of thousands of people detained for a period and then bailed into a permanent state of limbo,

unable to be removed, unable to have their asylum claims processed and unable to reunite with families. There is nothing specifically in the Bill about tackling criminal gangs, people smugglers and traffickers. To conclude, we all want action on small boats, but we want effective action that will deal with the problem.

7.38 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Countries mean more than their borders. National character, shared heritage and the institutions that give that history life matter. But borders matter too, for they are what mark the territory that defines citizenship, with its implicit entitlements, responsibilities, opportunities and duties, and the plain fact is that our kingdom's borders are being breached day after day with impunity. Since 2018, some 85,000 people have entered Britain illegally, 45,000 of them in 2022 alone. Seventy-four per cent. are men under 40 and 100% have travelled through safe countries, where they failed to claim asylum, to get here. Accommodating them is costing the British taxpayer every single day £6 million. It cannot go on.

Of course, Britain should provide a safe haven for people in fear—in genuine need—but it is a deceit to pretend that the asylum system has not been gamed and the British people taken for a ride by economic migrants with no legal right to be here, enabled by fat cat law firms that have grown rich on the proceeds, aided and abetted by militant interest groups that are determined to subvert the will of the people and cheered on by vacuous self-indulgent celebrities leading millionaire lifestyles. It may be uncomfortable for the bourgeois liberal establishment, but polls show that the British people want tough action on illegal immigration. Indeed, polling last week showed that people support the principles of the Bill.

Benjamin Disraeli said that justice is truth in action. Today, the Government are giving voice to the true wish of the British people to restore justice to our immigration and asylum system. It is not extreme to want to cap all kinds of immigration; it is not immoderate to deport illegal immigrants; and it is not unreasonable to give the Government the tools they need to do just that. It is time to take back control of our borders. It is time to stop the boats.

7.41 pm

Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I have to say that the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) makes a very unlikely class warrior. I would also like to say that my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) gave her usual forensic analysis of the situation and I am very grateful to her for doing that. I agree with the Home Secretary on one thing: her comment that we should choose our words carefully. It is just a pity she did not do so herself.

The reason I wanted to speak in this debate is that, as you are aware, Mr Speaker, there is a hotel in Knowsley with 180-plus asylum seekers. I will not talk about that in detail because I had an urgent question on it a few weeks ago, but I will say that, since then, the situation has deteriorated to the extent that some of the refugees have been verbally abused in the street and others have been assaulted. They fled because the countries they come from were unsafe, only to find themselves in an

[Sir George Howarth]

unsafe position in this country. I think we should all be ashamed about that. It is not just happening in Knowsley; it is happening all over the country.

I want to conclude by saying something about why the Bill is before us in the House. The shadow Home Secretary convincingly pointed out the failures in the system that have led to this, but why are the Government bringing forward a Bill that anybody who knows anything about it knows is not going to work? The answer is that, with some notable exceptions—the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), to name but two—broadly speaking, those on the Conservative Benches split into two groups. The first group are deluded and actually believe this is going to work. The second group are cynical, do not believe it is going to work, but are going along with it anyway. That is a shameful set of circumstances. At least those who are deluded will wake up tomorrow morning and think, “We are still right.” Those who are cynical will wake up tomorrow morning and have to look at themselves in the mirror—and they ought to be ashamed of themselves.

7.44 pm

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Many in this House want to say that the Government are inciting people’s worst instincts on immigration. I want to say optimistically that, ultimately, it is not the Bill, the Home Secretary or the Government who are causing that feeling. In fact, they are in touch with the widespread symptoms of it from people—decent people—in constituencies like mine up and down the country, and we have to heed those views. In my judgment, enough of the fine people of Skegness say, accurately, that they are already doing a huge amount. They say that asking them to do even more has untold consequences. They say, in short, that endless numbers cannot be made to feel welcome if they worry that the town they are staying in will never be the same again, in part because of it.

When enough people feel that way, we mainstream moderates in this House have to act, because if we do not, we should know that it is the racists and the extremists of the far left and the far right who will take our place. We have already seen Patriotic Alternative march in Skegness. If, however, we act now, there is a chance to stop decent British people withdrawing their consent. That is why the aims of the Bill are not just compassionate; they are the only compassionate option. They are the most compassionate way: breaking the business model of both the people smugglers and those who buy hotels to sell back to the Home Office at profiteers’ rates. All that has to end.

I want to end by saying that we do need to have safe routes from dangerous countries and we do need to have provisions for men and women who are trafficked, and for children who are taken by irresponsible adults to these shores, but we must not use those hard cases to pretend that we cannot do better than where we are today. If we do not, compassion will cede the ground to ignorance and hatred. We have to act, or we will stretch the licence that voters give us to act on their behalf beyond breaking point. In Skegness, I am not exaggerating when I say that for some, this is an issue about democracy and the effectiveness of government itself. The Bill is

not just about stopping the boats; it is about stopping that democratic tragedy. That is just one reason why I will be proud to support the Bill this evening.

7.47 pm

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): The words of the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) must have some meaning for him. They do not for anybody else in this debate, because they do not make any sense or bring any delivery for the people we represent.

This country is based on the rule of law. We are in the UN Security Council. We wrote the European convention on human rights. We were the main principals behind the Geneva convention. We penned the war crimes legislation that is now in existence. People here are being accused of being lefty lawyers for doing the right thing and standing up for people and for our rights which are enshrined in law. We have always worked to the letter of the law, and so we should.

The Home Secretary takes no advice from the Bar Council and no advice from the Law Society, which both say that the Bill will create contradictions and will have problems in the courts, just like those the Government have already had. The Government do not want to do anything about that, and that is a problem. There are no safe routes for anybody to come through. Afghanistan has been closed. Hong Kong has been closed.

Robert Jenrick indicated dissent.

Mr Mahmood: The Minister shakes his head. If he tried getting out of Afghanistan, he would see what the issues are.

Women who have been trafficked will have no support under the Bill. Young children in jeopardy will have no support under the Bill. The Bill is against the people, and against the human rights and civil liberties of people. The Labour party does not say there is an open and a free door. That is what the Tories say about the Labour party. The Labour party is here to look at open and positive immigration. That is what we want to do.

The Home Secretary said that she cannot be xenophobic or racist just because of her colour and origins. I say to her, being of the same colour and origin, that that is exactly what her politics are about—dividing our society and our community based on that. That is what she continues to do. The best thing that she can do is to look at what is right for the people, rather than making political decisions that she thinks will win her the next election. That is not the case. The people of the United Kingdom are not so naïve as to allow this huge nonsense of xenophobia and racism from her party. She needs the knock of humanity to move forward with these issues.

We are all here representing all of our constituents—the Home Secretary does not understand that. For her sake and for the sake of all the people who come here, I hope that we are responsible for human beings and show humanity moving forward.

7.50 pm

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I echo the words of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) in saying that we need some calm and seriousness in this debate. Tone is important, even if it has sometimes been lacking. In that spirit, we should observe that it is not

unlawful or illegitimate, when faced with novel developments in the means of unlawful entry into the United Kingdom, to test the legal position. That is what the Bill does, and no more at this stage. It is legitimate to do that.

I support the international convention on refugees, but we have to recognise that it was conceived in 1951, at a time when people were smuggled across borders, and there was perhaps a little bribery of local officials or some altruistic assistance for people to get over borders. That was before the time of organised criminality exploiting vulnerable people. We have to reflect the reality of that change in circumstance. The Government are entitled to look at how that might best be done. That is a case for judicial dialogue in Strasbourg, and for renegotiating some of the international treaties.

That said, some of us are able to support the Bill only because of the safeguards written into it, such as habeas corpus.

Stephen Hammond: Does my hon. Friend accept that a number of Conservative Members support the Bill tonight on the basis that when it gets to Committee and Report stage, the Government will confirm in more detail the legal basis of the statement that it complies with our international obligations?

Sir Robert Neill: I have great faith in the legal input of the Attorney General and the advice of senior Treasury counsel on the Bill. My hon. Friend is right about that. Some of us will look to improve the protections for children and families and some of the tests, such as the suspensive serious harm test and the compelling circumstances under new subsection (4)(b) in clause 29. Were it not for things such as that, it would be very difficult to support the Bill, but they are in there and we need to build on them.

I want to make it clear that legislation itself is not a solution. Left on its own, the Bill will not achieve anything, and nor will any other Bill. The real need is to operationalise the situation and to improve the lamentable performance of our asylum and immigration systems over a number of years. It is ludicrous that immigration tribunals sit empty and that fee-paid, part-time immigration judges who are used to surge capacity sit unused because the Home Office is unable to get the files in order to present before the tribunal. If it cannot get the cases through the system efficiently and accurately, the Bill will fail.

A kind of isolationist unilateralism will not solve an international problem. Many of us think that the Prime Minister's work on Friday will be every bit as important as any piece of legislation in finding a way forward to what I hope will be a new agreement with France on security and a movement to a proper returns policy. We need a returns policy with friendly and safe countries to make the Bill work. The Prime Minister has the seriousness and the tone to achieve that.

Finally, we must ensure that we swiftly undertake a sensible approach to the international position to ensure that our reputation continues to be upheld. The rule of law matters domestically and internationally. That does not mean that we turn a blind eye to organised criminality abusing our hospitality—that is a real concern to my constituents. That is why it is important that we move forward, but the idea that any piece of legislation alone will do that, without serious operational changes and the resource to go behind them, is misleading.

7.54 pm

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Just when I think that I cannot be shocked any further by this Government's inhumanity, they try to rush this abhorrent and unlawful Bill through Parliament. Human rights and legal organisations are calling this one of the most damaging Bills introduced by a British Government in living memory. That is because the Illegal Migration Bill amounts to a refugee ban. It breaches fundamental and internationally recognised human rights, and attacks our way of life and our communities all over the UK.

Let us be clear: persecuting refugees and anti-migrant scaremongering do not benefit the majority of people. The cynical and dangerous use of scapegoating to divide people by an unpopular Government who have overseen a horrifying death toll during the pandemic and continue to inflict hardship and suffering across the UK, damages our communities. We have already seen an alarming rise in violence and intimidation organised by the far right against refugees and refugee accommodation. But beyond the rhetoric, spin and fake news, the fundamental point is that most people in small boats are men, women and children escaping terror and bloodshed. Chillingly, it is a truth that the Government are obviously aware of, because the majority of people arriving in the UK via boats are granted asylum. They are creating a cruel mechanism to deny sanctuary to people who they know are legitimate refugees and in need.

Why are migrants being forced into risking their lives in the first place? It is simple: for many, there are no safe routes to the UK. In 2022, half the men, women and children who crossed the channel in small boats were from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Sudan or Syria. We know the reasons that people from such countries are displaced, yet only 22 refugees came to the UK on the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme. How can that be true? Just recently, the Government confirmed that they do not intend to introduce any special visa routes for people in Turkey and Syria who have been affected by the earthquakes.

As the daughter of migrants who faced violence and persecution from the far right in east London, I am all too conscious of the consequences of pandering to racists. Whether it is the Bangladeshi community standing up and leading the anti-fascist fightback on Brick Lane following the murder of Altab Ali in 1978, or the Jewish community who came together in the battle of Cable Street in 1936 to stand up to Oswald Mosley, in east London we will never let our communities be divided or targeted. The Government should be saving lives, not salvaging their failing political record. We need an approach that prioritises people's lives and dignity. We need safe and legal routes to the UK. We need the Bill thrown out of Parliament.

7.57 pm

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): We are a rich country—the world's fifth largest economy. We have international obligations, and it is right that we meet them. In 2020, we were the third highest donor to overseas development in the OECD in absolute terms, and the sixth highest as a proportion of gross national income. We have welcomed thousands of people to this country from Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Hong Kong. Whether through the Government and the taxpayer or through people

[Tom Randall]

opening their homes, we have seen the great generosity of British people. Indeed, Gary Lineker was correct today to write, as he did on Twitter, that we are “a country of predominantly tolerant, welcoming and generous people.”

Where I think that he, and others who make the opposing argument, is wrong is that he ignores the fact that that tolerance can be tested and that generosity, while deep, is not limitless.

I take a rather hawkish view on immigration. It should be in the tens of thousands rather than the hundreds of thousands, but I have been surprised by the depth of feeling of Gedling residents on this issue. If I hold a supermarket surgery or knock on people's doors, what is raised with me unprompted—if not potholes—is the issue of boats and migrants. I think the depth of that feeling is understandable, given the context.

Albania is the top country for small boat arrivals, with 25%. However, compared to other countries, Albania does not face the major international issues for which people request asylum. While there are pull-factors, including language and shared history, the passage of asylum seekers through multiple safe countries undermines the idea that the system we have is one based on fairness.

The asylum case load has doubled since 2014; that increasing burden is unfair to those who are already in the system, awaiting a decision. As we have seen in numerous television pictures, the people arriving across the channel are mainly male, whereas it would be commonly understood that it is mainly women and children who are the most vulnerable. It is also wrong that asylum claims should be granted after a cross-channel migration that has the role of the smuggler as a *de facto* part of the asylum process. Therefore, it is right that we tackle the issue robustly.

I can put it no better than the person who put an anonymous note through my door at the weekend, which said:

“Dear Mr Randall, I implore you to vote to stop this vile trade. It has to stop now, and you and your fellow MPs can make it happen.”

Today, we can make that happen; we must stop this vile trade.

8 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Listening to the hon. Member for Gedling (Tom Randall), it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that somehow or other we have gone back in time. In much the same way as people in the 19th century spoke about the deserving and the undeserving poor, today we have landed in a place where we have the deserving and the undeserving desperate.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the number of men who crossed the channel, but he may not be aware that 7,177 of those who crossed the channel last year were children. The characterisation that he and others have made today is not borne out by the statistics provided by the Home Secretary and the Home Office itself.

There are many different reasons why hon. Members should vote against the Bill this evening. We may choose to vote against it because of concerns about legality, both in respect of our domestic legislation and our international obligations under treaties. It is difficult for

those on the Treasury Bench to deliver lectures to those in Beijing in relation to adherence to international law if we do not live up to the same standards ourselves. As the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) said, we can choose to reject the Bill on the basis of the impact it will have on our world-leading modern-day slavery legislation. We can even reject it because it lacks a basic sense of British compassion. I was a Minister in the Government that abandoned detention for children for immigration purposes, and I am horrified to see the Conservative party seeking to restore it today.

If compassion and concern for the rule of law are not enough to speak to the values of hon. Members, I can offer them one further reason, which is simply that it will not work. It will not achieve the deterrent effect that it seeks to claim. We have been told this before. We were told that the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 was going to be the Act that would solve the problem, but what has happened since that came into force? The numbers have gone up and up.

The truth is that many people who deserve and are entitled to asylum at present will not get it if the Bill passes. And what will be the consequence of that? They will be sent away and many of them will die. That is why this House should reject the Bill tonight.

8.3 pm

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I rise to make a simple point, because in the time available that is all we can do. I will draw a little bit of light rather than heat into the issue. I want the Government to succeed in restricting the boats coming across, and in getting rid of them eventually, because of the danger for all those who try to take that route. It is incredibly dangerous and people have died, particularly children.

I want to make a point about one specific area. The Centre for Social Justice brought through the original paper on modern-day slavery. I was enormously proud of it and I was enormously proud that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May)—the Home Secretary, as she was then—was able to bring that into legislation. We were the first country to adopt that. It is not perfect but there are things that can be changed.

I say gently to the Minister for Immigration, my right hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), and others on the Front Bench, that I do not understand why the Bill makes such a big deal of modern-day slavery when that represents a tiny proportion of people who come over using that route. Let me give a few figures: 6% of small boat arrivals in 2022 claimed modern-day slavery. In reality, the total number is even smaller. When the Government say 73% of people

“detained for return after arriving on a small boat...then referred to the NRM”,

that amounts to 294 people. We are talking about small numbers.

I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Minister that we genuinely need to recognise that we have to be careful when treading on this. We are dealing with those who are trafficked, not people smuggling; there is a big difference between the two things. Some 60% of the claims on modern-day slavery are domestic claims, here within the UK, by people who have been trafficked into

brothels or who are working in chain gangs. Those are the sort of people we really do want to stand up for, and I recognise that there is a big difference.

The people who my Government—my right hon. Friends, with their legislation—want to seek to stop are those who are coming across illegally, using smugglers. By the way, the single group that gives us the greatest credibility and likelihood of prosecuting those people smugglers, are those who have been trafficked and who then give evidence.

I simply want to say to my right hon. Friend the Minister that we need to look carefully at what we are saying in the Bill. How will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State be able to make a judgment about whether somebody has come illegally or has come illegally and is trafficked, if the national referral mechanism is not to be used for that purpose? If we can get that down to 30 days, most people could be processed without having to take an arbitrary decision. I want my Government to succeed in this matter, but I beg them to be very careful about the modern-day slavery legislation and to protect it.

8.6 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): We need to tone down the debate. Let us be clear: no one on the Opposition Benches wants the small boat crossings to continue or to see people forced into those boats. We want to see legal routes for those people and for them to find alternatives rather than having to go to those traffickers. Nor does anyone on the Opposition Benches want anyone to stay in the UK who has committed a crime and has no right to remain. It is time that Conservatives MPs stopped standing up and making claims such as that.

The overriding problem with the Bill, as has already been said, is that many Government Members know it is not going to work. The danger is that, beyond that, they think that the solution to the problem is for us to leave the European convention on human rights. As one of my hon. Friends pointed out, they are not respecting what the European convention on human rights means to this country. For instance, if we want to arrange for the safe return of failed refugee claimants from this country, we will need to have an agreement with countries in Europe that are signatories to the European convention on human rights. If we are not seen to be inside that convention, they will not be able to enter into those agreements, so they will be defeating the very object that they seek to achieve in the legislation.

Moreover, if we are to fall foul of the European convention on human rights, we will not be able to reach legal agreements on issues such as extradition, fingerprints, DNA or biometric data or the essential exchange of that data when dealing with serious crime. Beyond that, a serious criminal, harbouring in Europe, could claim legitimately that their human rights are at risk if they are extradited to the UK. Imagine that argument in a case made by a serious criminal who we want to extradite back here to face justice. They might say that their human rights are at risk and that would be a legitimate claim for them not to face justice in this country.

The Bill is not the solution to the problem we have. We need to create safer routes for people who are legitimate asylum seekers to come to this country. We need

to deal with the backlog and we need to create an organisation that will deal with the criminals who are trafficking people across in small boats. That is the way forward, not this piece of legislation that is just dog-whistle politics.

8.9 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): We are very lucky to live in a country people want to escape to, not a country people want to escape from, and we should all be mindful of the words we use. I support the Bill's Second Reading, but I want to make a few points.

Four hundred years ago, John Donne wrote:

"No man is an island, entire of itself".

In today's interconnected world, no country, even if it is an island, can be entire of itself. The war in Ukraine has reminded us that when there is instability or insecurity in another part of the world, it can result in instability and insecurity here in the UK. It is very important that the UK can use its official development assistance funding to help poorer countries to build their stability, but we are having to divert billions of pounds of our ODA funding to care for the tens of thousands of people who have come to the UK by small boats. That is money that could instead have helped tens of millions of people to tackle the causes of instability in their own country.

John Donne also said that

"any man's death diminishes me".

The UK has a long history of giving asylum to those who have suffered war or persecution. We should continue to offer asylum, but the small boats route has resulted in many lives lost, not just on the channel but on the way to the channel. Action needs to be taken to close that extremely dangerous route.

We also need to recognise that no country's capacity to offer asylum is unlimited. We must focus our support and prioritise helping the most vulnerable. The vast majority who arrive by small boats are men under the age of 40, not the disabled or the frail. By giving priority to those who arrive by illegal routes, we reduce the amount of support that we can give to safe and legal routes and we divert resources away from the vulnerable. That is not fair and it is not compassionate.

I am pleased that the Government have announced that they will introduce more safe and legal routes, but they need to go hand in hand with other measures, not come as an afterthought. Furthermore, it should not be left to local authorities alone to decide how many people our country can support. I recall that when I was children's Minister there was a time when all Scottish local authorities bar one refused to take any unaccompanied asylum-seeking children at all. I am concerned that if local authorities are left to their own decision making, many will say that they have no capacity to support asylum seekers.

Finally, as a former children's Minister, I note the comments that the Children's Commissioner made today. I hope that these important points can be addressed as the Bill moves through its stages in this House. I hope that the Government will be able to find a way to ensure a fair, balanced and compassionate approach to migration, and that this will be the one that prevails.

8.12 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): As Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, I will focus on aspects of the Bill that potentially breach the European convention on human rights.

The Committee will be scrutinising the Bill very carefully and reporting on it in early course. So far as I can see, however, the Bill is designed to set the UK on a deliberate collision course with the European Court of Human Rights. In their human rights memorandum, the Government accept that the Bill engages articles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 13 and 14 of the ECHR. By her statement under section 19(1)(b) of the Human Rights Act, the Home Secretary clearly accepts that some or all of those rights might be breached by the Bill. For once, she is correct.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights published in January our report on the Bill of Rights Bill. We said that that Bill should be scrapped. Now we see some of its most reprehensible aspects cropping up in this Bill. Time permits me to identify only two. First, clause 1(5) undermines the fundamental principle of the universality of human rights by creating a class of people in respect of whom the courts in the United Kingdom will not be required to interpret the Bill in a way that is compatible with the convention.

Secondly, clause 49(1) sets conditions on the UK's compliance with interim measures issued by the Court in Strasbourg. The Home Secretary tries to pretend that there is something unusual about such orders, but any undergraduate law student knows that for a legal system to be effective, courts must be able to issue interim orders requiring parties to take, or not to take, certain steps while the full arguments in a case are litigated. In Scotland, they are called interim interdicts, while in England they are interim injunctions; I am sure the Home Secretary must have heard of them. Such orders are issued by the Strasbourg Court to prevent irreparable damage to human rights while a case is being considered. It was interim orders from the Strasbourg Court that stopped Russia executing British soldiers Shaun Pinner and Aiden Aslin.

Talking of Russia, many of the Bill's provisions echo legislation passed by Russia in 2015 that limits the availability and applicability of ECHR rights—and we all know what happened to Russia's membership of the convention. Is that really the sort of bedfellow that the UK wants?

In Scotland we want no part of this. The convention is written into the Scotland Act, embodying the devolved settlement, which is the settled will of the Scottish people. If the UK takes us out of the ECHR, it will be without the consent of Scottish voters and without the consent of our Parliament. When I led a delegation of the Joint Committee to Strasbourg last year, I was told by interlocutors there that if the UK leaves the ECHR it will strengthen the case for Scottish independence. While the Tories try to give Labour a headache, they are creating yet another reason for Scots to favour independence over the status quo.

8.15 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I fundamentally disagree with almost everything that the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) said, as many people may understand.

I believe in the rule of law, I believe in Parliament, I believe in democracy and I believe in the sovereignty of this Parliament. I therefore want this Bill to work, but I do believe that it will require amendment in Committee or on Report. There needs to be a “notwithstanding” formula in the Bill to enable us to ensure that the courts cannot simply apply the arrangements currently in operation. As Lord Sumption said at the weekend, of course the courts will obey an Act of Parliament where it is necessary to do so.

I agree very much with my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) about clause 49, which addresses interim measures of the European Court; I have made the same point myself, as indeed has Professor Ekins, a professor of constitutional law at Oxford. The bottom line is that we will have to make certain that only final judgments will apply, not interim measures. I could spend much more time on that point, but I will not. I am quite sure that a “notwithstanding” provision will be required, because otherwise I am afraid that the clause may not work effectively.

On international law, I simply say to hon. Friends that article 31 of the refugee convention, which deals with unlawful refugees in respect of, for example, the United Kingdom, does not apply at all unless such refugees have come

“directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened”.

It therefore does not apply if they have come from France or Albania, for example. For the same reasons, article 33 does not apply. We are compliant with international law in these respects, which is of great benefit to us and to everybody concerned.

We have prevaricated for far too long. The Labour party will never sort this out. The unelected Lords will oppose this Bill. The Bill, as amended by this elected House, must therefore be made subject to the Parliament Acts and must receive Royal Assent before the general election. The Prime Minister is right to say, “Stop the boats,” but it has to be done lawfully. Under the Bill, with some amendment, we will be able to achieve that. Promises will not do. I am sure that we will find that the promises that have been made can be fulfilled.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I call Ian Byrne.

8.17 pm

Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker—it is an unexpected pleasure.

I will be voting against the Bill today. I am proud to support the reasoned amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) to stop the Bill in its tracks. This pernicious Bill fails to protect children and other victims from trafficking, fails to ensure safe routes for refugees and fails to treat people with humanity. It disgracefully expands the Government's hostile environment. If enacted, it will mean that anyone who has been put in the desperate situation of having to arrive in the UK on a small boat because of this Government's failure to facilitate safe routes will have their asylum claim deemed inadmissible. The Home Office will not even consider their claim, no matter how strong their application may be.

Clause 2 will enable the Government to seek to remove anyone who does not arrive via a specific route or with specific documentation. Those are requirements that the Government know it is next to impossible for somebody fleeing violence and persecution to meet. The 1951 United Nations refugee convention, to which the UK is a signatory, states explicitly that refugees shall not be penalised solely by reason of unlawful entry or because, being in need of refuge and protection, they remain illegally in a country. As the United Nations points out:

“Most people fleeing war and persecution are simply unable to access the required passports and visas. There are no safe and ‘legal’ routes available to them. Denying them access to asylum on this basis undermines the very purpose for which the Refugee Convention was established.”

Trade unions and human rights campaigners have rightly condemned the Bill, under which everyone who is subject to the new removal duty can also potentially be detained. The House should be doing everything in its power to ensure that people fleeing persecution and violence are given the safety, care and support that they need, not inflicting further trauma and harm on them. Is this really what we have become? It shames those who have gone before us in the House.

This anti-refugee Bill must be voted down. It is inhumane and immoral, and if I were a betting man I would also say it is illegal. The TUC has said that the “Government’s proposal and the language used to describe it are divisive and will stoke tension.”

We saw evidence of that on the border of my constituency in Knowsley last month. The language used is so dangerous and damaging to our communities.

Let me end by making an observation. It is not the people in boats we should fear coming to our shores, but the elite in the private jets who, along with this Government, are responsible for the unequal, broken society in which we live, where millions shiver and starve in their own homes, seeing no future for themselves and their families. I urge the House to reject the politics of division, and reject a Bill that shames this place and everything that it is supposed to stand for.

8.20 pm

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): Both the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have made it clear that tackling illegal immigration is an absolute priority for this Government, and I wholeheartedly welcome the firm measures outlined in the Bill. The sad fact is that this country has been a soft touch for far too long. Our asylum policy has been chaotic, granting approvals to questionable claims and leaving people waiting years for decisions, and all at a cost of billions of pounds per year to the taxpayer. It is any wonder that the people of this country are sick and tired of the situation?

My constituency is the most deprived in England. Many residents cannot access housing, struggle to obtain a GP appointment, and have little chance of finding an NHS dentist. They have paid into the system all their lives. Is it any wonder that when they see people entering the country illegally, receiving free accommodation, free food and access to local services, they are incredibly frustrated and angry?

Let us dispel some of the myths surrounding this issue that we hear from the Opposition, from lefty lawyers and from celebrity do-gooders. Many of the people entering this country in small boats are not genuine

asylum seekers. If their lives were truly in danger, they would have claimed sanctuary in the first safe country where they had arrived. Instead, these people have travelled through many safe European nations to try to come to the UK. They are invariably single young men, and increasingly from nations such as Albania. They are coming here not for sanctuary, but as illegal economic migrants. Our public services are already creaking under enormous pressure, and we simply cannot accept hundreds of millions of people who would no doubt seek to come here for a better life. I am afraid that this country is nearly full.

The measures in this Bill are ones for which the residents of Blackpool have been crying out for an awfully long time, but they can work only if we fully enact our Rwanda plan. It has been immensely frustrating that this policy has been tied up in the courts, both domestic and foreign. It is outrageous that the policy of the elected Government of the day should be restricted in this manner, and it is clear that the Bill is likely to encounter similar judicial frustrations. However, I urge the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary to stop at nothing to tackle this issue. If the Bill requires reform of, or a departure from, elements of the ECHR framework—as seems likely—that is exactly what we must do. We simply have to sort this situation out, and the Government have my full support in doing so.

8.23 pm

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): Let me remind the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) that the reason our public services are crumbling and people cannot see a dentist, and the reason NHS workers are queuing up at food banks and parents are living on their children’s leftovers, is nothing to do with migrants, asylum seekers or refugees; it is the fact that his party has been in power for the last 13 years.

Last night, Ke Huy Quan won best supporting actor at the Oscars. In the 1970s, he fled Vietnam in a refugee crisis that saw countries closing their borders to desperate people arriving by boat. Had he arrived on our shores under this Bill, he might well have been locked up and deported. Last year, the Olympian Sir Mo Farah revealed that he had arrived in the UK under a false passport, trafficked from a war zone into domestic servitude. Had he arrived under this Bill, he might not have been eligible for access to modern slavery protections.

I raise those examples not because I think that refugees should need to win awards and medals before they are respected, but to remind the House that the refugees whom the Government seeks to ban are people, with their own hopes and dreams—people who want to rebuild their lives and be reunited with their families; people who, like any one of us, may go on to do exceptional things or lead very ordinary existences, as should be their right. I say that because it seems that some Members need reminding of refugees’ humanity. When they say “invasion” they present desperate people seeking sanctuary as a threat, when they say “stop the boats” they mean that we should turn our back on refugees, and when their policy is welcomed by far-right groups, we should all be alarmed about the direction in which the Government are taking us.

What the Home Secretary is proposing is a de facto ban on seeking asylum in the UK, because for the vast majority of refugees there is no so-called legal way of

[*Nadia Whittome*]

reaching the UK. If you face religious persecution in Iran, there is no scheme to which you can apply. If you are a victim of torture in Eritrea, there is no visa that you can obtain. Even if you are from Afghanistan, a country that is supposed to have a resettlement scheme, the chances of your being accepted are vanishingly tiny: only 22 people have arrived under pathway 2. It is our asylum policies that are forcing people into the arms of smugglers and pushing people into fragile dinghies in the world's busiest shipping lane, and it is this Government who are to blame for the misery that they cause. The only one way in which to resolve this situation is to open safe and legal routes—now.

8.26 pm

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): This country, including the people in my constituency of Hyndburn and Haslingden, is amazingly kind, as we have seen with the Homes for Ukraine scheme. I think that people in this country are genuinely supportive of immigration and refugees when they perceive the legislative system to be fair. Stopping channel crossings is not just vital for the UK; it is the humanitarian policy option as well.

Every moment we flounder and stagger around this debate, people smugglers are preying on people in Calais and Dunkirk, persuading them to make an unsafe journey, and that must be stopped. To do that, we need to address the pull factor: the feeling people have that if they can just get to the UK, they will be settled for life. While I welcome the Prime Minister's new agreement with France, we cannot rely on that policy alone to reduce numbers. The Opposition have claimed repeatedly that new agreements with France are their priority, but the Prime Minister has already achieved that, delivering the largest ever small boats deal with France.

In my inbox, and when I am out and about on the doorstep in Hyndburn and Haslingden, this is one of the most frequently raised issues. I often think, when I hear SW1-centric commentators debate the subject, that the voice of people in northern communities such as mine is completely ignored. The fact of the matter is that in my part of the world, Hyndburn is supporting the second highest number of people receiving asylum support in Lancashire. The north-west as a region has more people in receipt of asylum support than Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland combined.

The Home Office acknowledges that these numbers fluctuate quite regularly, and that leads me on to my second point. The current system prioritises moving asylum seekers out of the south-east. We need to ensure not only that we have a fair immigration system but that places such as mine in one of the most deprived areas in the country do not bear the brunt of it where we are already struggling. We need a fair system, and that is why the people of Hyndburn and Haslingden support this legislation put forward by the Home Secretary.

8.29 pm

Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind): It is frankly frightening that we are at the second stage of a Bill that begins with an effective admission by the Home Secretary that the proposed legislation is not compatible with international law and human rights obligations. Yet despite

this, the Home Secretary says that they want this House to go along with it anyway. The European convention on human rights is often misrepresented by the Conservatives and their media friends, but the facts are that it was drafted by the UK and it protects the rights of my constituents in Leicester East and of every one of us.

The Bill is frightening, not just for refugees but because it sets a precedent that the Government can simply choose to derogate our human rights with almost no route to legal challenge. Not even children are safe under this Bill. While it does not instruct the deportation of unaccompanied children, it does give permission for their deportation if the Government or the Home Secretary so wishes. This is monstrous legislation, and no assurances from Conservative Members can make it less so. Will the Home Secretary commit today to protecting the rights of unaccompanied children and to ensuring that they will not be deported under any circumstances?

Let us be clear: while the Government disguise the Bill under their "stop the boats" slogan, this legislation is designed to give them the power to pick and choose which people from which countries and regions can apply for asylum, whether they come by boat or not. Many would argue that this is racist legislation, allowing safe and legal routes for a select group but not for others in classic colonial divide-and-rule style. According to the Government, a person escaping torture, persecution or war—even those wars involving British-made bombs and weapons—who applies for asylum on arrival is already disqualified and automatically made ineligible with no right of appeal, and under this Bill, they will be deported.

Furthermore, the Bill gives the Government the power to detain for 28 days human beings who have committed no crime, with no right of appeal or right to apply for immigration bail. This is a state-sanctioned fascism. It is inhumane and cruel. It is beyond dispute that the Bill is an attack on internationally protected legal rights, but it goes even further to explicitly state that its purpose is to exclude certain human rights entitlements from the asylum process. The Bill states that certain human rights claims are made inadmissible. It is also a move by the Government to put themselves and their agents above the law. The late, great Tony Benn famously said we should watch how a Government treat their refugees because that is how they will treat UK citizens—

Mr Speaker: Order. In fairness, I want to get everybody in, so please help each other and help me.

8.32 pm

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): Sovereign states have a duty to protect their borders from the illegal movement of drugs, contraband and people, but sovereignty is not just about protection from outside interference; it is also about having responsibility for our own citizens' welfare. We hear so much about rights but not enough about responsibilities. The UK Government, as with any Government, have a responsibility to protect democracy, the rule of law and the rights of their citizens.

The UK's illegal immigration issue is complex and multifaceted. It is about rights and responsibilities, and it needs addressing. The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have put together a plan that will significantly address illegal migration. Illegal migration is wrong. Organised immigration crime, which is what we are

talking about here, makes it easy for criminal gangs to make money and funds other forms of organised crime. Illegal immigration is not just a moral question; it is about fairness, too. It is not fair on hard-working British taxpayers who are spending billions a year funding the support for illegal immigrants when there is already pressure on our public services.

Illegal immigration is not fair on those who come here legally and abide by the rules, and the abuse of our system undermines trust in the system. Paying people smugglers is a choice, and entering the UK illegally prevents law enforcement from conducting criminal record or security checks. We have a legal visa route for those people who wish to come here to work, and we do not have a Government that are against immigration. The number of non-EU visas was at an all-time high last year. Criminal gangs who make money out of people trafficking and smuggling must be stopped and their business model dismantled.

I have listened to the narrative about illegal immigration over the past three years or so. Opposition Members are quick to criticise and challenge any measures taken by the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary, but they have no plan and no solutions of their own. None has any desire at all to stop this trade and to secure our borders. None has any desire to exercise the primary responsibility of a UK Government, which is to serve, safeguard and protect the British public. Why do they think it is wrong to deport people with no right to be here, including foreign criminals?

We have to stop the boats, and the Conservatives are the only party with the plan and the desire to do so. Opposition parties are pro-open borders; they just will not admit it. They are dishonest to this House and to the British public to claim otherwise.

8.35 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I despair at the tone of this debate and the dog whistle, the false argument—we have just heard it—that the Labour party wants open borders. Nothing, absolutely nothing, could be further from the truth. We have heard manufactured political rows in recent days and in this debate, but I say to Conservative Members who are willing to listen with an open mind that this is a serious issue.

To be clear, I want secure and safe borders for my constituents. I want a robust and fair asylum system. I want compassion for those in desperate need of help, as the UK has always provided, including this Government to people from Syria, Ukraine and Hong Kong. But I want the system to work, and it is not working at present. The Government say it is not working because of migrants, but I say it is not working because the Home Office, on this Government's watch, is not fit for purpose.

If rhetoric alone worked, the issues we are debating today would have been fixed by the last three immigration Bills, which we opposed because we said they were unworkable rhetoric. I am afraid the same is true of many of the measures before us tonight. When we hear talk of hundreds of millions wanting to come to these shores, it is sensationalist. To say we are going to be “swamped” is just wrong. To say that we are going to be “overrun” is not correct. We hear that “lefty lawyers” and “saboteurs” in the courts are to blame—it is always somebody else.

I believe there is actually a lot of common ground, as we have heard from the right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland), the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill). We can get around the table, and together we can plan an asylum and immigration system that works in the interests of our country and our constituents. This Government championed the fight against modern slavery, but this Bill does a disservice to that issue.

Finally, it does not matter what we think about the European convention on human rights. Many of the countries listed in the schedule to this Bill are also signatories, and they will not accept returns if we are against the convention. The Government need to rethink.

8.38 pm

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I rise to support this policy because I believe it is fair, sensible and in keeping with the UK remaining a compassionate country. An asylum system should not be based on people's ability to make the journey to a foreign country—that is what is not fair.

Those who oppose this policy say that people would not need to make the journey if there were more safe and legal routes. Let us follow through that line of thought and say we set up application centres in France. Although the journey would be less strenuous, a grandmother in a wheelchair or a double amputee would still be less able than a fit adult to make the journey, so it would remain unfair. So let us say we set up application centres in a more accessible country such as Turkey. What would happen next?

Even if there is disagreement on the exact figure, no one can deny that many millions of people around the world would be eligible for asylum in the UK. If tens of thousands of people are willing to make such a long and arduous journey to the UK to seek asylum, it is obvious to me that many, many more would make an easier journey to somewhere like Turkey. I cannot imagine the number being less than double, and there is no reason to think it would not be even higher. For anyone who understands British public opinion, it would be completely untenable to continue with that position. We would then need to introduce a cap, and then what? Of course, we would have to turn some people away. A humane policy would prioritise granting the elderly, the disabled and ill people asylum, which would leave fit, younger people as the ones we turned away. There is no reason why they would not make the crossing by boat in any case and we would be right back where we started.

That is why more safe and legal routes will not solve this problem—because at the heart of the issue is the fact that many more people could legitimately claim asylum than the British public would or should reasonably take in. If someone's test of an asylum policy's humaneness is whether a particular deserving individual—we have heard many such examples this evening—can obtain asylum, no policy will ever pass it, because unless we agree to take in everyone, there will always be people who would like and deserve to come here who will not be able to do so.

What the British public expect is that we take our fair share. Even if someone personally wants the UK to take many more refugees than we do, we have to remember

[Dr Kieran Mullan]

that we are talking about taxpayers' money. Compassion paid for by someone else is compassion that must be offered carefully, because if we do not do that, we find that we grow the resentment and hostility that we seek to avoid in the first place. The British people are fair and compassionate, and they ask me and they ask each other, "If people are coming from France and they are young men, are they really the people we have in mind when we want to say that we give a safe haven to the most vulnerable? Does a preference to come to an English-speaking country give someone a right to be here?" Those are fair questions and if we do not answer them, someone else will.

That might seem harsh, but I am a Conservative because I believe we should act with our heads as well as our hearts, and that we should care less about how something looks on social media and in the Chamber, and more about what it actually does. There is no problem-free panacea to this issue; it is about doing what helps best overall, which is why I am supportive of this policy and I am confident that the British public will be too.

8.41 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): This dehumanising Bill will not stop boats, but it is no exaggeration to say that it will destroy our asylum system, it does rip up international law, it leaves modern slavery legislation in tatters and it tramples all over human rights. But the implications of this Bill for people—for the human beings caught up in it—are the most important consideration. The reality is that every man, woman, pregnant woman and child, no matter their individual circumstances and history, is to be treated in the same brutal way. Whether to a young man who fled the Taliban because of his sexuality, a woman tortured and raped because she converted to Christianity, or a child trafficked here by a gang for exploitation, this Bill says, "We don't care. They applied for the wrong visa or they arrived here by the wrong route." That is all that counts under this Bill, not the horrors that these people have had to endure. It is as though to this Government these are not human beings; all they are is a political problem.

How this Bill treats these people is nothing short of sickening. The provisions on detention, if anyone bothered to read them, are outrageous. Protections for vulnerable people, pregnant women and children are tossed aside. Judicial oversight of liberty is made almost worthless. The Chair of the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill), talked about habeas corpus, but that is a prehistoric relic and we should not be left to rely on it to secure somebody's freedom. The Home Secretary basically helps herself here to a power to detain whoever she wants, for as long as she wants. It is, to put it mildly, extreme stuff.

The permanent inadmissibility rules are as stupid as they are heartless, leaving genuine refugees—the Afghan, the Christian convert—either waiting to be removed to Rwanda for years on end or in permanent limbo. Bizarrely, and I do not think this penny has dropped for Conservative Members at all, it actually makes it harder to remove people who do not qualify for asylum, because if we do not consider their asylum application, we cannot remove

them to their home country. That is explicit in the Bill, so this is making it harder to remove people who have no genuine claim for asylum.

Trafficking victims are also disgracefully abandoned in this Bill. For the overwhelming majority, there will be no recovery period. There will no leave to remain. They are being forced straight back into the arms of their people traffickers. The treatment of children in this Bill is equally shocking, with more detention; more unsafe accommodation, from where they can be exploited; less child protection; their being kicked out of this country at 18; and no prospect ever of citizenship.

So this is an utterly disgraceful Bill that needs to be kicked out today. Frankly, the timetabling of the Bill is also a complete disgrace, as is the lack of an impact assessment. It is pathetic that Parliament is allowing itself to be treated in this manner.

8.44 pm

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): All western countries have immigration controls. They have rules and a system that people have to go through. Thousands of people fill out the forms, get the sponsors, pay the cheques and go through the official Home Office systems, for a range of purposes. We all deal with constituency casework, and sometimes it takes a long time to get a legitimate wife in or to get somebody approved for a job. But no Government in the western world can allow the legitimate rules-based system to be undermined by people arriving illegitimately in boats as they do in Kent, because it undermines the whole system. It undermines all those people who decide to follow the system. The majority of people who arrive in Kent are white men under 40 who want jobs because they are economic migrants. We ought to ensure that we stop the trade so that, ultimately, people do not come here. If they want to come here, they should follow legitimate routes. The reality is that people who arrive illegally cause the state to spend resources on them, which is a massive irritation to our constituents. That money could be spent on education or the NHS. It could be spent on speeding up processing by the Home Office system so that those who are waiting to come in legitimately could enter more speedily. Many people think we are being taken for suckers because we are not dealing with this system. The Home Office is trying to set up rules that ensure that we deal with the situation which our constituents elected many of us to deal with, to control illegal immigration.

There is clearly work to do on the Bill. Bills are not perfect and this will go through the full parliamentary process. I think that the Home Office is trying to do its best to ensure that we safeguard our borders for a range of reasons. I agree with comments made by some of my hon. Friends, including the former Lord Chancellor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland). It is not just laws that we need to pass—we need to administer the system far better. I have confidence that the team in the Home Office will get on top of this and begin to deal with the issues that our constituents feel passionately about. It is only fair and reasonable and it is what people expect.

8.46 pm

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab): The Government and their immediate predecessor have not tried to formulate workable policy on this issue, which was evident from

the Home Secretary's bizarre and unconvincing opening speech. They are trying to keep the European Research Group and other agitators onside—grubby politicking by using the most vulnerable people, often fleeing the effects of our wars, or persecution or reprisals, as collateral damage. The reality is that most asylum applications are fully justified. In the end, after long and unnecessary delays, three quarters of applications are granted, yet these are the people the Government want to deny entry, not because of their circumstances but because of how they arrived.

We now have the abject sight of Ministers putting out propaganda that boasts that anyone arriving by small boat will not be offered the protections of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Ministers are actually saying that they will refuse protections to people being trafficked and used as modern slaves, making the policy a charter for people trafficking. They cannot say that they are combating people smuggling if all they are doing is putting policies in place that encourage it.

One of the arguments that is often used, especially in relation to France, is that it is a safe space. I was in Calais earlier this year, and I can tell Members that it is anything but safe for refugees, particularly children. In fact, our Government are paying more and more money to make it more hostile and unsafe for the vulnerable people who go there. [*Interruption.*] They absolutely are.

The Bill does not address any of the issues when it comes to the need for humanity, but there is an alternative, and it is a policy that is supported by all the experts in the field. We could establish safe and legal routes—not the mythical routes that the Home Secretary does not seem able to name; she does not seem able to give a single indication as to what they are. There could be a number of processing centres close to the French coast. Residence visas could be issued to all those entitled to be here. They could be transported here safely, with no excuse for maintaining appalling immigration detention centres. If the argument of humanity does not appeal to Government Members, they could think about the millions of pounds that would be saved. Companies such as Serco, Mears, G4S and Clearsprings—the big winners in the immigration detention estate—would lose some money, and the tabloids would have to find someone else to attack. Government Ministers would have to find a new enemy to distract people from their spectacular economic failures. We would not be breaking international law, demonising vulnerable people or falling out again with our closest neighbours.

This legislation should not have seen the light of day. There is nothing worth retaining, which is why I was pleased to table a cross-party amendment. I am pleased to support the reasoned amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. If Government Members are as disturbed as they say they are, they should do the right thing, walk through the Lobby with us and vote against the Bill.

8.49 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I have been trying for two years to get a young girl, Maira Shahbaz, into this country. Aged 14, she was raped and abducted and she is now hiding in a room after being forced into marriage. I am told that I cannot get her in because the whole system is under such pressure, so I am all in favour of safe and legal routes.

However, the fact is that such is the misery in the world that there is no limit to the number of fit, able young men who want to come over here from Iraq, Eritrea and Syria. I do not blame them; I would do the same. We speak English, President Macron has a point that we have no identity cards—maybe we should have identity cards—and they can get jobs here. We could open a safe and legal processing centre in Lille and it would be overwhelmed: 1,000 would apply today and 10,000 tomorrow. There is no limit to how many people want to come. We could process asylum applications even more quickly, and that would produce even more applications. We could have more gendarmes based on the beach in France and, as I said earlier, people will try the first night, and the second night they will make it.

We have to do something, otherwise they are coming to every hotel. Every single hotel in the country is rapidly being filled up. For two years, I and my local council of West Lindsey have been producing a fantastic plan to try to get redevelopment of former RAF Scampton. We will get £300 million-worth of investment. It is the home of the Dambusters and the Red Arrows; we will have a heritage centre. But the Home Office is so desperate, because every single hotel is filled up, that it has now marched into my constituency and said that it wants to put 1,500 asylum seekers there.

Of course we oppose that. Nobody else in this Chamber cares a damn about what happens in Gainsborough, but I am the local champion; I care about my people and I care about £300 million-worth of investment. I am asking for an assurance from the Home Office that, if the asylum seekers do come in, they will not put at risk that wonderful development. However, in an interview with BBC Radio Lincolnshire, Peter Hewitt of Scampton Holdings said that his development would be “totally scuppered”, that the move would be “rather inconsistent with running an airfield and airside operations”, and that, if the housing plans went ahead, 40 acres out of the 130 acres earmarked for redevelopment would be taken up.

That is just one example of what is happening in our country. The system is broken. We have to do something about it, and international experience proves, whether in Greece or Australia, that the only two policies that work are offshoring or pushback. Nothing else works. Unless we pass this Bill, unless we have the courage to try to create an asylum system that brings into this country the real asylum seekers such as Maira Shahbaz, the people who have been raped or forced into marriages, we will have a never-ending stream of young men paying criminal gangs to get into our country.

8.52 pm

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): Back in 2019, the company that provides accommodation for asylum seekers in Northern Ireland housed around 1,000 people. Last Thursday, the figure was 3,271. One third of them are in traditional housing stock and two thirds populated within 20 hotels in Northern Ireland, predominantly on the eastern side of our Province. I know the pressure that that places on some local communities and some local services.

Earlier in this debate there was a challenge to Members that they should be temperate in their language and courteous to one another, so let me say this, as the

[Gavin Robinson]

Democratic Unionists' spokesperson on home affairs and immigration in this Chamber: I am not an out-of-touch lefty. I am not on the side of people smugglers, I am not a naive do-gooder and I am not against the British people, but I will be supporting the official Opposition's amendment this evening.

I say that as somebody who supported the Nationality and Borders Bill when it was before this House. I say it as somebody who, when the Prime Minister came to this Chamber a number of weeks ago and highlighted the problems with our immigration system, was incredibly encouraged that he recognised that there was a problem when so many applications are being approved in the United Kingdom, yet similar ones elsewhere in the European Union are not. I thought there was a clear sign that our Government were actually going to grasp these issues in a way that would work, not present us with a Bill that, on the face of it, is incompatible with the ECHR. I am interested in dealing with the problems of unmanaged or illegal migration in this country, but I am not interested in getting involved in what amounts to a culture war—a political culture war that is more about the forthcoming general election than anything else. It is a shame all around.

The right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and the right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) were probably too polite when they addressed this shibboleth as to what is really behind this Bill. The right hon. Member for Maidenhead was right when she said that the Nationality and Borders Bill has not had enough time to bed in. I thought the Prime Minister was right when he highlighted the deficiencies in the system. How much better would it be to sort out asylum applications and the process of assessing them than to do away with the process of accepting asylum applicants altogether? I have stood in this Chamber against indefinite detention: it is cruel, and it is immoral. This Bill will probably proceed this evening, but it will not proceed with my support at this stage, and I will certainly be working to change it.

8.55 pm

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): I entered politics in 1999 and, since then, having become a Member of this place in 2019, I have always put representation at the heart of everything. We are a representative democracy before we are anything else. When I represent the people of Dudley here, I speak from the heart, saying that an overwhelming majority would want me to support the Bill put forward tonight.

The Bill would deter people from undertaking very perilous journeys, and not only across the channel. It is those people who perish in the channel who we get to hear about; the ones we do not get to hear about are the ones who might be coming across from the other side of Africa, or from another God-forsaken country, all the way to Calais. We do not hear about the harm that comes to them, but while the message out there is "Set foot in this United Kingdom and you shall not be removed ever again", we remain a magnet, and people will continue to make those very dangerous trips.

I hear what Opposition Members say. I hear what Scottish Members say. I must mention the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss). She was right

when she said that Glasgow Central takes more asylum seekers than the rest of Scotland, but that is a very relative comment to make when speaking to everyone in this Chamber. The debate in Scotland in November 2022—only a few months ago—was to argue against the Home Office, which was saying, "You should be taking 4,000 asylum seekers under the dispersal scheme." The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which represents a significant number of councils in Scotland, was saying, "No, we can't do that. It should only be 2,000." It was a member of the Scottish Government who said that it should be a voluntary system for councils in Scotland.

I hear from Labour Members, who like to virtue signal and show that they are representing their own views, rather than those of their constituents, when they talk about people who should be coming to this country because they are raped or because they are children. What is actually happening, if we look at the Albanians who have come over here—just to give an example—is that 14,000 of them have come from a safe country, Albania, to another safe country, France, and over here. Why do we never hear about them from Labour Members? We only hear about those tiny numbers who they like to talk about.

8.58 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I served on the Nationality and Borders Bill Committee, where we were told time and again that that Bill's provisions to criminalise refugees would break the business model of people smugglers, despite the Department's own impact assessment saying that the sorts of measures being proposed risked failing and driving people to more desperate routes. That Bill was designed not to work, but to create the appearance of doing something: for the headlines, to provoke a fight with the UNHCR, to attack immigration lawyers, and to provide a platform for the lie—repeated again today—that Labour believes in open borders. Less than a year after it became law, here we are again. The Home Office impact assessment was proved right, the position in the channel is worse, numbers making desperate journeys are higher, the appalling Rwanda scheme is stalled, and what is the Government's response? To double down on failure. We have a new Home Secretary, but the same approach.

This Bill is even more cruel, and we should look in particular at the Children's Commissioner's concerns over child refugees, but the central proposition remains the same: to defeat people smugglers by criminalising their victims. Again, it is not designed to work, but to create the illusion of action—talking up a problem, but offering no solution. It is cynical, irresponsible and damaging to our politics. At Prime Minister's questions last week, the PM was right to say that there is a global migration challenge, but the Government like to give the impression that those entering Europe do so with the sole intention of getting to the UK, ignoring every safe country along the way. Of course, that is not true. Nineteen other European countries take more refugees by head of population, and the biggest numbers are hosted by countries such as Turkey, Colombia, Pakistan and Uganda.

We need an honest debate. We need to stop the "good refugee, bad refugee" narrative of Ministers. The Government have closed doors to all seeking refuge, except from Ukraine, from Hong Kong and the desperately difficult route remaining from Afghanistan. Ministers

should stop demonising economic migrants. Clearly, we cannot accommodate everyone who wants to come here, but it is not a crime for them to seek a better life for themselves and their families—it is what people have done since the beginning of time. There is an irony that as Ministers demonise those coming for work, they are actually opening up new routes, as the *Financial Times* reported last week.

We need a joined-up discussion on migration and asylum, and we need to take care with the language. When Ministers talk up problems around refugees and raise false expectations about the legislation, it damages democratic politics and opens opportunities for the far right, as we have seen in recent weeks. Let us tone down the rhetoric and look at real solutions. We can start by voting down this Bill.

9.2 pm

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): Our immigration and asylum system must be fair and able to support people fleeing violence and persecution and those who are most vulnerable, but it must not be undermined by criminal gangs who profit from illegal immigration and put at risk the very people we want to help. Do people believe that the criminal gangs are supporting asylum seekers? Does anyone in this House believe that we should thank them for their humanitarian endeavours? Of course not.

Support for vulnerable asylum seekers should be based on assessment of need, not on ability to pay or connections to criminal gangs to bypass the system. Support for vulnerable asylum seekers should never mean that lives are put at risk in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes in a small boat. Safe and legal routes must be the means through which the most vulnerable receive support, not by giving in to criminal gangs.

Schemes such as the Syrian resettlement scheme, the Afghan scheme and Homes for Ukraine have seen many thousands of refugees successfully relocated to the UK. We need more such schemes so that refugees, wherever they come from, can access safe and legal processes for claiming asylum. Our communities have opened their hearts and homes to those seeking refuge, and they will continue to welcome those genuinely fleeing violence and persecution. That is their choice, but our communities do not choose an ever-increasing burden of illegal immigration being foisted on the country by criminal gangs.

In the past year, 45,000 people illegally entered the UK by small boats. It costs the British taxpayer £3 billion a year. Imagine if the money spent housing people who came here illegally was used to create more safe routes for asylum claims—imagine the difference that would make for the thousands of genuine claimants without the means to access legal routes. Imagine the difference we could make if, instead of political point scoring, the parties on the Opposition Benches joined with us to end the exploitation and illegality that is rife in the current system and worked with us to prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable.

9.4 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): This immoral, deeply cruel and divisive Bill breaks international law, rides roughshod over human rights and shames us all. I would argue that it shames especially the Ministers

who are deliberately and dangerously stirring up hatred with their vile and dehumanising language. I am pleased to associate myself with the reasoned amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy).

Let us have clarity on some of the facts. The UK offers safety to far fewer refugees per capita than the average European country, including France and Germany, and to far fewer than the countries neighbouring those from which 70% of the refugees from the global south flee. Behind the numbers and statistics are real people with lives, hopes, families and dreams. In the words of the British-Somali poet Warsan Shire,

“no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land”

and unless

“home is the mouth of a shark”

or

“the barrel of the gun”.

The bottom line is that, far too often, there are no other routes available to those fleeing violence and persecution, many of whom have family here with whom they want to be reunited. Locking them up is beyond cruel.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has warned that the Bill

“would amount to an asylum ban”,

but Ministers simply do not care. They are even coming up with new ways to circumvent international law. The Bill explicitly gives them the authority to ignore future interim ECHR rulings, so even if a case were lodged in Strasbourg, they could still press on with detaining and criminalising asylum seekers while the courts are deciding—a process that can take up to three years.

The Government do not care whether the policy works—that is not what it is about. It is about dividing and ruling; it is about stoking cultural wars; it is about picking a fight with the European Court of Human Rights for cynical electoral gain. The Government certainly do not care about the human beings caught in the crossfire. If the Government seriously wanted to protect the lives at risk from small boat crossings, they would back more generous family reunification rights and support safe, functioning routes.

I have a constituent whose wife and daughters are stranded in Turkey, having fled Afghanistan in August 2021. They do not have the documents to apply for a family visa, and they are not eligible for the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme. They have played by the rules for the past 18 months and are desperate enough to consider crossing the channel to be reunited. Government Ministers have not lifted one single finger to help. Even those who are eligible for the ACRS cannot make it work. Not one Afghan has come to the UK via pathway 3 of the ACRS since it opened in June last year.

On the front page of the Bill, the Home Secretary invites Parliament to rip up international law. The only act of a Parliament that has any kind of moral integrity would be to rip up her illegal and immoral Bill, which has no place in statute.

9.7 pm

Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con): I will support the Bill this evening. The whole point of the Bill—its overriding objective—is to decisively break the current model of

[Gareth Bacon]

the criminal smuggling gangs. In short, it seeks to remove any incentive to pay thousands of pounds to criminal gangs and to attempt to cross the English channel by boat to gain illegal entry to our country.

To put the debate into context, since 2015 we have given safe harbour to just under half a million displaced and vulnerable people from Syria, Afghanistan, Hong Kong and, of course, Ukraine. By contrast, most of the 85,000 who have entered the UK illegally since 2018 have come from safe countries, and almost all have travelled through safe countries. Of all those illegal entrants, the majority are adult males, not vulnerable families. There is no war in Albania, for example, but a quarter of recent illegal immigrants to the UK originate from there.

What has Labour's answer been? Well, no one seems to know. At last week's Prime Minister's questions, all the Leader of the Opposition could do was criticise the Government's proposals without saying anything about what his party would do differently. The shadow Home Secretary put in a similar performance the previous day, when she said that we need "slogans and not solutions" but offered nothing but empty slogans.

After three years without a policy position, Labour has hurriedly cobbled together five bullet points, none of which is original and all of which have no detail to them. Setting out aims with no measures to achieve them is not a plan; it is empty rhetoric. The Labour party has no plan to tackle illegal immigration, and, more to the point, it shows no sign of wanting one.

The Government have said that our approach is two-pronged: first, to stop the small boats, which the Bill is designed to achieve, and secondly, to expand safe and legal routes, as has been done in the case of Syria, Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine, alongside an annual cap set by Parliament. I would like to hear more about that from the Government, because I believe it is important that such proposals be brought forward quickly as the Bill proceeds through Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) has been vocal about the idea of creating an offshore asylum visa processing system, which I think could be helpful.

The Bill cannot be the end of the story in dealing with illegal immigration, but it is a solid foundation. At a stroke, it could destroy the business model of the criminal gangs and remove the incentive for people to risk their lives on hazardous channel crossings. The principle of the Bill is therefore clearly right, and I will be supporting it this evening.

9.9 pm

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): My constituency is the most diverse in the entire country; 80% of our community has heritage from a different part of the world. Many of my constituents, including the multiple hotels that we have holding asylum seekers and refugees, welcome those people into our community. In Ilford we embrace humanity and the differences in our community. We recognise the struggles that we all face, and that blaming each other for the ills that our country faces is not the right way forward. Our local churches helped Afghan and Iraqi refugees find Korans so that they could practise their prayer. It is wrong for Conservative Members to say that this is not about our constituents.

Let me be absolutely clear—I am speaking on behalf of my constituents—that the Bill is the most inhumane and unjust piece of legislation. It will do nothing to solve any of the problems that the Home Secretary outlined today. If it passes, it will effectively criminalise asylum in this country and allow the Government to commit flagrant human rights abuses without any real consequence. The United Nations says that the Bill would breach the refugee convention and undermine a long-standing humanitarian tradition of which the British people and I are proud, instead punishing people fleeing persecution and conflict—conflict that is often the consequence of decisions taken in this place and by our country, historically or in more recent times.

In the short time that I have, I want to tackle the incendiary rhetoric from this Government. It is the playbook for the next election from a desperate Government. I have spent a large part of my life fighting the far right, not just in Barking and Dagenham but across the country. Some of the language that I have heard over the past months and days has reminded me of the language that people like Nick Griffin used to describe people. It is appalling, it is un-British, it is unacceptable, and it needs to be challenged.

In a recent report, *Hope not Hate* said that there is growing alignment between the language of the traditional far right and the language used by the mainstream right. Those on the Conservative Benches are supposed to be the mainstream right, but I look at that side of the House and it is just like a turbocharged UKIP. You should be ashamed of yourselves for this Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order.

Sam Tarry: Madam Deputy Speaker, I will finish simply by saying that if the desire is to prevent children from making these dangerous journeys and to protect them, the solution is clear: more safe routes for resettlement, and expanding and improving the existing family reunion schemes.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member knows that you do not address directly other hon. Members.

9.12 pm

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): After that extraordinary contribution, which mirrored a number of contributions we have heard, let me first say something about the irony of those on the Opposition Benches criticising rhetoric and incendiary language. So far, we have had one Member describe the Bill as "fascist" and one describe it as "racist"—we have gone through the whole gamut of left-wing clichés. I am not bothered, Madam Deputy Speaker; it does not concern me what any single Opposition Member thinks about what I believe and what I stand for. But it does concern me when they slander my constituents and millions of people throughout this country who have legitimate concerns about small boats and their social consequences. We are spending £6 million a day—the total is £3 billion and rising—on hotels, and we are expected, as a Parliament and a Government, simply to do nothing. I believe that this legislation is needed.

Let us get to the heart of the Bill, rather than the rhetoric that we have heard from Opposition Members. Let us see whether the British people disagree with this.

The Bill makes provision for an annual cap on the number of people admitted to the UK through safe and legal routes. Who disagrees with that? Nobody. Numerous countries, all over the world, have an annual cap. Would it not be nice for this place, just for once, to take some responsibility for immigration policy—not to subcontract it to a court or somebody else, but to decide the type of immigration we need and where we need it?

Let us talk about capacity—this is never addressed by the Labour party. In my area, we have no housing, we have no doctors' places and we have no school places. This is something the Labour party just simply wants to ignore. Migration policy is related to a number of different factors, but it is an eminently sensible policy that the people of this country support. Let us go on to the next one that is such an outrage, which is promptly removing those with no legal right to remain in the UK. That is a principle, and there is a legitimate debate to be had about how successful we have been, but how can we argue about that as a principle? There will be a legal duty on the Home Secretary to remove people within a reasonable and practicable time, and a 28-day period to allow that to happen. How on earth can that be unreasonable? This is a policy that responds, and it is what we should have.

In the current system, we have the ironic situation with the Home Office where we have doubled the number of case workers and have lost productivity. We need some targets, and we need people to be held accountable. What this Bill is about, which Opposition Members do not want, is holding each and every single one of us accountable for what we believe in terms of immigration policy and it is about how that immigration policy can be put in place in a reasonable, sound and fair way for every single person in our country.

9.15 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Gary Lineker and others are right to caution about the use of language in this debate, but I think it is important that we also understand why people use the words they do. When the Home Secretary talks about invasion, when she refers to “us and them” continuously and when she tries to characterise this problem as there being millions of people waiting to come to the shores of this country, she does so for a particular reason. She does it because, generally speaking, the people of these islands are compassionate and fair-minded, and in order to get acceptance for proposals that are so inhumane and so brutal, it is first necessary to dehumanise and then demonise the people to whom those words refer. That is why the public are invited to regard migrants as some sort of amorphous collective menace and a threat to our way of life and our wellbeing, rather than the truth, which is that they are an assembly of some of the most wretched people on the earth, who have undergone unimaginable horror and have stories to tell that most of us would never wish to experience.

Let us be honest: the problem of small boats is one entirely of this Government's making. For years, they have been playing a game of grotesque political whack-a-mole, in which the hammer of Government policy has come down on the heads of the world's most vulnerable people every time they try to find a route through to the shores of this country. We have got to a situation where the legal routes are now so non-existent or so limited

that most people have simply no alternative but to put their lives in the hands of the people smugglers on the shores of France. The truth is that until and unless we open up those safe, legal routes, this problem will continue.

The Government's novel approach to the increasing number of people claiming asylum is now simply to make it illegal to claim asylum in the first place. That is a grotesque and absurdist logic that Franz Kafka himself would be proud of. I have heard a lot of Conservative Members talk about criminal gangs. Let me tell you this, Madam Deputy Speaker: if I was organising an organised criminal group and I was engaged in people smuggling and modern-day slavery, I would be rubbing my hands in glee at these proposals, because they alter the balance of power between these criminal gangs and the people they oppress by removing the redress and the rights that people have when they come to this country.

Finally, there is a lot of talk about how many millions this is costing. Getting rid of the cost is quite simple: process the applications and allow people to work and pay taxes while they are being considered. That would solve the problem overnight.

9.18 pm

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): I am very grateful for the chance to say a few words in this debate. This is an issue that has been raised with me repeatedly on the doorsteps in Wolverhampton North East, and it is of importance to my constituents. I am really disappointed about some of the language we have heard from Opposition Members. My constituents are not without compassion and my constituents are not xenophobic, and to paint their concerns as coming from a very bad place is very disappointing.

The inability of Opposition Members to accept that we have to limit the numbers of asylum claims we process and accept into the country astounds me and my constituents. Evidently resources are limited, and we face a global migration crisis. The moral case for stopping the boats cannot be denied, and I do not hear that. A fair and just asylum system does not mean one that relies on a person's physical fitness and ability to scramble across a continent and pay a people smuggler. A fair and just asylum system means that the most vulnerable are given the chance to claim asylum, not young men climbing into boats.

In Syria we took people from the border of a warzone. We took older and disabled people, pregnant women and those who could not make the journey. We must recognise that this is a difficult Bill to put forward. It is not a fluffy huggy bunny Bill, but in this situation we have to come to this place and make difficult choices. We need a limit, but the Bill opens more safe and legal routes for people in the greatest—[*Interruption.*] With a quota that we will set in this place. We will have the opportunity to decide the number of asylum claims that we process each year. I welcome the Bill and hope it works, but overwhelmingly there is a case for looking at why we have the migration crisis. It is a case for more foreign aid and for better trade links; it is a case for lifting those countries out of poverty, and ensuring that they are stabilised. That is a global problem, and the whole western world should be uniting to attempt to make progress on that. But I will not be lectured by people who, when we say we have to have a pragmatic

[Jane Stevenson]

limit on numbers, shout “shame on you, shame on you” at the Home Secretary. That is not worthy of debate in this place.

9.21 pm

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): I wonder what our international partners across the globe are thinking about this Bill and this discussion, and about the fact that we are acting like a bunch of Poundshop Ukippers. Whatever happens with the Bill, I feel totally ashamed. I am ashamed as a Member of Parliament to be thinking that in the mother of all Parliaments. We are all elected; we all represent constituents with differing views, and we are talking about the best way to deny people—some of the most deprived and desperate people in the world—the right to come to this country.

It is an absolute outrage. This Bill should not, under any circumstances, see the light of day. It really shouldn't. It pains me to say this, but there have been some decent contributions from Conservative Members, who I have lots of respect for. But my goodness there has been some rhetoric. And I will not take any lectures on rhetoric, because what has been said tonight is that every hotel—nearly every hotel—in the UK is now full of refugees. What a load of nonsense coming from the Conservative Benches.

They also referred to a number of other issues. Don't not talk to me about compassion. It is only a matter of months since the previous Home Secretary wanted to have wave machines to blast these people back on to the shores of France. We have a situation in a Brighton hotel where 137 kids are missing. Don't talk to me about compassion. We are talking about real people here. It is absolutely essential that we do not get into a number crunching game about the nitty gritty of looking after people. Be proud. Of course we are proud to be British. Be proud and stand firm on behalf of these people. Put these people before politics. Recover some semblance of humanity. Scrap this ghastly toxic Bill and support some of the most desperate people in the world.

9.25 pm

Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con): The public expect action on small boats and illegal migration. The main issues raised with me are illegality, asylum seeker hotels, and safe and legal routes. I will come on to those points in a moment.

It is clearly extremely dangerous and not sustainable to have 45,000 people arriving across the channel in small boats, many of whom are paying people smugglers. It is not sustainable for our own communities, housing and services. Many councils, including Labour councils, say that they absolutely cannot cope and are not able to take additional people at the moment. The Stroud public also know that this is an international issue, something that is often lost in the debate online. It is an international issue and it has a very serious national security bent, too. I find that, away from social media, all the yelling and the noise of shouting down anything—literally anything—that the Government try to do on this issue, people really understand that the Government have to do absolutely everything they possibly can. Given that we are legislators, it is not a surprise that we are going to try to legislate.

On hotel accommodation, my constituents know that I have worked really hard and been very careful not to use my social media or my platform to draw attention to hotels or to asylum seekers in our county of Gloucestershire. Given the attacks on various hotels and places around the country, I do not think it is fair or responsible to communities to do that. Instead, I have spoken to people directly. I have held meetings and I have had police down to particular parts of my constituency. I have spoken before about my disappointment and anger that hotels have been placed in inappropriate areas that we know will cause difficulties. The hotels have to close and I want to hear more from the Minister for Immigration, my right hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) about when that will happen.

On safe and legal routes, like many of my constituents I of course want to see safe and legal routes that are controlled. Unfortunately, that term has become quite nebulous. We have to nail down what it means. The reality is that the safe and legal route policy should work transparently alongside the Bill. It is good that it is referenced, but we need to have that transparency. I want to know whether my right hon. Friend will consider creating a super clear, simple, and safe legal route policy. I look to the recent leader in *The Spectator*, which talked about the simple policy of a safe route being created for each illegal migrant who is returned. That is gloriously simple and I think it would deal with a lot of the concerns of the public. I think it would also pull the pants down from the Opposition.

9.28 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): We can agree or disagree with Gary Lineker on his choice of words, but he was perfectly entitled to say what he did about the vile incendiary language of the governing party, who have spoken of refugees as invasions and swarms, and how he sees the parallels with the rhetoric of 1930s Germany. What he expressed was a cry out: a warning from history. We remember the horrors of the past in order to learn the lessons in the present and ensure they are never repeated.

In their desperate bid to hold on to power and distract from their disastrous handling of the economy, where working people have seen their standards of living decimated under 13 years of austerity, the Tories are, at very best, playing culture war cards. They are trying to distract attention away from their failures by using the age old far right strategy of scapegoating and dehumanising the most desperate of people, pointing the finger at them to say, “They are the cause of our problems,” as was explained by the hon. Member for Poole (Sir Robert Syms). With breathtaking disregard for basic humanity, Ministers are now determined to deny refugees their most fundamental human rights. They are not even trying to hide it—it is explicit on the face of the Bill.

The Home Secretary has been advised that the Bill will, more likely than not, be found to breach the European convention, but nevertheless she told the House that she was confident that it was compatible. That is either gross stupidity and incompetence or much, much worse. We should worry about a Home Secretary who admits to dreaming of expelling refugees to Rwanda and who has used such disgraceful language as “invasion” to describe the arrival of refugees by the English channel.

The UK did the right thing by responding to Putin's war crimes with the Homes for Ukraine scheme, but how is the plight of the people involved any different from someone fleeing Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen? Do they not feel pain? Did they not lose their homes or have loved ones killed in plain sight? Do they not deserve our compassion and assistance? It beggars belief that the Government claim to be compassionate. The Bill is not compassionate; it is cruel, heartless and wicked and goes against any claims they have of providing a welcome sanctuary to refugees. As we are one of the prime architects of and signatories to the conventions on refugees and human rights, this evil Bill brings shame on this House and on this nation. I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to vote against it tonight.

9.31 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): For my constituents, the Bill is long awaited. They want us to crack down on the horrific people smugglers, stop small boat crossings, remove those who have no right to be here and deny asylum to those who illegally cross our borders from safe countries.

People voted in overwhelming numbers in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire to take back control of our borders, and they expect this Government to deliver. Stoke-on-Trent has done more than most to welcome those in the greatest need—more than 1,000 refugees and asylum seekers have now been accommodated, not to mention the Ukrainians and others who have been taken in by local families having arrived as a result of Putin's barbaric war. But we can only take so much. There is certainly no room for chancers from safe countries who are paying big money to shameless smugglers to play the system.

Small boat smuggling is unfair, immoral and unsustainable. The pressure on local health services, schools, social services and the third sector has been significant. I welcome the new Home Office hub in Stoke-on-Trent, which will help to clear the backlog of cases. For too long, all the accommodation pressures have rested on a small number of authorities—including Stoke-on-Trent—defined as resettlement areas, in a "Hotel California" scheme that is supposedly voluntary but with no ability to leave. We were forced to accept totally unsustainable numbers, often in totally inappropriate locations.

I am pleased that the Government have listened and taken action to ensure a more equitable distribution across the country but, ultimately, action is needed to reduce the overall number entering the UK illegally in the first place. I welcome the Bill and the measures announced by the Prime Minister both in December and last week. Unprecedented pressures necessitate unprecedented actions. The actions in the Bill will break the people smugglers' model. I hope that they will be properly resourced and implemented.

The Home Office must restore our confidence in its ability to deliver, particularly on detention and removal. There is an abundance of determination on that on the Front Bench, which I hope is shared across Government. It is vital that we ensure that the measures are legally watertight and do not face ongoing challenges by Labour-backed lawyers, as we have seen with Rwanda. Everything possible must be done to ensure that the Bill is incontrovertible. We will not enjoy the support of the general public unless we tackle these issues.

The Bill is about fairness and ensuring that illegal migrants cannot jump the queue. It is about ensuring that we never again allow the generosity and compassion of the British people to be abused by unscrupulous people smugglers and bogus claimants.

9.33 pm

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): We have heard a shamefully grim level of debate from some Government Members. The debate has lacked compassion and logic, but I want to start on a positive. Last night, something truly historic happened: Ke Huy Quan became the first east and south-east Asian actor to win an Oscar. He said:

"My journey started on a boat. I ended up in a refugee camp....They say stories like this only happen in the movies...This is the American dream."

Why is that story of success not a British dream, especially when people such as Mo Farah have had a similar experience, filling stadiums, smashing records and being wrapped in a Union flag? Why is that hope and aspiration crushed before it even starts? Because of fear and failure—13 years of Tory failure, to be exact; a failure to provide any sense of international leadership or to negotiate workable deals with other countries. And at home, this Government are making 40% fewer asylum decisions a year than they were in 2015, leaving 160,000 people waiting in limbo for much longer and pushing up accommodation costs. This immigration Bill is based on fear—the fear of the Prime Minister and Home Secretary losing a grip on their own party.

People of faith often speak about the opposite of fear—hope. And they have spoken out against the Bill. The Board of Deputies has shared its concerns and, earlier today, I met members of the Jain community, whose focus is on compassion for all living things, not on this. Last June, all the bishops in the House of Lords signed a letter raising alarm about the Rwanda policy. Today, the Archbishop of York joined the Muslim Council of Britain and 350 other charities and faith organisations to condemn the Bill, saying it was "immoral and inept".

Normally, that level of criticism would make a Government stop and think, but we are not in ordinary times. Instead, we have yet another Prime Minister who is so desperate to stay in power and keep the Conservative party together that he is willing to tear a country apart. That is the base level of the Bill—the Government blaming others and reaching for unworkable, inhumane covers for their own wretched failure.

My grandparents' generation, which fought in the war, will not be fooled, and neither will generation Z. Last week, Luton Sixth Form College celebrated its culture day, which was beautiful, exciting and harmonious. Those young people know that there is strength in diversity, not fear. That is true strength. What we hear today is fear, the only card that this clapped-out Conservative Government have left to play. As our faith communities, the generation that fought against division and hatred, and our young people all know, Britain is so much better than this Bill, and our country is so much better than the Conservative Government give it credit for.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. It is obvious that not everyone will get in. The final speakers—they know who they are—have said that they will try to take two minutes, which means that I can get four more speakers in. David Simmonds will lead the way.

9.36 pm

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): Away from the noise and heat, there are a number of elements of the Bill that are to be welcomed and that have had cross-party support in the past. They include the principle of a cap, which we already operate with our resettlement schemes; the principle of consultation with local authorities to determine the capacity that the country has to accommodate newly arrived refugees; and, in particular, the focus on early and swift decision-making. In my view, those are strong reasons to support the Bill this evening.

Clearly, the focus will be mainly on areas where there is a need for improvement, and I will simply highlight two such areas. First, there is a need to clarify the interaction between clauses 15 to 18 of the Bill and the Children Act 2004. There is a long history of the Home Office taking a view about the primacy of immigration legislation, simply for it to be overturned on judicial review by the courts, which take the view that duties contained in the Children Act come first. We need to ensure that this legislation is watertight, and that it will serve the interests of unaccompanied children in a way that is practical and operable.

Finally, the key weakness I see at the moment, which we need to address, is the lack of a permission stage for those wishing to claim asylum in the UK. If people wish to work, get married or study here, they have to apply for a visa before they travel to the UK, then we decide to whom we will issue visas and how many we are going to issue. In respect of asylum, there is no such process of control. My argument to the Front Bench and to the Government is that we should introduce an asylum visa. We would give ourselves genuine control over who arrives in the UK, how many people come, in what numbers and where they go, and avoid the risk of both a free-for-all and the legal challenges that are a significant peril for the Bill.

9.38 pm

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): Last year, child poverty nearly doubled, workers' wages fell at the fastest rate in decades and there was a more than 25% jump in people sleeping on the streets, while our schools and hospitals continued to crumble with their funding slashed. These are the crises that grip our country, but instead of addressing them, the Tories focus on this: whipping up fear and hate, demonising people who flee war and torture and whose only supposed crime is wanting to rebuild their lives in Britain.

This Bill is not really about stopping the boats. No one believes it will do that. It is about scapegoating. It is about diverting attention. It is about pretending that the crisis we face is people arriving in dinghies, not growing poverty and inequality. It is about pretending that the challenges our constituents face are not due to soaring bills and a collapsing NHS but due to refugees. This Bill is really about divide and rule. It is about the

Tories' plan to get ahead in the polls and desperately cling to power, even if that means breaking international law and throwing refugees under the bus. I do not think anyone believes that this Bill will work on its own terms. I do not think Government Members believe it will work.

The real problem is the terms that the Bill sets. These are not boats that we are legislating on, but people. They are people the vast majority of whom have their asylum claims accepted once they are here, and who are taking this route because the Government have closed safe routes for refugees and refuse to create new ones.

This is really a crisis of compassion. It is a crisis of solidarity that has been created by those at the top. A decade ago it was David Cameron who called refugees a "swarm"; today the Home Secretary uses the far-right language of an "invasion". Instead of pandering to the right-wing press and attacking the rights of refugees, let us defeat this Bill and actually address the real sources of the problems in this country.

9.40 pm

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): I will continue the trend of highlights without commentary. Of the 45,000 people who crossed the channel illegally in 2022, we know that 27% were Albanian and 74% were males under 40, as the Home Secretary highlighted earlier. That is on top of the hotels that have been costing us up to £6 million per day, putting our public services and our NHS under great strain.

Today's debate is actually about fairness. We are a fair country and a welcoming country, as we have shown with Ukraine, with Syria, with Afghanistan and with Hong Kong—with the 89,000 people from Ukraine and 18,900 from Afghanistan. This is a humane policy, tackling the people smuggling gangs responsible for the deaths in the channel, which cannot continue. We must make processing times shorter and we must clear the backlog for the genuine refugees. That is what today's Bill is about, so I welcome the plans to tackle it and I welcome the wider package of measures—not just the Bill, but everything else we are introducing.

Some people want to make this about the ECHR and whether we stay or leave. That is a debate for another time, but I think all hon. Members will agree that that is a better reason to make this legislation work. Show that we can control our borders—that is my challenge to the Opposition. Vote with us today and show that it can be done. But this is an Opposition who have shown patronising views of countries such as Rwanda, who have campaigned to drag murderers off flights and who want open borders, blanket approvals and amnesties for those who are cheating our system. I support this legislation 100%.

9.42 pm

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): The Government have failed to build a system that takes on the refugee and migrant-related challenges of this century, shows compassion to those who so desperately need it and deals with the very small number of people who seek to exploit it. Let us not forget that stopping the boats once and for all can be attained only by calling time on the criminal gangs that seek to exploit the most vulnerable. Nothing in the Bill addresses that issue. This Government have no interest in penalising the perpetrators;

they are more concerned with playing to the gallery, even if that means pursuing a cruel and impractical policy that they themselves know will not work.

The Bill is not worth the paper it is written on. It is a hallmark, pure and simple, of a desperate Government who have long run out of ideas in their last-ditch attempt to cling on to power. This Government are seeking to use wedge issues to drive division in our society and mask their fundamental failings in every other aspect of public life. That is the reality facing our communities after 13 years of failure by this Conservative Government, and it is not the fault of refugees.

I am proud that my city of Liverpool, as a city of sanctuary, plays its part in the support of the most vulnerable from overseas—people who have fled violence, persecution and genocide. The Bill does nothing to deal with criminal gangs, nothing to assist the victims of modern slavery, and nothing to address returns agreements—and so much more. It is time to scrap this Bill, go back to the drawing board, and build a system that will deliver for the British people and those seeking refuge from overseas.

9.44 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): Because this has been such an incredibly well-subscribed debate, in the time available to me I will not be able to thank all my hon. Friends individually for their excellent contributions, so I hope they will forgive me for thanking them all collectively. I also want to thank some Conservative Members for their excellent and insightful contributions, particularly, of course, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May).

I am old enough to remember a Conservative Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), standing at that Dispatch Box and promising the House that her new Nationality and Borders Bill would

“deter illegal entry to the UK...break the business model of the smuggling gangs and protect the lives of those whom they are endangering.”—[*Official Report*, 19 July 2021; Vol. 699, c. 706.]

Fast-forward two years, and scroll your way through a few more Prime Ministers and Home Secretaries, and here we are again having to listen to the same old reheated rhetoric and empty promises. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

The Conservative party likes to claim that it stands for secure borders, but when the last Labour Government left office in 2010, fewer than 10,000 people were waiting for a decision for a claim for asylum. The number now stands at more than 160,000, the highest since records began. Conservative Members will also recognise that the number of failed asylum seekers being returned has decreased by an astonishing 80% since 2010. The reality is that, since 2010, successive Conservative Governments have lost control of our borders, and the people smugglers are laughing all the way to the bank.

Another bit of nonsense being peddled on the Conservative Benches is that this Bill will stop the boats. Everyone agrees that the small boat crossings must be stopped. Thousands of people are risking life and limb, and it is utterly appalling that the people smugglers are making millions from this trade in human misery. The fundamental question is whether the measures in the Bill can reasonably be expected to solve the problem, and the answer to that question is a clear and resounding no. In fact, if the Bill were passed, it would actively

make matters worse by adding further to the enormous asylum backlog, and by piling further cost on to the staggering £7 million-a-day hotel bill that is currently being picked up by the British taxpayer.

The Government can label channel crossers “inadmissible” or “illegal” all they want, and they can promise that they will be detained and swiftly removed until the cows come home, but the fact is that Ministers are completely unable to answer two obvious and vitally important questions: “Detained where?” and “Removed to where?” Rwanda is a non-starter because the Rwandan Government can only take 200—and how on earth are the Government planning to send asylum seekers back across the channel unless we have a formal returns agreement with the EU to replace the Dublin convention? Ministers tried all this last year: under the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, they made 18,000 people inadmissible, and how many did they remove or return? Twenty-one. Let me therefore encourage Ministers to drop their obsession with chasing tabloid headlines, and to focus instead on prioritising measures which will actually work.

That brings me to the final myth that needs busting: the idea that we on these Benches have somehow not been putting forward our own proposals. Every single time the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Home Secretary and I have come to this Dispatch Box, we have set out exactly how Labour in government will tackle the small boat crossings and fix an asylum system that has been utterly broken by 13 years of Tory incompetence and indifference, but it appears Conservative Members have not been paying attention, so let me remind them of our plan.

First, we will scrap the unaffordable, unworkable and unethical Rwanda scheme, and redirect all that wasted taxpayer money into resourcing a 100-strong elite cross-border police unit to relentlessly pursue the real enemy—the ruthless criminal gangs and traffickers—and ensure that we tackle this upstream, working with the French and across Europe to defeat the gangs.

Secondly, we will negotiate a returns agreement with the EU as a matter of urgency. Successive Conservative Governments since 2016 have focused on trashing relations with our European partners and allies, so the Prime Minister has a mountain to climb in rebuilding the trust that will be required as the basis of securing a returns deal. We wish him well, but the reality is that it is going to take a Labour Government to pick up the pieces and succeed where this Government have so badly failed.

Thirdly, we will introduce long overdue measures to get a grip on the decision-making process for asylum claims. We will clear the backlog once and for all by establishing an effective triage system and by reversing the absurd and incomprehensible decision to downgrade the seniority of key Home Office officials. Fourthly, while the Government do little more than pay lip service to the idea of safe and legal routes, we will act to fix the current resettlement programmes, including the broken Afghanistan pathways.

It is time to let the grown-ups back into the room. Three years ago, many people who had never voted Tory before put their trust in this Government because they wanted secure borders, controlled migration and competent governance, but absolutely none of those things has been delivered. So it is little wonder that the country has had enough of a Government who cynically bring

[Stephen Kinnock]

forward Bills that are far more about scapegoating and slogans than they are about solutions, and it is little wonder that it has had enough of a Government who know that they cannot stand on their record and who are instead planning to fight the general election on a platform that is all about stoking anxiety, fear and division.

The good news is that the British people are not stupid. They watch as Conservative Ministers blame everyone else for their own failures: they blame the civil servants; they blame the lawyers; they blame the European Union and the ECHR; and they even blame the football pundits. But our constituents know exactly where the buck stops. They know that the day is approaching when they will be able to vote for a Labour Government who will tackle the small boats crisis and deal with the myriad other challenges and crises that our country is facing after 13 years of Tory failure, and they know that that day cannot come soon enough.

9.52 pm

The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick): This has been a passionate debate characterised by many excellent speeches, and I commend among others on my side my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill), my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) and my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) for a series of outstanding speeches. I commend none more than my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Tom Randall), who said that his constituent had told him:

“I implore you to vote to stop this vile trade...and you and your fellow MPs can make it happen.”

He spoke for the country.

As my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have made clear, we must stop the boats and secure our borders. Our approach is guided by that most British of values: fairness. The present situation is anything but fair. Ours is a generous and compassionate country and we will continue to offer sanctuary and refuge to those fleeing persecution, conflict and tyranny, but we will not accept mass illegal migration to our shores, orchestrated by people smugglers. It is for that reason that we are introducing this Bill today, to address this challenge once and for all.

Let me start by addressing some of the important points that were raised, first by those hon. and right hon. Members who have argued for the exclusion of children and families from the scheme or the detention powers. This is a difficult and sensitive topic, but let me be clear: we cannot allow women and children to be used as pawns in the people smugglers’ despicable trade. I have seen for myself the depravity of the people-smuggling gangs. There is no low to which they would not stoop. They have no regard for human life. If we were inadvertently to create an incentive to split up families and to encourage adults to make false claims, there is no doubt in my mind that the people-smuggling gangs would do it. That is why we will handle this issue with the sensitivity it deserves, but we will also ensure that we break the evil people smugglers’ model.

My right hon. Friends the Members for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) both spoke powerfully about the modern slavery frameworks they forged and the need to protect genuine victims. We agree. The Government are committed to tackling the heinous crime of modern slavery and to supporting victims, and it is for that reason that we want to prevent abuse. Just 6% of detentions ending in 2019 involved a modern slavery referral, rising to 53% in 2020 and 73% in 2021. We have to defend the modern slavery architecture by reforming it and ensuring that it is not open to abuse.

The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the shadow Home Secretary, spoke eloquently, but she could not bring herself to say that those crossing the channel in small boats are illegal or that it is wrong to break into our country.

Mr Khalid Mahmood: Will the Minister give way?

Robert Jenrick: No, I will not.

Nor could the shadow Home Secretary explain what these migrants, the overwhelming majority of whom are young men, fleeing through Greece, through Italy, through Germany, through Belgium, through the Netherlands and, indeed, through France are actually fleeing. She lamented the absence of a European replacement for the Dublin agreement, but she failed to mention that just 1% of the UK’s transfer requests were granted in 2020 and that, year after year, we took back more people than we transferred. She did not provide one credible proposal to stop the boats, which should come as no surprise because, when Labour announced its five missions, stopping the boats did not even feature. Labour has literally nothing to say.

The right hon. Lady was sensible enough not to say it, but her Back Benchers betrayed the real views of the Labour party. They queued up, one after another, to dismiss the perfectly reasonable concerns of the British public as “racist” and “fascist.”

And from the SNP we heard what can only be described as performative compassion. In her 25 minutes, the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) did not mention the fact that Scotland accounts for 8% of the UK’s population but hosts only 1% of all migrants in initial and contingency accommodation. In fact, there are more migrants housed in contingency accommodation in Kensington than there are in the entirety of Scotland. The SNP’s message is clear: “Refugees welcome, but not in SNP Scotland.”

Let me be clear that this country will always provide support to those in need, and nothing in this Bill will ever change that. As we have seen with the 500,000 people who entered this country in recent years on humanitarian visas—more than at any time in our modern history—this country believes in dealing with migrants with dignity, but it also believes that there is no dignity in the dinghies. There is no humanity in the people smugglers, and we have to break their business model. That is why we brought forward this Bill.

There is a simple choice before us. Is it for the British Government or for the people-smuggling gangs to decide who enters this country? On this side of the House, we believe that, without border controls, national security is ultimately compromised, that the fabric of communities begins to fray and that public services come under

intolerable pressure. Although we should always be generous to those in need, we believe there are limits to the support we can provide. It is Members on this side of the House who are on the right side of the moral debate. It is clear that, for that reason, we will stop the boats, we will secure our borders and I commend this Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 249, Noes 312.

Division No. 190]

[10 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 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, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Crawley, Angela
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 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
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 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
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 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
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 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
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 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
 Mary Glindon

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 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
 Berry, rh Sir Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 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
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinanage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 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
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 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
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 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
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw

Metcalf, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murray, Mrs Sheryl
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert

Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, rh Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)

Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Webb, Suzanne
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, rh Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wood, Mike
Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Noes:
Andrew Stephenson and
Steve Double

Question accordingly negated.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 62(2)),
That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 250.

Division No. 191]

[10.14 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Badenoch, rh Kemi
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
Berry, rh Sir Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
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
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
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
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James

Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
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
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
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
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
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
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, rh Jeremy

Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cheryllyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrisey, Joy
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murray, Mrs Sheryl
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert

O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 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
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Andrew Stephenson and
 Steve Double

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 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, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy

Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 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
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 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
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewis-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Graham
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 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
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes

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
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 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 Noes:

Colleen Fletcher and
 Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

ILLEGAL MIGRATION BILL: PROGRAMME

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Illegal Migration Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

Proceedings in Committee of the whole House, on Consideration and on Third Reading

(2) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall be completed in three days.

(3) Proceedings in Committee—

(a) shall be taken on each of the first and second days in the order shown in the first column of the following Table, and

(b) shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the times specified in the second column of the Table.

Proceedings	Time for conclusion of proceedings
First day Clauses 37 to 51; new Clauses and new Schedules relating to the subject matter of those clauses	Six hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the first day.

Proceedings	Time for conclusion of proceedings
Second day Clauses 2 to 5; the Schedule; Clauses 6 to 36 and 52 to 58; remaining new Clauses and new Schedules; Clause 1; remaining proceedings on the Bill	Six hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the second day.

(4) Any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall be taken on the third day in accordance with the following provisions of this Order.

(5) Any proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the third day.

(6) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

Programming committee

(7) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings in Committee of the whole House, to any proceedings on Consideration or to proceedings on Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(8) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—
(Scott Mann.)

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 248.

Division No. 192]

[10.28 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 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
 Berry, rh Sir Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 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
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinene, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 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
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 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
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 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
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien

Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 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
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Jacob
Tellers for the Ayes:
Andrew Stephenson and
Steve Double

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Bardell, Hannah
 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, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan

Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debonnaire, 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
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lillian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret

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
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Brenda O'Hara*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena

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
 Reed, Steve
 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
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris

Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 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
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 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 Noes:

Colleen Fletcher and
 Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

ILLEGAL MIGRATION BILL: MONEY

King's recommendation signified.

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

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Illegal Migration Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(1) any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by a Minister of the Crown, and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(*Scott Mann.*)

The House divided: Ayes 310, Noes 246.

Division No. 193]

[10.42 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 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
 Berry, rh Sir Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bottomley, Sir Peter

Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 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
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinagen, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 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
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 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
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 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
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon

Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic

Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 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
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, rh 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
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Andrew Stephenson and
 Steve Double

NOES

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

Bardell, Hannah

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, Alan

Brown, Ms Lyn

Brown, rh Mr Nicholas

Bryant, Sir Chris

Buck, Ms Karen

Burton, Richard

Butler, Dawn

Byrne, Ian

Byrne, rh Liam

Cadbury, Ruth

Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)

Cameron, Dr Lisa

Campbell, rh Sir Alan

Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair

Chamberlain, Wendy

Chapman, Douglas

Cherry, Joanna

Clark, Feryal

Cooper, Daisy

Cooper, rh Yvette

Corbyn, rh Jeremy

Cowan, Ronnie

Crawley, Angela

Cruddas, Jon

Cryer, John

Cummins, Judith

Cunningham, Alex

Daby, Janet

Dalton, Ashley

Davey, rh Ed

David, Wayne

Davies, Geraint

Davies-Jones, Alex

Day, Martyn

De Cordova, Marsha

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

Dowd, Peter

Duffield, Rosie

Eagle, Dame Angela

Eagle, rh Maria

Edwards, Jonathan

Efford, Clive

Elliott, Julie

Elmore, Chris

Eshalomi, Florence

Esterson, Bill

Evans, Chris

Farry, Stephen

Fellows, Marion

Ferrier, Margaret

Flynn, Stephen

Foord, Richard

Fovargue, Yvonne

Foxcroft, Vicky

Foy, Mary Kelly

Furniss, Gill

Gardiner, Barry

Gibson, Patricia

Gill, Preet Kaur

Grady, Patrick

Grant, Peter

Green, Sarah

Greenwood, Lilian

Greenwood, Margaret

Griffith, Dame Nia

Gwynne, Andrew

Haigh, Louise

Hamilton, Fabian

Hamilton, Mrs Paulette

Harman, rh Ms Harriet

Hayes, Helen

Healey, rh John

Hendrick, Sir Mark

Hendry, Drew

Hillier, Dame Meg

Hobhouse, Wera

Hodge, rh Dame Margaret

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

Jones, Darren

Jones, Gerald

Jones, rh Mr Kevan

Jones, Ruth

Jones, Sarah

Kane, Mike

Keeley, Barbara

Kendall, Liz

Khan, Afzal

Kinnock, Stephen

Lake, Ben

Lavery, Ian

Law, Chris

Leadbeater, Kim

Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma

Lewis, Clive

Lightwood, Simon

Linden, David

Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)

Long Bailey, Rebecca

Lucas, Caroline

Lynch, Holly

MacAskill, Kenny

Madders, Justin

Mahmood, Mr Khalid

Mahmood, Shabana

Malhotra, Seema

Maskell, Rachael

Mc Nally, John

McCabe, Steve

McCarthy, Kerry

McDonagh, Siobhain

McDonald, Andy

McDonald, Stewart Malcolm

McDonald, Stuart C.

McDonnell, rh John

McFadden, rh Mr Pat

McGovern, Alison

McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)

McMahon, Jim

McMorrin, Anna

Mearns, Ian

Miliband, rh Edward

Monaghan, Carol

Moran, Layla

Morden, Jessica

Morgan, Helen

Morgan, Stephen

Morris, Grahame

Murray, Ian

Murray, James

Newlands, Gavin

Nichols, Charlotte

Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)

Norris, Alex

O'Hara, Brendan

Olney, Sarah

Onwurah, Chi

Oppong-Asare, Abena

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

Reed, Steve

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

Sheerman, Mr Barry

Sheppard, Tommy

Siddiq, Tulip

Slaughter, Andy

Smith, Alyn

Smith, Cat

Smith, Jeff

Smith, Nick

Smyth, Karin

Sobel, Alex

Spellar, rh John

Stephens, Chris

Stevens, Jo

Stone, Jamie

Streeter, Wes

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

Twist, Liz

Vaz, rh Valerie

Wakeford, Christian

Webbe, Claudia

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 Noes:

Colleen Fletcher and

Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 41A(3)),

That, at this day's sitting, Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of Secretary Michelle Donelan relating to Online Safety Bill: Carry-Over Extension.—(*Scott Mann.*)

Question agreed to.

Online Safety Bill (Carry-over Extension)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the period on the expiry of which proceedings on the Online Safety Bill shall lapse in pursuance of paragraph (13) of Standing Order No. 80A shall be extended by 18 weeks until 20 July 2023.—(*Paul Scully.*)

10.54 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I do not intend to detain the House, but I have made intimations to a number of Ministers that I wish to put on record.

Time is always a factor in the House, and the sheer scale of business inevitably leads to delays. I absolutely agree with the motion to extend the time available for this essential Bill to continue its passage to the next stage in the other place before it returns to us so that we can fine-tune it and get it right.

I have received large numbers of emails about the Online Safety Bill, and Ministers are well aware of the issues of concern to me and others. The fact is that this Bill and the provisions it contains are necessary in this modern world. Loopholes must be addressed and measures added to ensure that the spirit of the Bill's aims is achieved, that people are safer online, with the prohibition of bullying, attacks, wrongful advice and out-and-out harmful lies, and that there are powers to enforce that. That is what is needed.

It is right and proper that appropriate time is given to discuss the Bill—I support that entirely. I look forward to returning to this place to get the job done and to get it right for my constituents. For me, that is what it is all about.

Question put and agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

PENSIONS

That the draft Occupational Pension Schemes (Administration, Investment, Charges and Governance) and Pensions Dashboards (Amendment) Regulations 2023, which were laid before this House on 30 January, be approved.—(*Scott Mann.*)

Question agreed to.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Kate Osborne be discharged from the Education Committee and Mohammad Yasin be added.—(*Sir Bill Wiggan, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

PETITION

London & Quadrant Housing Trust

10.56 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I rise to present a petition submitted by homeowners at the relatively new Acton Gardens development, which is on the site of demolished blocks where the external shots of “Only Fools and Horses” were filmed. It is not even a decade old, but leaseholders are concerned about spiralling service charges paid to the London & Quadrant Housing Trust in the face of incomplete repairs to communal doors and security systems, malfunctioning water and energy supplies, unanswered inquiries and the bottomless pit of the sinking fund, leaving them to wonder where the money is going.

The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to take into account the difficulties faced by Acton Gardens residents, and leaseholders who have been fighting for increased transparency of service charge accounts and expenditure and take immediate action to ensure that leaseholders who seek transparency of service charge accounts are granted that transparency.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002815]

Pavement Parking

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Scott Mann.*)

10.57 pm

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): In my time in this House, I have been lucky to obtain a number of Adjournment debates, but never before has one generated quite the same level of response as this one. This issue has a daily impact on constituents and makes their lives materially worse. For some constituents, it is beyond frustrating and actively stops them from enjoying the things that many of us take for granted. That includes people who have mobility impairments, who are blind or partially sighted, and people who are neurodiverse.

I heard from my constituent, Barbara, who told me about the difficulties she had getting to the supermarket when she was in a wheelchair. Carolyn told me she is finding it harder to take out her mum, another wheelchair user, on walks to Alexandra Park. New parents like Hafsa, Jack and Antony told me how difficult it was to navigate parked cars with a pushchair, and the dangers of having to take their children into the road to get around.

Kim Leadbeater (Batley and Spen) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate on pavement parking. Sadly, it is an issue that affects people in my constituency daily. Does he agree that ultimately what we need to rid our towns and villages of this problem is behaviour change? The question is how we get people to stop inconsiderate, selfish and dangerous parking that blocks paths for pedestrians, wheelchair users, pushchairs and guide dogs. Sadly, appealing to people's better nature does not always seem to be effective, so does he agree that we need councils and police forces to be properly resourced so that they can issue fines, put signs up, repaint lines and work with local businesses, which should also remind customers about not parking on pavements, for the good and the safety of all our communities?

Afzal Khan: I agree wholeheartedly and thank my hon. Friend for her amazing hard work in her constituency. I will be covering the issues she raises in my speech.

I have heard from my local council about missed bin collections and expensive damage to pavement surfaces. Walk Ride Whalley Range in my constituency commissioned its own local research; the response was that pavement parking not only is an issue for those with disabilities or young children, but encourages speeding and reckless driving in neighbourhoods. It discourages people from choosing active travel alternatives to cars, such as walking and cycling, and prevents people from accessing public transport.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing the debate. He is absolutely right that there is a very clear safety issue. If cars are parked on the pavement, that means that women with prams, ladies who are walking and blind people with their guide dogs have to go on the road, thereby endangering them. Does he agree—perhaps the Minister will address this point, too—that safety has to be paramount? People have to be considerate of others. Back home, whenever

I have brought these things to the attention of the police, they have gone out and enforced the rules with tickets. Maybe that needs to be done here as well.

Afzal Khan: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention and will expand on some of those points.

I know that local councillors across my constituency have worked hard to tackle the issue, despite not having the right tools to do the job. For example, they have joined efforts to leave notes on parked cars to remind drivers to think about the impact of their parking on other road users.

Most streets in my constituency were constructed before car ownership became common. There are many narrow terrace streets and houses without drives or garages. There needs to be a much wider debate about how a reduction can be achieved in car use in cities, but I want to focus on this one specific issue today. Our starting point must be that footpaths and pavements are for people walking or wheeling, not for vehicles.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate on an issue that has united Members of all parties across the House. Does he agree that the best solution already exists in London, where we have had a default ban on pavement parking for decades, and where local authorities can work with residents on exemptions where there is no choice? It is about time the Government responded to the consultations that took place more than two years ago and brought something in across the country similar to what we already have in London.

Afzal Khan: I agree. That is exactly the point I will make: we need to move forward, because we should not be still waiting. What is good enough for London is surely good enough for the rest of the UK.

In 2020, the Government held a consultation called “Pavement parking: options for change”. There have been written questions on when we can expect the outcome of the consultation; the response every time is “As soon as possible.” We are now on our fifth responsible Minister since the consultation closed. Government instability aside, surely the Minister agrees that two years, three months and 19 days is more than enough time to prepare a response. I hope he will be able to make “as soon as possible” mean sooner rather than later.

PATROL, a joint committee of local authorities—the name stands for Parking and Traffic Regulations Outside London—points out that it is a misconception that all pavement parking is currently legal outside London. The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 make it clear that causing “unnecessary obstruction” of the highway by a stationary vehicle is a criminal offence. However, because it is a criminal offence, only the police have the power to issue penalty notices. The truth is that this is not a priority for the police and, to be honest, I do not blame them for that. After all, since 2011, Greater Manchester police have seen real-terms cuts of more than £215 million, with 2,000 fewer officers. They simply do not have the capacity. The current law is also ambiguous. The word “unnecessary” is subjective and leads to significant confusion among drivers: a study by YouGov found that 46% of them were confused by current laws.

[Afzal Khan]

The real difference between London and the rest of England lies in the fact that the Greater London Council (General Powers) Act 1974 created an unambiguous offence which authorities are confident to enforce and which, moreover, is also enforceable by local councils, rather than just the police. There is widespread agreement that we must bring the rest of England into line with London.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): My first Adjournment debate in the Chamber was about the issue of pavement parking. We were told that there would be a response very soon. Is it not now essential, for the sake of people such as Laurel, a blind constituent of mine who has a guide dog, for these laws to be introduced?

Afzal Khan: I entirely agree.

While it is already possible for councils to issue a traffic regulation order, there are drawbacks to the process which make it not only an unsustainable option for local authorities, but one that is unlikely to drive widespread behavioural change. The cost of permanent TROs can be astronomical. There is a clear need for a separate review of TROs to bring the process into the 21st century. They are rightly only enforceable when clearly signed, but that is yet another expense, and the overall cost makes them suitable only for a narrow and targeted approach. It would never be possible to create a TRO preventing pavement parking covering the entire city of Manchester, for example. If an order is applied to just one small area, the problem may shift to a nearby area without changing driver behaviour.

What is needed is a national approach that sets an expectation for all drivers everywhere. One way of achieving that would be to amend the Traffic Management Act 2004 to add obstruction to the list of offences to which civil enforcement applies. This would be imperfect, but would allow local authorities to issue fines, and would give councils outside London the first ingredient in the recipe that their counterparts in the capital enjoy: the power to enforce. We would also need a second ingredient, a lack of ambiguity. However, there should be very few circumstances in which obstructing the pavement is necessary, and we must set clear expectations on that to change driver behaviour.

A step beyond would be the introduction of a default ban on pavement parking across England through primary legislation, which is the approach now being taken by Scotland. The main benefit would be the creation of a simple, uniform and easily understood system, allowing for exceptions to suit local circumstances. I appreciate that that might take more time, which is why I hope the Government might make use of intermediate options now to begin to tackle the issue as soon as possible.

Any of these options will need to be accompanied by more resources: resources for national and local information campaigns on how the law is changing, and resources for local authorities for the purpose of enforcement. Only by doing both can we change behaviour for the better, and we cannot expect local authorities to foot the bill when they have already faced millions of pounds of cuts forced on them by Conservative and Lib Dem Governments since 2010.

There is a clear and widespread desire for change across the country. We must do better to make our streets usable for people walking or wheeling, and create an environment that is for the many, not the few. That will mean more people on foot, on bikes and on public transport, fewer cars and healthier, cleaner air.

11.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Richard Holden): I congratulate the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) on his speech today and on bringing this matter to the attention of the House. I have a constituency similar to his with a lot of 19th century terraced housing, which is also similar to the constituencies of the hon. Members for Blaydon (Liz Twist) and for Batley and Spen (Kim Leadbeater). I also thank the hon. Members for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for contributing to the debate.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton mentioned his constituents Barbara, Carolyn, Hafsa, Jack and Antony. I also have several constituents who regularly contact me about this matter, so I know that there is concern across the House about it and we all want to see positive change. I would like to make it clear that the Government are determined to ensure that disabled people have the same access to transport as everyone else and that they can travel easily, with confidence and without extra cost. That is why the Government's inclusive transport strategy aims to create a transport system that provides equal access for disabled people by 2030, with assistance if physical infrastructure remains a barrier. I am delighted also to be the accessibility champion for the Department.

We also want to make walking and cycling the natural first choice for shorter journeys wherever possible. We have set an ambitious vision that by 2030 half of all journeys in towns and cities will be either cycled or walked. To help to deliver that, Active Travel England was launched in August 2020 to work with local authorities to develop and deliver new high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure schemes.

Ruth Cadbury: We all welcome the words about active travel that the Minister has just read out, so why is the budget for Active Travel England, which was launched only last year, being cut by two thirds?

Mr Holden: I cannot speculate on what is going to be in the Budget, and I would urge hon. Members to wait and see what is going to happen later in the week. What I would say is that we have placed huge emphasis on this area already, with major investment going on across the country, and we expect to spend around £850 million by the end of this year, which is a record amount of funding. That represents a step change from previous Governments and Administrations of all colours in this space, and I expect to see that continue.

Recently in Parliament, I met Matthew Campbell-Hill, the new Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee chairman, and Cameron Wood, a constituent of the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), who are both actively campaigning on this issue. They highlighted to me, as has happened in other recent meetings I have had in Parliament, the real issues that pavement parking can

cause for pedestrians and people with buggies and prams, but particularly for disabled people with sight or mobility impairments. This is an issue I have been campaigning on in my own constituency as well, where the blind community is particularly prominent in the town of Dipton.

Pavement parking has been prohibited in London since 1974, except where councils choose to permit it by implementing exemptions and erecting the necessary traffic signs. There is no specific ban outside London, but councils can implement local pavement parking prohibitions through traffic regulation orders, as well as prescribed traffic signs and bay markings. It is also the case that waiting restrictions such as yellow lines can apply to pavements as well as to the carriageway.

The Transport Committee reported on pavement parking in September 2019, with the key recommendation that the Government bring forward proposals to reform the TRO process to make it cheaper and easier for local authorities to use. Having seen it myself, I know that the process clearly needs reform. The Committee also recommended that the Government consult on a new civilly enforceable offence of obstructive pavement parking, and that we legislate across England, outside London, to address this issue more broadly.

Although successive Governments have recognised that there is no perfect solution to this difficult problem, the Government believed in 2020 that it was time to look again at the issue in detail. I am delighted to say that we had over 15,000 responses to the consultation, and each respondent was given the chance to answer up to 15 questions, providing tens of thousands of pieces of feedback and information, all of which needed to be read and analysed. Although I do not think I can please the hon. Gentleman as much as I would like by saying that we will imminently publish our formal response to the consultation, it is a very real and complex problem that we are looking to address at the earliest opportunity. I am actively working on this inside the Department.

At the moment, there are inherent dangers for all pedestrians from pavement parking, including being forced on to the carriageway. This is an issue faced by many disabled people, particularly those using motorised chairs when there are no dropped kerbs, resulting in further damage to pavements, which is a trip hazard. Maintenance is also a burden for local authorities and local taxpayers.

It also needs to be recognised that many towns and cities like ours were not designed to accommodate today's traffic levels, or indeed cars per se. In some locations, particularly our narrower terraced streets, the pavement is the only place to park without obstructing the carriageway and so allow the free flow of traffic, including for emergency services.

All the measures on which we consulted have challenges in respect of efficacy and deliverability, and we want to take the right steps for future policy. Existing legislation allows local authorities to introduce TROs to manage traffic, and it allows them the freedom to decide what they wish to do at a local level. As the hon. Gentleman said, however, the process is time-consuming and burdensome. We recognise that it has to be reformed, as it is hugely important, and the Department is committed to doing that.

Removing bureaucracy and digitalising a costly, paper-based system is desperately needed to help speed up applications and the process more broadly. This will

make it quicker and cheaper for local authorities to implement TROs. We need to reduce the average wait time of six months, which is far too burdensome and bureaucratic. At the moment it takes 12 weeks even for temporary TROs. We estimate that this could easily be reduced by a third, with resultant savings in both administrative costs and time. Digitalised TROs will also provide accurate digital data on how our roads operate, which will be needed to support autonomous vehicles in the longer term, and they will help to provide accurate information to road users in the shorter term. We are actively looking at this at the moment.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton also mentioned the second recommendation on the offence of unnecessary obstruction of the road. I agree with him and other hon. Members that this is a broad and not well understood area of law. The offence includes the carriageway, verges and pavement, and it already exists as a criminal offence. We could amend the regulations to make unnecessary obstruction of the pavement enforceable by local authorities, while leaving obstruction of the carriageway as a criminal matter. That would enable civil enforcement officers to address instances of unnecessarily obstructive pavement parking, as and when they find it. Enforcement against this offence would be more targeted than a general prohibition of pavement parking. This would allow egregious cases to be addressed while not penalising motorists where pavement parking is the only option, and where it is safe for pedestrians and other road users. This could be implemented relatively quickly, as it would require only secondary legislation. Through this approach, pavement parking would not become a general offence, so local authorities would not need to conduct costly and time-consuming audits of their road networks, nor would it be necessary to place traffic signs and bay markings to indicate where pavement parking was still permitted.

However, there is a challenge with this option. Parking offences currently subject to local authority civil enforcement are violations of clearly defined restrictions indicated by traffic signs and road markings, such as yellow lines or white bay markings. By contrast, unnecessary obstruction could not be indicated by traffic signs or bay markings, as "obstruction" is a general offence that may occur anywhere. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, "unnecessary obstruction" is also difficult to define. It would require case-by-case assessment and the Department would likely need to issue properly extensive guidance to steer local authorities in the right way as to what might be deemed unnecessary obstruction, in order to prevent inappropriate and inconsistent enforcement. Any such inconsistency would also ensure that our mailbags were overflowing with correspondence from people rightly concerned about that issue.

The third option, which we have also consulted on, is a national prohibition, extending the London arrangements to the rest of the country or making local authorities able to implement this as they see fit. That option would establish a general rule against pavement parking except where there is a specific permission of a local authority, or vice versa. I think we would all agree that motorists would also benefit from a consistent rule in this space. That option would need a significant implementation period. Furthermore, it would require primary legislation, as the hon. Gentleman noted. Local authorities would need to audit their road networks to decide where

[Mr Holden]

pavement parking remained necessary, implement the necessary exemptions, and place traffic signs and bay markings to indicate all the places where pavement parking was to be permitted—or vice-versa, depending on which route we went down.

Consideration also needs to be given to whether it would be disproportionate to ban pavement parking across the whole country. For example, in rural areas the scale of the road network would mean that the costs of implementing a national ban in this way would be higher, while the issues caused by pavement parking are often likely to be lower, especially on verges in some rural communities. This is a complex area and it is only right that we are thorough in taking our time to consider it.

Liz Twist: The Minister has explained clearly the difficulties with different schemes. Are the Government intending to come forward with any proposals to help my constituents and others who have the difficulties in coping with pavement parking?

Mr Holden: The hon. Lady rightly presses me on this point. There are things I am actively considering in this area, and these are interim steps. Primary legislation is a long-term aim in this area, but there are certainly things we can do in the interim and things I hope to bring forward in the not-too-distant future.

Overall, local authorities are clearly in the best position to decide where pavement parking should or should not be permitted in their local areas, especially outside London, which is an urban conurbation. It is the Department's role to ensure they have appropriate and effective tools to prohibit pavement parking where desired. I am fully aware that the Department's response to the consultation is eagerly awaited, as has been made clear by hon. Members today. Although I cannot pre-empt publication of the Department's consultation response, I am actively working on this, not just on the primary legislation, but on other measures that could be put in place in the interim period. All the options have challenges in respect of efficacy and deliverability, and it is our job to weigh up all of that and take the right steps forward. We are working through the options and the possible legislative opportunities for delivering them, and as soon as those matters are certain, we will publish the formal response. Although I cannot say this evening exactly when that will be, and I am sorry to let the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton and others down on that, I assure them that this matter is receiving our full consideration. It is a priority for us and we are aiming to publish as soon as is practically possible.

Question put and agreed to.

11.23 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 13 March 2023

[GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

Suicide Prevention and the National Curriculum

4.30 pm

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 623390, relating to suicide prevention and the national curriculum.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. First, I thank the petitioners—the 3 Dads Walking—for their brilliant campaign; I know that they are here today. I also thank Papyrus, the charity leading the prevention of young suicide in the UK, for its work and the support it has given to 3 Dads Walking. This is something that those dads never thought they would be involved with, or even want to be, but sadly, each of them, along with their families, has suffered immensely through the loss of their daughters. If anything good can come out of three such tragedies, we in this place must do all we can to help.

I will speak about the three dads and their daughters. First, there is Tim and his daughter Emily from Norfolk. Emily was 19 and took her life in March 2020. She was the life and soul of every room, meeting and party—a free spirit and a talented artist. She had struggled for some time and a late diagnosis of autism had not helped. She could not cope with life under lockdown and attempted to take her life. She sadly died five days later.

Secondly, there is Andy and his daughter Sophie from Cumbria. Sophie took her life just before Christmas 2018. She was 29. She was an open, happy young lady with a wide circle of friends. She brought a smile and a sense of fun to everyone she met. No one had an inkling that she was feeling suicidal—everyone said,

“she seemed like ‘normal’ Sophie.”

If she had felt able to share her emotions, everyone would have helped, but sadly, she did not.

Thirdly, there is Mike and his daughter Beth from south Manchester. Beth was 17 and she died in March 2020. She was a leader, including being the head girl at her primary school. She was outgoing, independent and an artist with a record contract. Her dad Mike says:

“Not one single person...saw this coming.”

If she had only known about the many charities, maybe she would still be alive. Those are three tragic stories and three brave dads.

Those three brave dads came together to set off on walks to raise more than £1 million for Papyrus and its HopelineUK helpline and text service, which provide much-needed support for our young people. More importantly, they have raised awareness of a subject that sadly affects many families across the country.

I am fortunate to be able to stand and lead debates in this place, and I hope that many are watching. When leading such debates, I like to not only ask the Government what the petitioners have requested, which I will come

on to, but speak directly to the public. Hopefully, I can pass on information that I have learned in my research and in my position as a Member of Parliament. I will therefore start by sharing some guidance on talking about this subject.

The first message is never to say “commit” when speaking of suicide. That is an out-of-date term for people taking their own lives, and one that we should refrain from using. People do not commit a crime when they take their own life. They are obviously in a place of deep unhappiness, and their memory should not be tarnished by poor language. They took their own life or they died by suicide. Let us all try to remember that today.

There are many great charities working hard to end suicide. As well as Papyrus, there are the Samaritans, James’ Place, Mind, the Campaign Against Living Miserably, Mates in Mind, Baton of Hope and many others that do great work in this field. We should pay tribute to them all in this place.

Helpfully, Samaritans has produced some basic rules for discussing or reporting suicide, and we should all take note. The rules include: not reporting the method or sensationalising the act; not referring to a site or a location; and avoiding an excessive amount of coverage and/or speculation in the media or on social media. Those are really helpful tips that might just prevent someone from taking their life. I recommend the information on the Samaritans website and also its excellent Small Talk Saves Lives campaign.

Let me now look at what Andy, Tim and Mike, Papyrus and the 160,000 people who signed the petition are asking for. It is to ensure that suicide and self-harm awareness is included in the national curriculum, specifically in the relationship, sex and health education curriculum, and that it should be age appropriate. Obviously, all three dads have a specific interest because they have each suffered their own individual tragic loss. However, their main aim is to help other families and young people, and to stop the biggest single killer of our young people.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for giving way and he is making a very important speech about this subject, which is not talked about often enough. Some of my constituents get in touch with me about their son, Peter, who sadly took his own life in 2012. They are clear that there has to be more information about suicide and suicide prevention in schools. I know that Scotland has a different curriculum to England, but this is something that we can work on on a cross-party basis to achieve across the UK.

Nick Fletcher: I thank the hon. Member for her intervention and I offer my condolences to Peter’s family. As she said, this greater awareness is something that we want across the entire UK.

As I was saying, suicide is the single biggest killer of young people in Britain. The figures are very difficult to swallow. The latest statistics from the Office for National Statistics show that between April 2020 and March 2021 157 young boys and 72 young girls between the ages of 10 and 19 took their own life. That cannot be right, can it?

[Nick Fletcher]

At least until my time in this place began, I was one of the many people who thought that talking about self-harm and suicide was not a good idea; I thought that putting thoughts into young people's minds by discussing the issue openly would only make things worse. However, the many professionals and charities I have spoken to disagree, and a literature review conducted by Cambridge University showed that there is no research to prove that that idea about putting thoughts into young people's minds about suicide was true. Children are exposed to so much on their phones that they need the tools to help them to deal with the subject. An appropriate curriculum, taught well, could do just that. However, we also need to think and act maturely and responsibly on this issue. If we find that, by discussing this issue, an unintended consequence is that suicide rates among young people increase, we must be prepared to think again.

The professionals who I have spoken to are all agreed that this subject should be included in the curriculum. They also agreed that year 7 and upwards was the best time to start. Furthermore, they agreed that it should not be discussed just in one year of secondary school, which I believe some schools already do, but should form part of each academic year for 11 to 12-year-olds upwards. For those children who are younger, this subject should not necessarily be broached. However, the message to them should be that they have the right to be, and to feel, safe. There should be no secrets and nothing should be kept from parents, on this matter or any other.

The professionals said that ideally this subject should be taught by external providers who are specialists in it and that after each session there should be a follow-up session to talk to any children who are concerned. They also said that both parents and teachers should be trained in how to deal with children who were struggling; in how to better spot any signs that something might be wrong; and in being proactive in starting conversations. We cannot place the responsibility on the shoulders of our young boys and girls to come forward and talk. It is our responsibility—in fact, our duty—to keep our eyes and ears open at all times. Mental health first aid training might be one way of achieving that.

I have concerns about bringing external providers into schools, as I have seen some highly inappropriate content on other subjects within RSHE, and parents are kept in the dark about what is being taught. If we are to use such providers, the content must be shared with parents. If a parent has concerns, their voice should be respected. I am sure the Government will take that on board.

Last week, I was delighted to receive a letter for the 3 Dads and I from the Secretary of State for Education. It said that the Government will include suicide prevention as a key priority area in their forthcoming review of RSHE. I greatly welcome that move; it is a real step forward. I am hopeful of a good debate today where we all have one aim: stopping our children and young people taking their own lives. Their lives are so precious. As a dad, my children are my life and my greatest joy; I cannot think of anything worse than losing them.

I ask the Minister to do what we can to stop this. The Government are good, and they can—and do—do good things. Let this be the next good thing they do.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): I ask hon. Members to stand if you want to speak, even if you have written in. If you have not written in, please stand. It will give you and me an idea of how to proportion the time during the debate.

4.41 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I thank the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for introducing the debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee.

Most of all, I thank the 3 Dads Walking for everything they have done to raise awareness of suicide in young people. I have had the pleasure of meeting Mike, Andy and Tim. I am delighted that their petition has led to this debate being brought forward, with 160,000 signatures. That is truly amazing. There could not be a more fitting tribute to the lives of Beth, Sophie and Emily than the passion and dedication that their dads have shown. I also thank Papyrus for its support to the 3 Dads and for all its work to tackle young suicides.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on suicide and self-harm prevention, it has been an honour to meet so many inspiring people who, having lost a loved one to suicide, have dedicated so much time and energy to ensuring that other families do not have to go through the same thing. The 3 Dads is the club that no one wants to join, as they say. However, many people who have found themselves in it have carried out brilliant work in the face of great adversity. The Government must do everything they can to match their efforts.

Unfortunately, the issue is touching more and more families. Suicide has recently become the biggest killer of young people under 25. It is estimated that in an average week, four schoolchildren will take their own lives. Although young men are three times more likely to take their own lives than their female peers, the suicide rate for young women is now at its highest on record. We are getting better at tackling the stigma and talking about mental health, but suicide and self-harm is still a taboo subject. As we have heard, people are worried that by talking about suicide, they may say the wrong thing—or worse, encourage it. That is a particular fear when talking to children and young people about suicide.

Sadly, this issue is already in the lives of so many young people, as demonstrated by work carried out on online harms. In a recent Samaritans study with over 5,000 participants, over three quarters of them said they first saw self-harm content online before the age of 14. Several studies have suggested an association between suicidal ideation and accessing relevant content online. Better online safeguards are a must, but we must also equip our young people with the skills and knowledge to deal with the unique pressures that they currently face.

It has been my pleasure to work with the local organisation If U Care Share, which has been delivering suicide prevention workshops to school pupils across the north-east for over 10 years. The charity was founded by the family of Daniel O'Hare, who was just 19 when he took his own life in 2005. Its dedicated team, which includes Daniel's brother Matthew, is primarily made up of young people who have lost a loved one to suicide.

The team speak to primary and secondary school children about their own stories, and how the children can be open about their emotions and mental health. Research carried out by the charity found that 19% of young people would go to a friend if they needed help, compared to just 6% who would approach someone at their school.

Suicide prevention training equips pupils with the skills and confidence to help each other as well as themselves. If U Care Share is one of many fantastic voluntary organisations that are working with young people to prevent suicide, but currently those organisations are picking up the pieces left over from the incapacity of statutory services. They often rely on short-term grants to carry out their vital work.

I am delighted to be able to say that If U Care Share has just been awarded funding from the National Lottery to support its suicide bereavement multiple death response programme over four years. Multiple deaths refers to a situation where more deaths occur by suicide than is normally expected at a certain time or place—or both. That can sometimes be as a result of contagion, whereby one person's suicide influences another to engage in suicidal behaviour. Such suicide clusters are a rare event, but schools can be a setting in which they occur.

We must do more to ensure that suicide prevention work is placed on a stable footing. Currently, all funding supporting local areas' core prevention plans is set to cease in 2023-24. We need continued ring-fenced funding across three years to support local areas to deliver targeted, non-clinical support services to prevent suicide. That would allow local authorities to commission long-term services from our best organisations, and empower them to support the most at-risk groups.

We must also do more to ensure that children are able to access help when they reach out for it. NHS figures show that children suffering mental health crises spent more than 900,000 hours in A&E last year. Between July 2021 and July 2022, referrals to child and adolescent mental health services increased by 24%. It is still important that we work to prevent suicidal ideation in young people, and promote mental wellbeing. It is also important that we ensure there are systems in place to support them in the most acute crises.

Making suicide prevention an essential part of the curriculum is another step towards ensuring that statutory, long-term support is in place for our young people whenever they may need it. But it must be backed up by the funding to ensure that all school pupils are able to access those life-saving workshops, such as those delivered by If U Care Share, and many other organisations. It must take the form of sensitive and thought-out content, delivered by people with the experience to make it count. Crucially, it must be built in as part of the curriculum, as the petitioners request, so that every student is supported.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for her excellent speech, and particularly for the work she is doing as part of the APPG. On the comment that this is a cross-party issue, it has been mentioned that suicide sadly affects many families across the UK. My family is one of those, following the tragic suicide of my brother. Recently, I launched a campaign to have 100 people on Anglesey trained in mental health first aid. Does the hon. Member agree with me that it is absolutely vital that we talk about mental health, particularly

with our young people, so we can give them the tools to speak about it and signpost them to the many fantastic organisations and charities that are there to support?

Liz Twist: I thank the hon. Member for that intervention, and I offer my condolences to her on the loss of her brother. I, too, have been affected by suicide, so have personal experience of that and know how important it is to share. I certainly agree that it is vital that people talk more about suicide, and about having difficult suicidal thoughts as well. We want to prevent suicide, rather than see it continue. I thank her for that.

To conclude, I want to share a message from Daniel's family, who often say,

"We taught Daniel to tie his shoe laces, and how to cross the road safely—but we never spoke to him about how life can throw things at you that you need some help to deal with. It is not a sign of weakness to reach out for help."

Just like Daniel's family, our schools teach our young people all about road awareness, online safety and many other vital lessons necessary to keep them safe, but today one of the things that is most likely to take the lives of our young people is our young people themselves. By talking more openly about suicide, we can save more young lives and prevent families like Daniel's, Beth's, Sophie's and Emily's from going through unimaginable pain.

4.50 pm

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) on his excellent and powerful opening speech. I am humbled to follow the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist), who does excellent work in the all-party group.

The debate is one we all wish was not necessary. Sadly, it is, but I am relieved that we have a thoughtful and compassionate Minister in place who I know will look at the issue in great detail, as he does so many things, and will try to come to a speedy decision for the benefit of everyone. I had not met them before the debate, but I pay tribute to 3 Dads Walking, who have done a phenomenal amount to raise awareness. We can all agree that that is something that no parent ever wants to do, but they have powerfully put across that personal story. I pay tribute to Papyrus, which continues to campaign on the prevention of young suicide, and other national and local charities that continue to support those with suicidal tendencies and the family members who have been left behind.

As local MPs, we are often approached by constituents with some of the most tragic and challenging circumstances, and we do our utmost to support them and provide the right advice. However, being approached by a parent whose child has taken their own life is utterly heartbreaking, and I suspect it leaves most of us struggling to find the right words of advice and support. I am sorry to say that I have learned of too many suicides in and around my constituency. Each and every one is a tragedy. Each and every one is a person with a unique story. Each and every one is a life taken too soon.

Nationally, the statistics speak for themselves. In 2021—the last date available—5,583 people took their own life, three quarters of whom were men. While there

[Tracey Crouch]

is a specific concern about middle-aged men, we are seeing a worrying increase in the number of school-aged children taking their life, with figures suggesting over 200 a year. That could and should be reduced through better institutional and individual awareness, as well as a better functioning mental health support system.

Today I want to focus on two recent lost lives, and I do so with permission from their parents. I thank them for having the courage and strength to share their experiences with me and, importantly, their thoughts on what steps are necessary to potentially prevent other parents and loved ones from experiencing the loss of a child. In both cases, they were boys at secondary school.

It was just over a year ago that Ryan's body was found. He had gone missing from his home in Eccles, a small close-knit village that neighbours my own. I found myself quite affected by Ryan's disappearance. He had a connection to my son's football club, and the CCTV footage of Ryan on the night he went missing was from my street. I quietly joined others in looking for Ryan and found myself doing regular walks along the river when it became clear that that was where the police were focusing their efforts.

Ryan's disappearance and subsequent recovery was absolutely heartbreaking for Eccles and Aylesford. I know his school well. I know of his friends and I know his teachers. I confess that, when his dad emailed me, I did not know what to say. What do you say? What would I want someone to say to me? Ryan was 17, and it turns out that he had made a passing comment at school. Although there is certainly no blame cast, with better awareness could something have been done? Ryan's dad said:

"Whilst we will never know why Ryan did what he did, and we will also never know if having suicide spoken about openly at school might have saved him, we are keen to see suicide awareness and prevention in schools progress. If it saves just one person now and again it will be worth it".

Ben Ambrose was 15 when his mum, Cathryn, found him lifeless in his bedroom. There is currently a legal case regarding Ben, so I should be careful what I say, but Cathryn felt and still feels very let down by the institutional failures in education and mental health services. We met and spoke for a very long time about the deep lack of awareness and understanding of mental health issues in some schools, and how their policies and procedures on paper do not necessarily reflect their practices. In my eyes, Cathryn is a phenomenal woman. She is not only fighting for Ben, with support from Irwin Mitchell, but she wants to help stop this happening to others. She is very pro suicide education and awareness, and like me wants there to be more conversations in schools about it. She wants to talk to students about mental health; she wants to be part of the prevention programme.

Cathryn is not alone. Pre covid, I was on the cusp of trialling a few talking sessions in schools with boys about mental health. The idea had come from a question and answer session at a local boys' school, where mental health was mentioned more than once. It also came from another mum who lost her adult son to suicide, and, coincidentally, from a man who, having experienced his own brush with suicidal thought, was keen to talk to others, particularly young boys, about mental health.

Covid scuppered it all, and the plans have not been revived, in part because it is scary to go and talk about these things without qualifications and proper guidance. I get why schools might be nervous about having conversations, and why Ministers might be nervous about allowing them to be had, but by working with the right people in the right way, we can create a useful tool that would work.

Sadly, as I am discovering, there is no definitive parenting manual out there. There is no guidebook that tells a parent how to react—or, indeed, how not to react—when their child is struggling with mental health, or starts to self-harm or look at harmful websites. The natural reaction might not be the right reaction. That is why I truly believe that we all need better awareness and much more access to support for mental health, whether it is our own, our friends' or, most worryingly, our children's.

In our formative years, because of the amount of time children spend in education, teachers become incredibly important figures in our lives. I understand why some have concerns that we are asking our educators to do so much more than teach maths, English, science and so on, but if we are to take a more holistic approach to addressing mental health, they need the right tools and training. If targeted interventions and teaching at the right age can help people identify mental health conditions and suicide thoughts they or others are experiencing, could that help those suffering there and then or later in life?

I will leave the final words to Ryan's dad:

"The devastating and lasting effect that this has had on everybody is very difficult to compare to other bereavement we have experienced. One minute our happy and brilliant son is with us and in the blink of an eye he has gone."

I know the Minister understands how difficult it would have been to write those words; they are hard to speak and hard to hear. If there is one thing that the tragedies of Ryan, Ben, Emily, Sophie, Beth and many others have sparked, it is an awareness of suicide and mental health among their peers and teachers, but we need that to remain long after their friends have left school. That is why I support the petition to put suicide prevention on the national curriculum. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

4.59 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): As ever, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I thank the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for bringing this petition to us.

My constituent Mike Palmer's daughter, Beth, died by suicide on 28 March 2020, in the first week of lockdown. She was just 17. She was a talented singer, with a vivacious personality. She was deeply loved by friends and family—a great character who belonged on stage. Indeed, Beth was the last person anyone would have thought would take her own life. She had so much to live for. Sadly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist), the chair of the APPG, said, this is far too common: suicide is the biggest killer of under-35s in the UK, with around 200 school children each year taking their own lives.

Mike felt Beth's loss so acutely that he was plunged into a suicidal spiral himself. A complex grief is left behind for families. The facts show that around 135 people

are affected by one suicide and that those closest to the individual lost are 80% to 300% times more likely to take their own lives. However, through that despair, fate was to play a part. Mike was to team up with Tim and Andy, the fathers of two other beautiful young women, Emily and Sophie, who were also sadly lost to suicide, and so 3 Dads Walking was born.

For these men, a simple walk between their homes, raising funds and awareness for the charity Papyrus, which is dedicated to the prevention of young suicide, has turned into a life mission to prevent other families from going through the same lifelong agony that they face. Walking in 2021 and 2022, they covered over 900 miles and were on the road for 46 days. During the walks, Mike, Andy and Tim were joined continuously by other bereaved parents and those affected by suicide. Through conversations with those individuals, the same messages kept coming through: if our children had only known how to reach out, and had had an awareness of how to keep themselves safe, they might be here now. 3 Dads Walking believes that, if our young people's greatest danger is themselves, we as a society should tell them and teach them, in an age-appropriate and sensitive way, how to keep themselves and others safe.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): I put on record that many of my constituents in Weaver Vale have been inspired by 3 Dads Walking, and the clarion call to ensure that suicide prevention is integrated into the curriculum and that there is greater regulation. The call for greater regulation of online harm has come from my constituents who have been affected by suicide in their family.

Mike Kane: I thank my colleague for his intervention. I am sure that the Education Minister will have heard that fully. I know the Minister to be an extraordinarily honourable man who takes the education of our children seriously, as I previously shadowed him in the post for a number of years.

We should talk about mental health in schools more, building the awareness and coping mechanisms that will foster more positive mental wellbeing and resilience in young people and helping to lay the foundations that will keep young people safe and reverse the tragically high rates of young suicide. Mike tells me that some of the most powerful stories that the 3 Dads hear on their walks are from those who have experienced severe mental health episodes, and in some cases have attempted suicide, but who have overcome those struggles and are now living happily, with full lives. Those stories show that hope is always possible and that people, especially with support, can make different choices and overcome the worst mental health struggles. Is an alternative outcome for families affected by suicide not worth fighting for? Surely the testimonies starkly demonstrate what is at stake if we do not act and what we can offer if we do. By providing life-saving knowledge to our young people, we can give them and their families an alternative path—a path to hope, a path to a happy and full life for them and their loved ones. That is a path that everyone deserves.

5.4 pm

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): It is indeed a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher)

for introducing the debate, and the petitioners, the 3 Dads over there in the Public Gallery—Andy, Tim and Mike—who are doing a fantastic job.

I also thank my good friend, Graham Lynk, who is sat in the Public Gallery. He lost his son, Sean, to suicide in December last year. Graham is a brave man. He is a hard man and a gentleman. Like me, he is an ex-coal miner—we have done many a shift down the pit together. He is one of the bravest men I have come across in my life, but the loss of his son has broken him.

Sean Lynk was a brilliant young man. He was 30 years old when he took his life. He was a big, strong, confident, good-looking lad. He was a handsome man; he had his mother's looks—and his mother's brains, I think, Graham. He was a lovely young man. When he walked into a room, he lit it up. Everyone wanted to be around him. Everybody liked Sean.

We all loved Sean. I was drinking with him in the Dog House pub just a week before he took his own life. I never saw it coming. He was such a lovely young man; his death shocked the whole community and left many of us asking why. I would sit with him at weekends with his mum and dad, swapping old stories about our mining days. Sean would be sat there laughing and giggling with us. We never knew; he must have been in pain. On the face of it, he was a happy man. He was a good footballer and loved his sports. He loved his family and friends. He always surrounded himself with great, loving people. There were no signs, but something must have been wrong.

Sean's dad, Graham, believes that Sean was using the dark web and looking at things that he probably should not have looked at. He was tapping into this dark, horrible web, which was giving him dark thoughts. But who knows? The police still have Sean's phone, so we are yet to get to the bottom of that. I know the internet can be a dangerous place and can target people with the algorithms and do some horrible stuff—it can target vulnerable people. I am glad that the Online Safety Bill is going some way to address that, but we need to go further.

I thank the charities and support groups that are helping young people who have dark thoughts. In my patch, we have a charity called Enlighten the Shadows, which was set up by a young man called Rory Green, who had some dark thoughts himself. He and his partner lost their baby through a miscarriage. He felt hopeless and worthless—he felt like ending it all. He was in a really bad, dark and horrible place, but he got through it and he set up a support group online through Facebook and social media, and it had a website. He was absolutely astounded by the number of young men contacting him who had dark thoughts and suicidal thoughts. He reached out and got some other people on board, and he talked to men on a regular basis. He tells me that they have probably saved about 100 lives so far just through men talking to men. I know it is a big problem with young ladies and schoolgirls too, but the vast majority of suicides I have come across have been young men. There is no rhyme or reason for it.

Keeping quiet is not an option. People have to talk about this. It is all well and good telling people that they must talk, but they have to have somebody to talk to. At the moment, it can be very difficult for people from poorer families in more deprived areas, because a lot come from broken families so they do not always have

[Lee Anderson]

great family support and people to talk to. Make no mistake, this is an epidemic, but it is not a means-tested epidemic. It does not matter whether a person is rich or poor, whether they are successful or unsuccessful, whether they come from a council estate or a country estate. It goes for anybody; it can affect anybody in any walk of life. I give a big shout-out for Rory and his group for doing that great work.

Probably everybody in the Chamber has been affected by suicide—my family has—but we do not talk about it. I travelled down with Graham this morning, and we had a long conversation. We MPs do not see inside our friends' heads, and what goes on in their minds. Graham goes to bed every night and thinks about his son, but he thinks about his son with a rope around his neck—that is what goes through his mind. I cannot get my head around that: for a man to watch a little boy grow up from a baby, be his pride and joy, and then take his life in that way. Graham feels broken, he probably feels guilty, and he feels hopeless. I am here today to tell Graham that he is none of those things. He is not guilty and he is not hopeless. Graham is working with the Enlighten the Shadows suicide charity, and he is going to raise thousands of pounds for it. He is going to cycle 1,000 miles in 10 days, and he is doing some running as well. He has the support of the whole community. Graham wholeheartedly supports the idea of putting suicide prevention on the school curriculum, helping people and getting people to talk to save some lives.

I ask the Minister to please look at the families in the Public Gallery. They are broken people. We need to see less of those families coming to this place. We need to intervene, we need to get this subject on the school curriculum and we need to save lives.

5.11 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is humbling to be called to speak in today's debate. Every step breaks taboos; every mile tells a story; every day hearts are joined in grief and healing as sons and daughters are mourned and celebrated. But the void they have left is beckoning with not only questions but answers. As three dads are traversing our nation, they are tearing down the stigma of suicide that too many are wrestling with. They are creating safe spaces to talk; they are ensuring that Sophie, Emily and Beth are heard. They have brought us to this place, through their petition to seek change.

Andy, Tim and Mike, we are indebted to you. Today, it is their pleas that must be heard, and I sincerely thank them for all they are doing. Having had the privilege of meeting them last week, I know how much this debate means to them. I am sure that the Minister and shadow Minister will not only listen, but advance their calls. Their mission is to reduce the number of young people who take their own lives, by shattering the stigma surrounding suicide and equipping young people and their communities with the skills to recognise and respond to emotional distress. Across our nation, people are struggling with their mental health. Let us be honest, we all do, in different ways and at different times. For some, the night passes quickly, while others spiral into a dark and enduring place, where the echoes of despair resonate louder than any hope.

Papyrus knows better than any charity the scale of the problem, and I sincerely thank them for their work. Our mental health services cannot cope. Child and adolescent mental health services are struggling, and with mental health receiving just 8.6% of the health budget, there is no parity of esteem to speak of. We know that with early intervention only a few would ever need to call on the NHS for care. That is the call that must come out of this debate. Young people talk extensively about mental health, but when the moment gets hard—in the silences—it is the toxicity of TikTok that is sucking them into the algorithms of despair, drawing them to make the wrong choices. From self-harm to suicide, children are accessing content that takes them down some very dangerous paths. As adults, parents, teachers, youth workers and politicians, let us acknowledge that, and take the necessary steps to keep our young people safe.

As we have heard, suicide is the biggest killer of under-35s in our country, with over 200 school-age children taken every year.

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for giving way, and my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for bringing forward this very important debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) was saying, the internet has some dark places. Surely, in schools we must be warning about online harms, and we must also make those platforms take more responsibility. I welcome the Online Harms Bill, but should we not also be addressing the platforms on this?

Rachael Maskell: The hon. Member is absolutely right that the online space continues to be unsafe for too many people. There is so much more that needs to be done to aid our understanding of new initiatives online and to ensure that everyone can be safe online at all times.

Of course, we are not talking about numbers, but about people who are struggling. According to the ONS, 5,583 suicides were registered in England and Wales just last year, with a ratio of men to women of almost 2:1. It is the young people we often think about. They need the skills and resilience to manage the very worst of their emotions. We know that talking is powerful, but, without young people knowing who to talk to and how to talk to them, and without parents and teachers actively reaching out, we are leaving our young people in danger. We need a greater therapeutic approach to our education system. We locked up our young people through covid, which proved tougher than anyone could have imagined. A generation is really struggling. They do not need brutal academic stress and harsh disciplinarian regimes, such as those that I discussed this morning at a local school in York. The behaviour in schools guidance needs serious revision.

The need for talking is there before us. Who can help young people to work through their anxieties, stresses and depression? They need space to explore and explain. Mums and dads need tools and skills to support and listen. Teachers need help too; they need training to talk about suicide. We cannot shy away or soften the words, for suicide is real. Adults need to catch up with young people and recognise that. As politicians, we cannot be squeamish or in denial, because we are losing our sons and daughters, and sadly mums and dads, too.

Life is really tough. People have not got enough money, and home is not always a safe place. Some young people carry a heavy weight. Life never turns out as we hope. Bullying is rife, there is a loneliness epidemic, and toxic social media is ever judging and tormenting, yet we do not talk about suicide and when that starts to play on the minds of its victims.

Minister, it is time to teach and time to talk to every child in every school. We start with the teachers, who need Government backing. We need every teacher trained so that they are ready to talk to their students, whatever age or context, knowing how to check in and reach out as well as guide and care. Every school needs to be a safe place for parents to learn and ask those questions that are never aired, for we can no longer hear the cries of “Why didn’t anyone tell us?”. We must also teach every child. For younger children, it is about mental health first aid—having safe conversations when they feel sad. As the years grow, children need to know who to talk to, how to talk and how to keep themselves safe. If we do not talk to our young people about suicide, it will find them. But if they are taught resilience, they will have the skills for life that they need to stay safe and well.

The pilgrimage of Tim, Andy and Mike has brought them to this place, to the Minister’s door. They are not here to beg or plead, because for them, this has come too late. Instead, they are here to tell us what it means to lose their beautiful daughters and how the tears of other parents need never be shed. This will probably be the most important debate of the Minister’s time in this place. It is time to open the door to open minds and open hearts. Let us listen and learn and ensure that all is done to keep our young people safe. It is time for walking to turn into talking.

5.19 pm

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for bringing and leading such an important debate on the introduction of statutory suicide prevention teaching in our current RSHE curriculum. There have been many powerful contributions this afternoon, but none more powerful than having 3 Dads Walking actually with us in this Chamber. I also thank Mike, Tim and Andy for their incredible work on this campaign. Mr Owen is a fellow Norfolk man, although not from my constituency, so it is a great privilege to represent our county for him this afternoon, along with my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild) beside me. Their efforts have clearly not gone unnoticed, and they will have a huge and significant impact on children and young people in future.

I thank those in my constituency, particularly the many mental health campaigners who I speak to, and Caroline Aldridge, who I know will watch the debate. She lost her own son to mental illness and she has done so much for others. I have also spoken to many others who have told me about their personal experiences and the tragedy of losing a child to suicide. I am honoured to participate in the debate on their behalf.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to 3 Dads Walking, including Tim, who is from west Norfolk. They have raised money and, vitally, raised awareness of the issue and of the

support that exists by getting us talking about it today. The Government have rightly committed to a review, which I welcome and which I know the Minister will consider carefully. Does my hon. Friend agree that it should hear directly from 3 Dads Walking and others who have been directly affected by suicide to inform its decision?

Duncan Baker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and I agree entirely. It is imperative that those with personal experience help to shape any future review and legislation that comes forward about the issue.

Mental health and mental health illness is a personal yet often isolating journey, despite the increased openness of conversation on that issue, which affects one in four of us throughout our lifetimes. Early intervention can make an astounding difference to the lives of those suffering, especially children and young people. When researching for this debate, I was devastated to learn that one in six children aged five to 16 were identified as having a probable mental health problem in July 2020. That number is likely to have risen since.

A survey by YoungMinds found that suicide rates for young people aged 15 to 19 rose by a third between 2020 and 2021—from 147 to 198. Despite those staggering figures, about 70% of children and adolescents do not get appropriate interventions at an early enough age, which begs the question of how we can begin to overcome that.

As many hon. Members have said, one of the answers is to implement this change in our national curriculum. Since September 2020, RSHE has been a statutory part of the curriculum, yet suicide prevention, taught in a safe and age-appropriate way, is only optional. I am pleased that the Government, too, see the incredible value in supporting mental health, but I believe that a review of the RHSE curriculum is the right step to provide consistent mental health support across all schools nationally. Introducing statutory suicide prevention teaching in schools would not only target the group most affected by suicide—the under-35s, as we have heard many times this afternoon—but make sure that our children and young people are equipped as they move into adulthood.

According to research, one in three mental health problems in adults can be attributed to childhood experiences, with higher rates of depression, suicidal thoughts and anxiety disorders presenting in later life. Educating our children on mental health will surely only serve to benefit them later. Moreover, mental health teaching within structured school lessons will have incredible benefits through early intervention to prevent suicide, normalise mental health, as many have said, and encourage conversations with support systems, whether that be parents, teachers or external agencies such as Mind or Papyrus.

Furthermore, where better to start following Papyrus’s three key principles—support, equip and influence—than in the classroom? Teaching, of course, should be preventive, and extra care should be taken to signpost a source of support. Promoting positive mental health in schools, however, and putting in place support, including by working with external bodies, is a positive way forward. I have always believed that schools should have trained mental health first aiders within their staff, because the suicide figures that we are seeing today and have spoken

[Duncan Baker]

about are too high. The wider support is there to provide suicide prevention teaching in schools, and I think this should be considered for implementation.

To conclude, supplying consistent mental health teaching across all schools nationally is a necessity. Although the Government have in the past said that they will be taking forward proposals to train designated senior leads for mental health in schools by 2025 and to fund mental health awareness training, the review of the RSHE curriculum to include suicide prevention should continue to be a priority for the Government. I think it should be brought in as quickly as possible.

5.25 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) on introducing the debate, but I pay particular tribute to Andy Airey, Mike Palmer and Tim Owen, whom we know collectively as 3 Dads Walking. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) summed it up brilliantly: there could be no greater tribute to your beautiful girls than the work you are doing in raising awareness, in fundraising and in getting this petition. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) that the Minister will probably not attend a more important debate in his career. We have already heard personal stories of people who have been affected by suicide, and I think we will be hearing more as the debate proceeds.

I fully support the proposals set out in the petition to make suicide prevention a compulsory part of the school curriculum. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central also made such an important point about converting walking to talking. I think we should bottle that phrase; it sums up where we need to go.

We know that 90% of suicides are associated with mental health issues but that 75% of people who take their own life had no prior contact with mental health services, so the earlier that children and young people are aware of and understand their feelings, but also where to access mental health services when they need them, the better. I would like to raise a few more points specifically in relation to deaths by suicide. In 2021, 5,583 people died by suicide.

Mike Kane: My hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech, particularly in the light of her excellent health service background, long before she came to this House. I hope that I have now stood on my feet long enough to bring her back into the debate.

Debbie Abrahams: My hon. Friend is very kind, and I thank him.

Unfortunately, our much-loved 20-year-old nephew, Jack, died when he took his life. Jack was a lot younger than his 11 cousins and was doted on by all. At our regular Sunday morning breakfasts, he would be in the centre of the room, laughing at someone's joke or telling everybody about the week that he had had at school. He was gentle, bright and kind. We are a very large family—my husband, John, is the eldest of seven and we all have our children; of course, Jack's mum is John's baby sister—but

we are a very close one, and 19 months on from Jack's death and a month after his inquest, to say we are all still devastated would be no exaggeration. This is absolutely nothing compared with the heartbreak his mum is going through. She has given me her permission to speak about the context of Jack's suicide, in the hope that that may help others.

At 17 and without his mum's knowledge, Jack was prescribed Roaccutane. Roaccutane is the trade name for isotretinoin, a medicine prescribed for severe acne, and has been available in the UK since 1983. It was also approved for use in the USA, under the trade name Accutane, in 1982. However, in July 2009, following the filing of thousands of lawsuits in which Accutane use was said to be associated with severe, life-changing health problems, both physical and psychological—in some cases many years after Accutane use—it was withdrawn from sale in the US.

In November 2020, the UK's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency announced that the Commission on Human Medicines had established an isotretinoin expert working group. This evidence review was prompted when the highest levels of fatalities associated with Roaccutane use was recorded in 2019 by the MHRA's yellow card reporting scheme—an online portal for reporting adverse drug reactions. In total, 12 fatalities were reported in 2019—10 by suicide—and there were 85 serious incidents and 19 non-serious ones.

At Jack's inquest last month, the coroner requested that the MHRA present evidence about the review's findings. The scandal is that the review had been completed at the end of 2021, but the findings and recommendations had not been published because of “complications associated with Brexit”. It transpired that the recommendations, which 15 months on still have not been published, included requiring two doctors to agree to Roaccutane being prescribed to under-18s and prescribing it only after all other acne treatments had been tried. It is a serious drug, and it needs to be closely monitored.

The MHRA representative attending the inquest revealed that, since the completion of the review in 2021, there had been a further 81 adverse psychiatric events, including one suicide and one attempted suicide. On this issue, the family were pleased that the coroner had issued a prevention of future deaths report to the Health and Social Care Secretary, and the family looks forward to his early response and the publication of the 2021 review on isotretinoin. However, we believe that there needs to be an immediate awareness of the dangers of this group of drugs so that more of our young people and their families do not go through what we have been through.

The family also want to raise issues about the suicides of university students. Every year, three students per 100,000 will take their own life. Despite Universities UK's “Suicide-safer universities” guidelines, there seems to be an ad hoc approach to how they are implemented. Prior to his death, Jack had been a first-year student at the University of York. In March 2020, he expressed concerns about his mental health to his departmental support officer, but although Jack was signposted to mental health support, this was not followed through. What Jack displayed was more or less word for word what was in the Universities UK's guidelines on recognising signs and vulnerabilities, but it was not responded to as such, and it certainly was not flagged centrally.

We believe that, at registration, universities should get students to identify an individual—a parent, guardian or named advocate—for university staff to get in touch with if they have health concerns about a student. We also believe that there needs to be training for all university staff regarding suicide prevention. At this stage, I also pay tribute to Papyrus for its work on awareness training, particularly its campaign #SpotTheSigns, and similarly to the Samaritans for its training. That needs to be widespread not just in schools but in higher education institutions, so there is an understanding of the signs and symptoms.

We will never know exactly why our Jack took his life. We miss him every day, and want to do all that we can to prevent others from feeling that suicide is the only way out of the pain that they feel, because it is not.

5.34 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under see you in the Chair, Mr Stringer. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams). That was clearly not an easy speech to make. Coming from a large family—I am up to about 20 nephews, nieces, great nephews and great nieces; even the children are having children now—I cannot begin to imagine what it would be like if one of them sadly went down the same route as Jack, and her speech was incredibly brave. Having spoken in a debate last year after the death of one of my very close friends by suicide, I know you feel powerless when it happens but, at the same time, you think, “Well, by speaking up and using what powers we have in this place to try to draw attention to it, I am at least doing something that will help others.”

Before getting to the main thrust of my speech, I want to pick up on a couple of things that my hon. Friend mentioned. I too attended my friend’s inquest, and a prevention of future deaths notice was published. I did quite a lot of digging around beforehand as to what was going to happen at the inquest. There is an issue about how long these things take. He ended up having a fairly quick hearing, but some cases take a long time to get to that stage. It is not entirely clear what happens when these notices are issued, and I asked some parliamentary questions about this matter. It is one thing a coroner issuing a notice, but does it just end up in a big pile? Is action actually being taken and are efforts being made to ensure that lessons really are learned?

The other thing I would pick up on is what my hon. Friend said about university students. Sadly, University of Bristol had a spate of suicides, which was again why my attention was drawn to this issue. The issue also came up at an event I did last year with the band New Order, talking with the Campaign Against Living Miserably—the suicide prevention charity. One thing that came through was that, in some cases, universities do not feel that they can talk to the parents because students are classed as adults and, even though there are signs of distress, they feel they cannot go back to them. There is a need for a named adult when students register, so they can ensure parents know what is going on. Again, there were a few cases where that had not happened.

In some cases, as we have heard, there are few signs from young people and children, and families can be shocked by sudden incidents when they were not aware

their child had mental health problems. However, a record number of children have mental health problems that are known and are on the NHS mental health waiting list. The situation is worsening rapidly, in part because of the pressures on children because of covid and the years of lockdown.

NHS stats from November last year revealed that one in six children aged between seven and 16 show signs of a probable mental health condition, and that jumps to one in four among young people aged 17 to 19. Half of all mental health problems are established by the age of 14, so it is imperative that we ensure today’s school pupils do not end up as tomorrow’s suicide statistics, whether that is when they are still young people or, as in my friend’s case, 30 or 40 years down the line.

I recently asked about adverse childhood experiences at Prime Minister’s questions. I think the Prime Minister just heard the words “children” and “mental health” and replied about what mental health support is available, rather than actually addressing my question. I do not particularly blame him for that, but I was asking about how we prevent children from reaching a stage when they are in mental health crisis because of things going on in their lives. We need to address not just the consequences, but the causes of poor mental health in children and, ideally, prevent those adverse childhood experiences from happening in the first place.

I entirely support calls to talk more about mental health. I encourage children to seek support if they are struggling, and I encourage teachers and professionals to try to identify whether children are in that place, but it should not just be about helping children cope. It should be about trying to ensure that children are happy and healthy right from the word go, whether that is trying to stop things like online harms; dealing with problems at home, including parents who may not be getting the help they need themselves, which will obviously have an impact on their children; or any of the other factors we know lead to children feeling in a dark place. Any strategy also has to include that.

As has been said, about four children a week—200 a year—lose their lives to suicide. I commend 3 Dads Walking for drawing attention to the issue, and for its work with the charity Every Life Matters. Going back to my earlier point, I see that the dads feel this work is the least they can do. I hope that we can do justice to them today, and that the Minister can show them that something will come of all their efforts. I also commend Papyrus and other charities for their work.

Bristol City Council published its updated suicide prevention plan last August. One of the seven action points is about targeting mental health among specific groups, including children and young people. That includes providing mental health first aid, a course called SafeTALK, and self-harm training to school mental health leads. I am sure we will hear more from the shadow Schools Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan), about Labour’s plans for mental health professionals in every school. The council’s plan also includes a “suicide pack” and a “self-harm toolkit” produced in Bristol, which are practical resources. Members have mentioned quite a few local charities. In Bristol, Off the Record works mostly with young people to offer them outreach, mental health workshops, one-to-one counselling and so on.

[Kerry McCarthy]

People have already flagged that any sort of education in schools needs to be done in a sensitive and age-appropriate way. My concern is that talking generally to a group of children who are in a reasonably good place might be fine. If a child is already in a dark place, I am not entirely sure that is the best way of reaching out to them, particularly for an introverted child who has gone inside themselves. That is a question for the professionals, but I wanted to flag that up.

Mr Robin Walker: The hon. Lady raises an interesting point in paying tribute to 3 Dads Walking and everyone who has campaigned on this issue. We have heard strong support from across the Chamber for doing more. Does she agree that it is important to work with the experts to ensure that any curriculum materials are properly sourced and age-appropriate? Elsewhere in the RSHE curriculum, there has been a big backlash and concerns when parents feel that might not be the case. If this is to be done, it needs to be done well. Organisations such as Papyrus and CALM, which the hon. Lady mentioned, can play an important part in informing that.

Kerry McCarthy: That is absolutely right. We always talk about the value of tailoring things to the individual, whether that is job seeking or health support. That can be difficult when resources are tight. My plea is that we have the teaching assistants and extra staff in schools so they can get to know the children and learn their individual characteristics.

I want to flag the issue of neurodiversity. We already know that children mature at different ages, so determining what is age-appropriate can be quite difficult. I have personal experience of one case where a child was in mainstream secondary school, but was so distressed and alarmed by what she was being taught about drugs, crime, gangs and so on, that she ended up in a full-blown mental health crisis and went to residential provision, where she was diagnosed with autism. She went into a special school because that was a safer environment for her. That is just one example of how being taught about something is different for every child. Some of the available therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy, might not be appropriate for somebody with an autism diagnosis whose mind does not work in that sort of way.

The special educational needs and disabilities review, which was published last year, was jointly authored by the Health Secretary and the Education Secretary, but there was very little about the overlap with CAMHS. I know the Minister is not here to speak for the Health Department, but the role of CAMHS is crucial.

My other point is about what support is provided once lessons and that individual's one-to-one support are over. I will end on that. I do not know what has happened to the suicide prevention strategy; I hope that we see it. I think I was told that it was imminent when I did my Westminster Hall debate last year, but I look forward to hearing from the Minister.

5.44 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Stringer, and to follow the many thoughtful, heartfelt and, in some cases, difficult speeches. I pay tribute to the families who are in the Public Gallery for their powerful campaign, and to

3 Dads Walking for all its work to raise awareness. My constituency of Barnsley East has the highest number of children, adolescents and young adults admitted to hospital for self-harm in Yorkshire and the Humber. For every 100,000 young people, 638 are admitted—almost one and a half times the national average.

Child and adolescent mental health services are at breaking point. Wait times for treatment are months and sometimes years, and local mental health charities simply cannot get the funding required to treat the people who are falling through the gaps of NHS treatment. A number of local charities are working hard with young people. Hey!, which came to Parliament last year to meet the health Minister, and the Samaritans support young people experiencing suicidal thoughts across Barnsley.

My office is regularly contacted by desperate parents who are not sure how to help their children through mental health crises and are terrified that self-harm will progress to suicide. Last year, a mother contacted me about her child, who had been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and had a very low mood, including suicidal thoughts. After they waited a year for treatment, it was delayed further as there was a debate about where it should take place. Because his school was in Rotherham, he was told that he must have his treatment there, despite the fact that he lived in Barnsley. That resulted in him being removed from his waiting list and placed on another one, which had a wait time of another 12 months. His mother was desperate and terrified that a longer wait for her son's treatment could lead to his mental health deteriorating to the lowest point possible. Following an intervention from my office, a decision was made to start his treatment in Rotherham, but it should not have taken that.

The process may seem overly bureaucratic, but it is driven by low budgets and an inability to manage waiting lists when demand outstrips the available services by a huge margin. The mum says her son is doing much better since starting treatment, which of course is very welcome news, but it is unacceptable that, due to a lengthy waiting list, he was allowed to sink so low for so long before he was given the help he needed.

Another of my constituents was suffering from depression and severe anxiety. She missed a lot of school and occasionally self-harmed. She had to wait more than six months for an appointment with CAMHS, during which time her schoolwork suffered and she was put into lower sets for key subjects. Following her initial appointment, she had to wait a further three months to start treatment. At the time, she was studying for her GCSEs—a vital time in any young person's life, when life chances can easily be decreased due to a lack of timely and effective treatment.

Those are just two examples of the many people who have been in touch, and sadly they are not unusual. The Government need an urgent plan to look at and deal with this crisis. I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell): this will be the most important debate that the Minister takes part in.

Teaching children and young people about good mental health and improving their resilience from a young age will be hugely beneficial in helping them to grow up and be aware of their feelings and the pressures that surround them. Life for the average teenager has changed beyond recognition in the past generation with

the advent of social media, and of course there are other pressures at home, such as a lack of money and poverty. We must keep up with the changes if we are to give young people the best chances and skills to navigate the extra pressures that they face today.

However, if we are to give schools and teachers that extra responsibility of support, there must be a plan of action to accompany it. The answer to the mental health crisis is not to give teachers and support staff more work. As a former state school teacher, I know that staff are already struggling to find resources for the same, and in some cases less, pay. We need a wide-ranging approach. A review of the RSHE curriculum must take on board experts' views about how to add worthwhile, appropriate contact to the school syllabus in a way that has a positive and educational impact on all young people.

As someone who has taught RSHE in school, I see the benefits and would welcome the change. Adding suicide prevention to the school curriculum would be an important step in the right direction. We must learn the lessons from this mental health crisis and use all possible means to safely equip the next generation of children as they navigate their way towards adulthood.

5.48 pm

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer, and I thank you for affording me the opportunity to speak. It is a privilege to follow the other hon. Members, who made powerful speeches, and I thank the Petitions Committee for hosting the debate.

I pay personal tribute to the 3 Dads Walking—my constituent, Andy Airey, Tim Owen and Mike Palmer—for their tireless, selfless campaigning to make suicide awareness a compulsory part of the school curriculum. We are all aware of their campaign. Andy, Tim and Mike tragically each lost their precious daughters, Sophie, Emily and Beth, to suicide. It is humbling for us all to be here to support them in their campaign. They have bravely turned their personal tragedy towards positive change to help other people. It was a privilege to join them on their walk as they came through Penrith. As we have seen today, their petition has been amazing, gaining around 159,000 signatures. I have lost track of their fundraising, but it is over £1 million, and I congratulate them all. I also thank all those who work with people young and old to protect and support their mental health in my constituency and right across the country, in the NHS and in charities such as Papyrus, Mind, the Samaritans and Every Life Matters.

I am passionate about parity of esteem between mental and physical health, and I have mentioned that since my maiden speech. I welcome the progress that has been made so far on suicide awareness since the Conservatives came into power, such as the introduction of the national suicide prevention strategy in 2012 and the cross-Government suicide prevention workplan in 2019. I welcome that that endeavour is being backed up by funding, such as the £150 million for mental health facilities, which includes supporting a mental health crisis centre at the Carleton Clinic in Carlisle. That is all vital for ensuring that mental health crises are handled by the most appropriate people to provide the most appropriate care for their needs, but we are all here today to press for more preventive measures to try to avoid crisis and, ultimately, catastrophe.

Today's debate shows the work of the House at its very best, as there is unity on addressing the important issue of mental health. The unity of the House is clear, with the early-day motion that I was humbled to introduce on behalf of the 3 Dads last year, which called for suicide prevention and mental health first aid in educational settings, being signed by 41 Members from across the House. That has also been recognised by our Prime Minister, and I look forward to taking the issue forward when the 3 Dads and I meet him in the meeting that I recently secured for them.

Why do we need this change? As we have heard, the evidence is clear that there is a crisis among our young people, and we need to take action. As Andy, Tim and Mike have highlighted at the heart of their campaigning, the reality is that, tragically, suicide is the biggest killer of under-35s in the UK. As we have heard, more than five young people take their lives each day and over 200 schoolchildren are lost to suicide every year. The majority are teenagers, but some are primary-age children. The data are unclear, and perhaps that is due to the way that deaths by suicide are interpreted and recorded.

The Government have long recognised that education is a crucial tool for ensuring that our young people are fully equipped to deal with the realities of the wider world. The Government's action to make relationships, sex and health education mandatory in schools is an important commitment to our young people and their wellbeing, but that commitment can benefit our young people only if every young person across the country is equipped to tackle every serious issue that may well affect their wellbeing. At the moment, there is a disparity: we equip our young people to tackle relationships, drugs, alcohol and other problems that may threaten their wellbeing, but we do not consistently provide our young people with the tools in their arsenal to tackle the threat of suicide.

Although I appreciate that the Government provide statutory guidance on mental health, making suicide awareness a compulsory part of the school curriculum would do something even more fundamental. The change would fundamentally re-enforce to our young people that their mental and physical health are equally important, need equal care and protection, and have parity of esteem in the eyes of wider society. Ultimately, that would help to break down the stigma that many people face because of their mental health, providing the same ability to discuss it openly and honestly as we would do with other aspects of our wellbeing. As we have heard, however, we must ensure that there is proper support for young people at all stages of education, including university and college, where being away from family and friends, and in a unique environment, can be an exciting journey for the majority but very challenging for others.

I declare an interest, because in my career in higher education I have had mental health first aid training and also ASIST—applied suicide intervention skills training. The huge take-home that I took from that was that we must not tiptoe around the subject; we must address it directly, but in a very sensitive way. I can say from my personal experience that I have applied the training. When I addressed the subject with one person I was liaising with, their relief welled up and they said, "Oh my goodness, Neil, thank you. You understand." That was a real lesson to me that we cannot tiptoe around the subject.

[Dr Neil Hudson]

The training does not make someone an expert or a consultant in mental health, but it gives them the tools to help them to talk to people and signpost them towards the help they need. Accordingly, I am strongly supportive of the concept of mental health first aid training, as I have heard other Members say today. In addition to the petition's aim of putting suicide awareness and prevention on the school curriculum, I would welcome the Government's considering expanding mental health first aid more widely into all educational settings.

Tracey Crouch: Does my hon. Friend agree that one issue is that mental health first aid training is not a standard provision and that quite often it is only employed by people after a tragic event? Recently, a young man associated with Aylesford Football Club took his own life and as a consequence the football club has reached out and become a mental health first aid trainer. However, it was unfortunate that it took such a tragic event for that to happen. As part of the safeguarding policies in schools and sports clubs, mental health first aid training could be offered as a standard part of the toolbox.

Dr Hudson: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful and sensible point, and I completely agree. This is about putting in place measures to prevent crisis. On many occasions when I have met the 3 Dads, I have heard that schools have brought measures in after a catastrophe. What we are talking about today is preventive healthcare medicine.

It is very important that intervention in schools is done sensitively and, as we have heard today, in an age-appropriate way, in the curriculum, with guidance. We also need to think about how we deal with the question for younger children. Tim is one of the 3 Dads and when I met him recently we discussed some of the language that could be used and is being used for younger children, and I was very struck by that. There is the concept of, "If you are sad and you don't want to be here". That sort of language can actually address some of the issues in age-appropriate and sensitive way.

Let me also briefly expand out of education and into mental health in rural areas. Andy, who is a constituent of mine in Cumbria, will be very well aware of the issues that we face in rural areas. My interest is rooted in my personal and professional background, and my experience of the foot and mouth crisis. In Cumbria and right across the UK, we are now struggling with the avian influenza outbreak. The mental health impact of such things on rural communities should not be understated.

On the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, we are conducting an inquiry into this issue. One of the key issues that we have found, which is why I wanted to bring mental health in rural areas into this part of the debate, is that there is a common theme of people being reluctant to seek help—to put their hand up and say, "I'm struggling". It is that concept of being able to feel that it is okay to not be okay.

[CAROLINE NOKES *in the Chair*]

The devastation caused by outbreaks of disease among animals can be huge for farmers and rural communities and can be ongoing, too. The inquiry that the EFRA Committee has instigated will produce a report in due course, but one of the key areas is talking about prevention.

How can we help people in whatever walk of life they are in—schools, education, rural communities or urban communities? How can we reach out and help people to help themselves? The principles that we are discussing for education settings have wider-ranging implications in society, for mental health first aid training and for putting in place preventative measures so that we can prevent catastrophe.

Finally, I pay tribute to 3 Dads Walking for their fortitude and their gritty determination to keep campaigning on this vital issue. I thank them and all the charities that are assisting them for all their work. Hon. Members on both sides of the House can work together and I look forward to hearing from the Government about how we can put in place preventive measures in schools and educational settings.

5.59 pm

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for securing this incredibly important debate and for his wider work on mental health, for which he has become well known since coming to the House.

Some 17 people a day take their own lives in the UK—not just today, but tomorrow, Wednesday, Thursday and onwards. That is just a statistic, but in the last hour and a half, we have heard many personal, emotional and tragic stories of the individual people—the names—behind that statistic. When I woke up this morning, I listened to Mike, Andy and Tim from 3 Dads Walking on Radio 4 as I was getting ready and packing my bags to catch the train to London. I heard about Emily, Sophie and Beth, which made it very personal, so I thank the 3 Dads for coming along. I also heard that they will be meeting the Education Secretary and the Prime Minister, and I look forward to hearing more about that.

When I returned to Parliament in 2019, I pledged and wanted to do more on suicide prevention and mental health after losing two close friends who took their own lives. I thank the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) for the work that we do together on the all-party parliamentary group on suicide and self-harm prevention. We had an emotional meeting last week with James' Place, the Samaritans and Mike McCarthy, who told us about his son Ross and the walk that he will be doing with the Baton of Hope in June—lots of people are walking and raising awareness. Mike is coming to Parliament with Steve Phillip, who lost his son Jordan.

After listening to the debate for an hour and a half, I ask: what can we do? I am a dad to two teenage daughters and I often—in fact, almost every day—think that I would like to turn off the toxicity, pressures and unreal expectations of social media; I really feel as though I want to switch it all off on their behalf. I also want to erase the isolation, disruption and anxiety that the pandemic caused for young people. I do not think that either of those two wishes is achievable or realistic, so what is?

In memory of Emily, Sophie, Beth, Sean and all the other young people we have heard about, we should get behind the motion. We should see how we can introduce suicide prevention and more support for mental health in the school curriculum in an age appropriate and sensitive way, of course. I hope that we will do our bit

here in Parliament and I look forward to hearing from the Minister. To Mike, Andy and Tim, I say, “If you keep walking, we will keep talking.”

6.3 pm

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Nokes. I start by thanking the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for securing this important debate. I pay tribute to Mike Palmer, Andy Airey and Tim Owen, who, as we have heard, raised more than £1 million for suicide prevention charities, inspired 159,000 people to sign the petition that triggered this debate, and brought the issue of suicide prevention in schools to the national consciousness.

As other hon. Members have mentioned, the 3 Dads came together following the deaths of their daughters Beth, Sophie and Emily. They are united by their grief and a shared motivation to tackle the causes of suicide. They completed two heroically long-distance walks to raise money and awareness, and to campaign for suicide prevention to be included in the national curriculum. Last year, the trio spent a month walking 600 miles between the four Parliaments of the UK to bring their campaign directly to politicians. Poignantly, they say they are

“part of a club no-one wants to be in, and yet sadly they are always meeting new members.”

The strength of feeling they have generated for their campaign has been shown in the backing their petition received for today’s debate. I am sure everyone present will join me in saying thank you to them. I also pay tribute to the work done by other suicide prevention charities and campaigners who devote their lives to helping people who often feel they have no one to turn to in their hour of need.

We have heard from a number of hon. Members from across the House with helpful and insightful contributions, with stories from their constituencies, from personal experience and from our communities’ fantastic array of voluntary and community sector organisations. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) spoke with real insight and expertise in her capacity as chair of the APPG, shared helpful research into suicide prevention and spoke about the invaluable role of the charitable sector in supporting families and promoting mental wellbeing. My hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) spoke passionately about what is at stake if we do not act. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) spoke about the need to create safe spaces both in communities and online to prevent suicide and the support needed to give young people the skills to be resilient and to gain the confidence to speak up and talk.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) for bravely sharing the tragic story of Jack’s life and the lessons that need to be learned. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) made helpful points about the need for support in universities, while my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) set out the challenges that CAMHS are facing and the consequences in constituencies across the country.

As we have heard tonight, while it is often not talked about, suicide is the biggest killer of the under-35s in the UK. Research has shown that women aged 16 to 24

are more likely to report having self-harmed than any other age group, with almost 20% reporting self-harm, and that suicidal thoughts are also most common in women aged 16 to 24. More than 200 schoolchildren are lost to suicide every year—each one of them a tragedy. In 2016, a commitment was made to reduce the rate of suicide in England by 10% by 2020, but by 2020 the rate was almost the same. Clearly, more needs to be done.

Research shows that with the appropriate intervention and suicide support for young people, all this could be prevented. It is therefore so important that we as a society ensure that the interventions are in place and that that support is always ready. We cannot bury our heads in the sand on these issues. Suicide needs to be discussed even if it is uncomfortable. In recent years, progress has been made in ending the stigma around mental health, but it is clear that much more needs to be done to ensure that mental health problems are given equal priority to physical health.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East said, too many young people are struggling with their mental health. NHS data shows that one in six children had a probable mental health condition in 2021, up from one in nine in 2017. Children are struggling without support—unable to see a GP and stuck on children and adolescent mental health service waiting lists for years, left in limbo without help. Concerningly, a report by *Schools Week* last year found that suicidal children are being turned away by overstretched CAMH services, with schools instead told to “keep them safe”. The investigation also found that many mental health services refuse to see children with a diagnosis of autism and other neurodevelopmental differences on the grounds that they do not meet the criteria for therapy. Families told reporters that they are being left to “keep children alive” as they either wait or are rejected from support.

No child should be left without the support that they need to be happy and healthy. No parent should be left feeling unsupported and alone when helping their child to face mental health problems. No teacher should be left stuck, unable to refer children for the professional support that is needed. That is why Labour is committed to giving children access to a professional mental health counsellor in every school. We would also ensure that children are not stuck waiting for referrals, unable to get support. Teachers would not be expected to provide expert mental health services that they are not trained to deliver.

We would also ensure that every child knows that help is at hand, and for the young people for whom accessing that support in school is not the right choice, we will deliver a new model of open-access mental health hubs in every community. They will build on work already under way in Birmingham, Manchester and elsewhere, and provide an open door for all our young people. They will get support to children early and prevent problems from escalating—improving young people’s mental health, not just responding when they are in crisis.

Alongside the investment in children’s mental health, Labour would oversee a radical expansion of the mental health workforce, resulting in over a million more people receiving support each year. A new NHS target would be set, ensuring that patients start receiving appropriate treatment, not simply initial assessment of needs, within a month of referral. We would also review the school curriculum, making sure that young people are ready

[Stephen Morgan]

for work and life. As we have heard, it is important that we teach young people to understand their mental health, in order for them to be able to identify warning signs of deteriorating mental health and wellbeing, which could lead to self-harm or suicidal thoughts in themselves and others.

One in four people in England experiences a mental health problem of some kind each year. One in six people in England reports experiencing a common mental health problem, such as anxiety and depression, in any given week. It is key that young people who are struggling recognise that they are not alone in that, that help is at hand, and that they know how to find that help for themselves and their friends.

The Department for Education is committed to reviewing RSHE statutory guidance. I encourage all campaigners and experts, and those listening to the debate today, to submit their evidence to that process. Our schools and teachers must be equipped to talk about mental health problems and suicide prevention in a safe and age-appropriate way. That is something everyone across the political spectrum can agree on, so it is crucial that we get it right. We should ensure that all reforms are evidence based, and done with children's wellbeing at their heart.

In conclusion, the highest priority for the Department for Education and all schools must be to protect children's safety and wellbeing. In his response, I hope that the Minister will outline what his Department is doing to help children who are struggling with their mental health get the support they need. What is his Department doing to bring down waiting times for children who need mental health services? What is his Department doing to help prevent suicide among young people?

I thank hon. Members for their contributions, and thank the 159,000 people who signed the petition to trigger this important debate. Conversations about suicide prevention can only lead to increased support and more dialogue. It is key that nowhere is off limits for life-changing conversations. I hope that any actions taken going forward ensure that more lives are saved.

6.13 pm

The Minister for Schools (Nick Gibb): It is a pleasure to respond to this debate under your careful stewardship, Ms Nokes. I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) on the way he opened this important debate. It has been a debate with many deeply emotional testimonies from families who have lost loved ones to suicide, including a moving speech from the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams).

I also thank Andy Airey, Mike Palmer and Tim Owen for being here today and for their tireless efforts to increase awareness of suicide prevention. Through their campaign, 3 Dads Walking, Andy, Mike and Tim took on the challenge of walking between all four Parliaments, a 600-mile walk that has raised over £1 million to support suicide prevention, in memory of their daughters Beth, Sophie and Emily. Through the campaign, Andy, Mike and Tim shared personal stories of their kind, talented and much-loved daughters and the devastating impact that losing them has had on their parents, siblings, and wider families and friends. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education has taken a keen

interest in the campaign after she met Andy, Mike and Tim in 2022, when she was serving as Minister for Care and Mental Health. I know she has written to them recently and hopes to meet them again soon.

In 2020, as Minister for School Standards, I helped with the introduction of education on mental wellbeing through the relationships, sex and health education curriculum. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) said in her intervention, we need to be able to talk about mental health. That is an important first step, but I recognise the concerns raised in the petition and in this debate and will do my best to address them.

The death of any young person is tragic, and we need to do everything that we can to prevent it. It is heartbreaking to think that some young people have suicidal thoughts and do not know how to address them, and it is heartbreaking that families have to go through the loss of a child with possibly no indication of their state of mind, as movingly pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch). We know that going to school can in and of itself be a protective factor for many young people, and we want schools to be places where emerging issues are identified and supported early and where pupils are taught to identify their own feelings and seek the right support at the right time. We need, as the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) put it so well, to help young people back to the path of hope.

The statutory curriculum guidance for RSHE sets out the detailed content that pupils should be taught. They are taught about the building blocks needed to develop positive and safe relationships and good physical and mental health. The content includes how to recognise the early signs of mental wellbeing concerns, such as anxiety and depression. Pupils are taught where and how to seek support, including who in school they can speak to if they are worried about their own or someone's else mental wellbeing. I hope that that valuable knowledge will stay with children as they progress into adulthood, so that they will continue to look out for friends and know how to seek the help that is needed when they or someone they know is struggling and not able to take the first step in supporting themselves.

In addition to mental wellbeing, the health education curriculum provides content on the benefits of daily exercise, good nutrition and sufficient sleep, which can all have a positive impact on a young person's health and wellbeing. Ensuring that pupils understand the links between good physical and mental health will provide them with valuable tools for managing their emotions. We want schools to develop curriculum content that is helpful to their pupils. Our approach is not to dictate how and when schools teach this content, but to ensure that they recognise that it must be covered in an age-appropriate and sensitive way, as my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley said. The RSHE statutory guidance is clear that the subject of suicide and self-harm can be discussed as part of this topic, but it is important that teachers approach it carefully, because we have to acknowledge that, taught badly, it has the potential to do harm. We need to consider the issues carefully before making it an absolute requirement.

We know that mental health awareness, as already covered by the curriculum, can have an impact on preventing suicide. We have been funding a large-scale

randomised controlled trial of approaches to improving pupil mental wellbeing in schools. The trial will provide evidence on what works to support children's mental wellbeing and how it can be delivered in schools. The "aware" arm of the trial is testing approaches to mental health awareness teaching, including a school-based programme for young people aged 13 to 17 called Youth Aware of Mental Health, for which there is good international evidence that it reduces suicidal ideation. That has the potential to add to the work that we have already done to improve teacher confidence and the quality of teaching by developing online training materials and implementation guides that give advice to schools and staff on how best to support pupils' mental and physical health.

The issue of social media came up during the debate. Teaching children to be safe online is another aspect of suicide prevention that is covered by the existing curriculum. The inquests into the tragic suicides of Frankie Thomas and Molly Russell found that unsafe online content, and in Frankie's case the failure of the school to support her in the online environment, contributed to their deaths. As the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) pointed out, life for this generation of teachers has changed beyond recognition, compared with the previous generation and generations as far back as mine.

We know that social media can be a force for good in relation to mental health. It is part of life and relationships for young people, but for it to be helpful we need to make sure the online environment is as safe as possible. The hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) raised that concern. Technology and the risks and harms related to it continue to evolve and change rapidly. As the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) said, we need to be wary of the toxicity of TikTok, as well as of the dark web, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) mentioned. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) put it, we must switch off the unrealistic expectations of social media.

Through health education, we are equipping children and young people with the knowledge they need to use the internet and social media safely, and understand how to deal with the content they encounter online. In addition to the statutory health education content, we have published guidance for schools on teaching online safety, which helps them deliver internet safety content in a co-ordinated and coherent way across their curriculum.

To check that RSHE teaching is having an effect, we are monitoring its implementation. We want to test whether schools are implementing the requirements with sufficient quality to understand what helps and hinders good teaching. As the Prime Minister announced last Wednesday, we have brought forward the review of the RSHE statutory guidance, which was originally due to commence in September 2023. The current content I have already set out on mental health and wellbeing covers a large amount of what it is important in suicide prevention, but we will look further at this as a priority area for the review and decide whether to add requirements on teaching about suicide. As part of taking a comprehensive, evidence-based approach, we will make sure we speak to the experts in the field. We plan to start the review as soon as possible.

Kerry McCarthy: The Minister talked about testing whether RSHE is having an effect by monitoring its implementation, looking at what is being taught in

schools and so on, but what is being done to take it beyond that and look at outcomes? It is one thing to prove that children are being taught about the dangers of drugs, but we must see an impact on the number of children suffering drug-related harm, getting involved in gangs or, in this case, going down that path. How do we judge whether it is having an impact, rather than just whether it is being implemented?

Nick Gibb: The hon. Lady makes a very important point. The review will be thorough. It will not only talk to experts, but will look at the data and evidence and statistics from Ofsted and other bodies to ensure it is thorough and leads to the RSHE guidance document being the most effective it can be to deliver the aims and objectives of the RSHE curriculum.

Tracey Crouch: On the review, will the Minister commit to speaking to the parents and loved ones of those who have taken their lives to hear them tell their stories and explain why they believe passionately that this should be on the curriculum?

Nick Gibb: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. Debates such as this are illuminating, and I am sure hearing such stories will help those carrying out the review of the RSHE curriculum.

Teaching about mental health is only part of the story. Schools can play a vital role by providing safe, calm and supportive environments that promote good mental wellbeing and help prevent the onset of mental illness. We should not, however, expect teachers to act as mental health experts, nor to make a mental health diagnosis. Education staff are well placed to observe children day to day, and many schools provide excellent targeted support for pupils with mental wellbeing issues.

To help education settings implement effective whole-school or college approaches to mental health, we are funding all schools and colleges in England to train a senior mental health lead. Over 11,000 schools and colleges have already taken up that offer, including more than six in 10 state-funded secondary schools in England, and we have invested a further £10 million this year to ensure that up to two thirds of state-funded schools and colleges can benefit by April this year.

That is in addition to record funding for children and young people's mental health support through the NHS long-term plan, which commits to increasing investment in mental health services by at least £2.3 billion a year, putting mental health on a par with physical health, as my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson) has been campaigning for. That means an additional 345,000 children and young people will be able to access NHS-funded mental health support by 2023-24.

A number of hon. Members raised the issue of access to mental health services for young people. Despite significant extra funding, we know that too many young people must wait for too long before they are seen by a mental health professional. Last year, the NHS set out its plans to introduce new access and waiting time standards for mental health services. One of those standards is for children and young people to start to receive their care within four weeks of referral, but hopefully sooner than that.

[Nick Gibb]

As a result of the 2017 Green Paper “Transforming children and young people’s mental health provision”, which is a very significant piece of work, more than 2.4 million children and young people now have access in schools and colleges to a mental health support team, which delivers evidence-based interventions for mild to moderate mental health issues; supports each school or college to introduce or develop its approach to promoting and supporting mental health; and advises and liaises with external specialist services to help children and young people to get the right support and stay in education.

Liz Twist: I am looking at the petition organised by 3 Dads Walking. The Minister has given us some very important information about mental health support in schools, but this is quite simple: it is about talking to young people about suicide prevention and knowing that it is okay for them to talk about their feelings. Will the Minister say how he will approach that specific point in the RSHE review?

Nick Gibb: The hon. Member makes an important point. That is a matter for the review. It needs to be carried out with thoroughness and speed, but we also need to consult experts on the issue, as well as talking to families and young people who have important experiences to convey to the review. I would not want to pre-empt that review with my own opinions. We want to ensure that it is a properly carried-out review; we will then get the best possible outcome from it, not just in this area but across the whole of the RSHE curriculum.

Rachael Maskell: I would like to raise two further points. One is about teacher training, and ensuring that teachers get the right training put to them when they are going through their training. The second point is about parents. Schools are part of a wider community, and parents are obviously part of that community—knowing how to have those conversations with their children is really important. How will the review look, in a wider scope, at being able to provide the support in the right place?

Nick Gibb: I will take both of those points under advisement. The hon. Member is talking about the wider issue of parents; we are really talking here about a curriculum for schools. Of course, in due course those children become parents—they become adults and parents. Teacher training is a wider issue. First of all, we need to get the curriculum right, and that is what will come out of this thorough review of the whole RSHE guidance, which we are starting right now.

The Government have also committed to publishing a new national suicide prevention strategy for England this year. The strategy will reflect new evidence and national priorities for preventing suicides. The Department for Education has worked closely with the Department of Health and Social Care throughout the development of the strategy to understand what more we can do to reduce suicide and self-harm among children and young people. In answer to the question from the hon. Member

for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), my Department and the Department of Health and Social Care are committed to publishing that strategy this year.

In conclusion, the mental health of children is a priority for this Government, and we know that schools can play a critical role in supporting children’s mental wellbeing. We will monitor implementation of the new curriculum and continue to work to improve teacher confidence to deliver these broad-ranging and sensitive topics to the best of their abilities—a point raised by the hon. Member for York Central. We will also continue the roll-out of training for senior mental health leads and mental health support teams to ensure that schools are getting the best support possible on pupil mental health.

I have set out the measures already in place and the ways in which schools can and do support pupils, including those with suicidal feelings. Once the review of the RSHE statutory guidance has concluded, we will be able to consider what more can be done to support pupils further.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): I call Nick Fletcher to wind up.

6.30 pm

Nick Fletcher: I thank everybody for coming today. So many MPs have spoken, giving so many heartfelt speeches, that there are too many to mention, but it is all extremely appreciated. I am sure that the 3 Dads will also appreciate so many Members of Parliament taking time out of their busy schedules to come and discuss this important issue. I would like to specifically mention the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) for the important work that she does on this subject. It is also wonderful to see that we have cross-party agreement on this. That is how this place really gets things done.

I would obviously like to thank the 3 Dads, Andy, Tim and Mike. You have been on a journey that nobody would want to go on. The deaths of your daughters, Sophie, Emily and Beth, have brought us all here together today, and, with assurances from the Minister on the work that will proceed, I am hopeful that we can really get the number of young people taking their own lives down to zero. When we see that number fall, it will be thanks to your work, and in memory of your three precious daughters.

That just leaves me to thank the Petitions Committee for bringing all of this work together. An awful lot happens behind the scenes, and I know that Andy, Tim and Mike will also appreciate the work it has done. I thank Papyrus for the work it has done, and all the other charities that have been mentioned. It has also been a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 623390, relating to suicide prevention and the national curriculum.

6.32 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statement

Monday 13 March 2023

HOME DEPARTMENT

Non-crime Hate Incidents: Personal Data

The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has today laid before Parliament the statutory Non-crime Hate Incidents Draft Code of Practice on the Recording and Retention of Personal Data, which police officers and staff must have regard to. This code is being laid under the provisions of sections 60 and 61 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. The Government are introducing this code to establish a proportionate and common-sense approach to the recording of non-crime hate incidents. This approach should better protect personal data, emphasise the importance of the right to freedom of expression, and reduce the number of unnecessary non-crime hate incidents that are recorded whilst still ensuring that vulnerable individuals, groups and communities continue to be safeguarded by the police.

This Government fully recognise the sensitivities surrounding the recording of non-crime hate incidents by the police, particularly in relation to concerns that this process infringes on the right to freedom of expression. We know there are concerns that individuals who express lawfully held views are at risk of becoming the subject of a non-crime hate incident report if their views are considered to be offensive, and that in turn, this may result in their personal data being stored on a policing record. This Government are clear that this should never be the case. The code makes it clear that offending someone is not, in and of itself, a criminal offence, nor does it warrant a non-crime hate incident being recorded. This aligns with this Government's stance that everyone in this country, no matter who they are or what their views are, should be able to engage in lawful debate without police interference.

The code emphasises the importance of free speech with case studies that are designed to assist the police in considering how the right to freedom of expression should be taken into consideration. The code clarifies that debate, humour, satire and personally held views

which are lawfully expressed are not, by themselves, grounds for the recording of a non-crime hate incident. Furthermore, the code sets out that a non-crime hate incident should not be recorded if the report is deemed by the police to be trivial, irrational, malicious, or if there is no basis to conclude that it was motivated by intentional hostility.

The code provides new personal data-related safeguards, setting out that the personal data of some who is the subject of an NCHI report should only be included in a record if the incident poses a real risk (a) of significant harm to individuals or groups with a protected characteristic, or (b) that a future criminal offence may be committed against individuals or groups with a protected characteristic. For the purposes of the code, protected characteristics are considered to be race, religion, sexual orientation, disability and transgender identity. If this new threshold is not met, personal data should not be recorded, and any personal data previously noted by the police in relation to the incident—for instance, personal information recorded by the initial call taker—should be deleted. This code therefore ensures that non-crime hate incidents, and relevant personal data, will only be recorded when absolutely necessary. We believe this will increase transparency and public trust in this process.

The Government fully recognise the importance of ensuring that vulnerable individuals, groups and communities continue to be protected by the police; indeed, this is the purpose of non-crime hate incident recording. We are confident that the code does precisely this. We are grateful for the advice provided by the National Police Chiefs' Council, the College of Policing and senior police officers during the process of drafting this code. This has allowed us to publish a code that strikes the right balance between respecting the operational importance of this type of recording for the police, while improving safeguards for free speech. If someone is targeted because of hostility or prejudice towards their race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or transgender identity, and the criteria in the code are met, the incident can and should be recorded as a non-crime hate incident. This approach will enable the police to intervene as appropriate in order to prevent significant harm or future criminal offences from materialising, while ensuring the right to freedom of expression is protected.

A copy of the draft code which has been laid before Parliament will also be published on www.gov.uk.

[HCWS626]

Petitions

Monday 13 March 2023

OBSERVATIONS

EDUCATION

Funding for Small and Rural Primary Schools

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.—[Presented by Cat Smith, *Official Report*, 31 January 2023; Vol. 727, c. 314.]

[P002800]

Observations from the Minister for Schools (Nick Gibb):

We have allocated over £13 billion in capital funding since 2015 for maintaining and improving school facilities across England, including £1.8 billion committed this financial year—informed by consistent data on the school estate. This supports the Government's priority of ensuring schools have well maintained facilities that support a high-quality education for pupils, whatever their background. We are also delivering on the promise of a 10-year school rebuilding programme, which will transform buildings at 500 schools, prioritising schools in poor condition and with potential safety issues. We have now announced 400 schools, including 239 in December 2022.

A large proportion of schools' capital funding is delivered through annual allocations to local authorities (LAs) and larger multi-academy trusts (MATs) to maintain the condition of estates. Schools and those responsible for school buildings receive condition funding through different routes depending on their size and type. All schools receive funding to spend on their capital priorities through an annual devolved formula capital allocation. LAs, larger MATs and large VA school bodies receive a school condition allocation (SCA) to invest in priorities across the schools for which they are responsible. MATs and VA school bodies are eligible for SCA if they have five or more schools and at least 3,000 pupils. Smaller or stand-alone academy trusts, other VA schools and sixth form colleges, are able to bid to the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF).

In 2022-23, the Diocese of Blackburn received a school condition allocation of £5,239,198 to invest in their schools. The diocese is best placed to prioritise investment of this funding to meet local needs. Scorton Church of England Primary School should approach their diocese so that it can understand the issues and assess their priority as part of overall capital investment decisions for SCA funding.

On top of this capital funding, revenue funding for mainstream schools nationally is increasing by £2.5 billion in 2022-23, compared to 2021-22, and will increase by a further £2.5 billion in 2023-24, an average increase of 5.6% per pupil compared to 2022-23. This includes additional funding from the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG) in 2023-24, worth an average 3.4% per pupil, which will be provided on top of the allocations based on the national funding formula (NFF) announced in July.

Scorton Church of England Primary School is attracting £387,000 in total in 2023-24, or £7,163 per pupil, through the schools NFF. This represents an increase of 7.2% per pupil for their pupil-led funding compared to 2022-23, based on current pupil numbers.

Schools' actual allocations are based on local authorities' local funding formulae.

On top of this funding through the NFF, Scorton Church of England Primary School will receive additional funding through the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG). We have published a calculator tool for schools to accurately estimate their additional funding through the MSAG—this gives an indicative allocation of £12,066 MSAG funding for Scorton Church of England Primary School. Final school-level allocations will be announced in spring 2023.

The Government recognise the essential role that small schools play in their communities, and the schools NFF accounts for the particular challenges faced by small schools in rural areas through the lump sum and sparsity factors.

All small schools are benefiting from a 6% increase to the lump sum in 2023-24, totalling £132,510 through NFF and MSAG allocations combined. The lump sum provides a fixed amount of funding that is unrelated to pupil numbers and has increased by over 20% since the introduction of the NFF in 2018-19. The lump sum is particularly beneficial to small schools.

Small and remote schools also attract additional support through the sparsity factor in the schools NFF. The sparsity factor recognises that some schools are necessarily small because they are remote and do not have the same opportunities to grow or make efficiency savings as other schools, and that such schools often play a significant role in the rural communities they serve.

The total amount allocated through the sparsity factor increased from £26 million in 2020-21 to £95 million in 2022-23—and increases again to £97 million in 2023-24. Changes to sparsity funding will continue to benefit small, remote schools in 2023-24. From 2022-23, we began measuring schools' remoteness more accurately, by road distances. This led to a significant increase in the number of schools eligible for sparsity funding to over 2,500 schools attracting sparsity funding in total, including Scorton Church of England Primary School.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Keighley Household Waste and Recycling Centre

The petition of the residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the Keighley Household Waste and Recycling Centre located on Royd Ings Avenue in Keighley must be saved from closure by the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to encourage Bradford Council to U turn immediately on their plans to close the Keighley Household Waste and Recycling Centre and keep the site and much needed service located on Royd Ings Avenue in Keighley, open.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Robbie Moore, *Official Report*, 23 January 2023; Vol. 726, c. 826.]

[P002795]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):

Thank you very much for sharing your petition with me as Secretary of State at DEFRA. I am very concerned that this valuable service for residents is due to be closed

by Bradford City Council, especially when its recycling rate is only 37.8%, considerably lower than the national average.

Household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) play an important role in helping people manage the waste they produce in a convenient and sustainable way. They play a key role in supporting kerbside collections and in boosting recycling. They help ensure waste is disposed of in a responsible way, rather than being fly-tipped.

The Government support comprehensive and frequent waste collection services. Waste disposal authorities have a duty under section 51 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to provide places for residents in their area to deposit their household waste—usually HWRCs. The City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council must be compliant with the legislation through the provision of other HWRCs within its area, though I would urge the council to consider carefully the impact of closing an important service such as a local HWRC.

Local authorities are independent bodies and are accountable to their electorate. I recommend that the petitioners also continue to raise their objections to the closure of the Keighley HWRC with local councillors, who have a responsibility to take their residents' views into account.

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