

**Friday  
24 March 2023**

**Volume 730  
No. 141**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**Friday 24 March 2023**

---



# House of Commons

Friday 24 March 2023

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

## PRAYERS

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

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 163) and negatived.*

## Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Bill

*Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Before we get on to proceedings, I remind Members of the differences between Report and Third Reading. The scope of the debate on Report is the amendments that I have selected. The scope of the debate on Third Reading, to follow, will be the whole Bill as it stands after Report. Members may wish to consider those points before deciding at which stage or stages they want to catch my eye, to ensure that their speeches are relevant to each stage of consideration of the Bill.

### New Clause 1

#### GUIDANCE

“(1) The Secretary of State must issue guidance to—

- (a) chief officers of police,
  - (b) the chief constable of the British Transport Police Force,
  - (c) the chief constable of the Ministry of Defence Police, and
  - (d) the chief constable of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary,
- about the offence in section 4B of the Public Order Act 1986 (intentional harassment, alarm or distress on account of sex).

(2) The guidance must in particular include guidance about the reasonable conduct defence in section 4A(3)(b) of that Act.

(3) The Secretary of State may revise guidance issued under this section.

(4) The Secretary of State must arrange for guidance issued under this section to be published.

(5) A chief officer of police or a chief constable mentioned in subsection (1) must have regard to guidance issued under this section.”—(*Greg Clark.*)

*This new clause requires the Secretary of State to issue guidance to the police about the new offence in section 4B of the Public Order Act 1986. It also requires that guidance to include provision about the application of the reasonable conduct defence in section 4A(3)(b) of that Act.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

9.36 am

**Greg Clark** (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 2, in clause 1, page 1, line 7, after “4A(1)” insert “primarily”.

Amendment 3, page 1, line 7, leave out “because of” and insert “due to”.

Amendment 7, page 1, line 8, leave out “(or presumed sex)”.

Amendment 8, page 1, line 10, leave out ““presumed” means presumed by A;”.

Amendment 4, page 1, line 14, after “not—” insert— “(za) A is a man or a woman,”.

Amendment 5, page 1, line 16, leave out “because of” and insert “due to”.

Amendment 6, page 1, line 16, after “other” insert “subsidiary”.

Amendment 1, in clause 3, page 2, line 20, after “1” insert “, (Guidance)”.

*This amendment is consequential on NC1.*

Amendment 9, page 2, line 20, leave out from “on” to the end of line 21 and insert “1 August 2023”.

**Greg Clark:** In line with your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will address my new clause and the amendment in my name specifically, and I will also touch on the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope). I will not rehearse the reasons for the Bill. We have had a substantial debate on Second Reading and in Committee, and I hope it may be possible to say more on Third Reading.

New clause 1 would require the Secretary of State to issue guidance to the police about the new offence proposed in the Bill, and that guidance must include, but is not limited to, guidance on the defence of reasonable conduct that is already contained in the Public Order Act 1986.

During our debate in Committee, some Members were understandably concerned that the perpetrator of an act of deliberate harassment of a person on the grounds of their sex could escape the consequences of their actions by asserting that they thought their behaviour was reasonable. Some Members thought there was a risk that the police might be put off from taking the offence seriously, because of that potential defence. In fact, in the Public Order Act, reasonableness is not in the eye of the accused. Simply saying that behaviour that was intentionally designed to cause alarm or distress was reasonable does not provide a “get out of jail” card. Having clear guidance on this point would ensure that the matter is crystal clear to the police and all the authorities.

The proposed requirement for statutory guidance therefore provides that clarity, but it is not limited to that; the guidance can include other matters, should that prove desirable in future. The guidance would be addressed to the police, as is obvious from the terms of the new clause, but in practice its use would be wider than that, and would include the Crown Prosecution Service. That is because statutory guidance, once issued, is in practice taken by all parties to be authoritative. Indeed, there is no point in having separate guidance for the police, the CPS and any other body.

This is far from the only occasion when guidance is formally issued and addressed to one particular audience, rather than being proliferated to multiple actors. For

[Greg Clark]

example, statutory guidance within the Stalking Protection Act 2019 is formally issued to the police, but was drawn up in consultation with other statutory partners, including the Crown Prosecution Service. I envisage and hope that the Minister will be able to confirm that the same approach will be taken in this case, and that the CPS would be involved in drawing up the guidance to which my new clause refers.

It seems to me, reflecting on the debate we had in Committee, that an amendment that guidance must be issued and must include, *inter alia*, statutory requirements on the interpretation of reasonable conduct, is a pragmatic and practical way of responding to the points made in the debate. I am delighted that new clause 1 has attracted widespread support, including that of the Government, whose assistance in drafting it I gratefully acknowledge.

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): How long does my right hon. Friend expect it to take for this guidance to be produced? The guidance requested last year on the draft code of practice on the recording and retention of personal data for non-crime hate incidents took more than one year to produce. Does he envisage a similarly long period? To what extent does he expect the House to have a say on the content of the guidance?

**Greg Clark:** I would be very dismayed if it took a year to draw up such guidance, and my hon. Friend gives a cautionary warning. When the Minister responds to the debate, I hope he might undertake to produce the guidance with dispatch. I said a few moments ago that it is right and appropriate that guidance is drawn up in conjunction with the CPS, which also has regard to it, and that will take some time. I hope, however, that it will be a matter of weeks rather than a large number of months. The Minister and I are experienced in office, and we know that only the Minister can give an assurance as to how long it will take, but I am delighted that my hon. Friend shares my impatience to get on with it.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** What about the ability of the House to comment on the guidance when it is produced, or during its preparation?

**Greg Clark:** As my hon. Friend knows, guidance is issued by the Government of the day. It is not a statutory instrument, and we are not proposing that it should be. I think it would be desirable for such guidance to be shared not just with the House but in public. Guidance that is important should enjoy the confidence and wisdom of those who intend to use it.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** Finally, does my right hon. Friend envisage that the guidance should first be produced in draft form, so that there is an opportunity for people to be consulted publicly on it?

**Greg Clark:** Again, that is a matter for the Minister, but I would not only be content with that but think it a desirable route to take.

On the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend, he is right to seek to ensure that legislation in this House is properly scrutinised and debated, and the points he has raised—including those he just made—are pertinent

and valuable. As I hope he might expect, I have studied his amendments carefully, so let me deal with them in turn.

Amendments 3 to 5 prefer the words “due to” to “because of”. Precise language is important—he and I share that view—but I do not think that the preference on his part signifies any difference in interpretation. The expression “because of” is extensively used in existing legislation. For example, section 66(4) of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 refers to circumstances in which someone suffers loss or damage

“because of the dangerous state of the premises”

That is “because of” rather than “due to”. With perhaps more immediate relevance to our discussions, the Equality Act 2010 uses “because of” rather than “due to”. For example, paragraph 3(5) of schedule 11, on school admissions, refers to circumstances in which a school

“does not admit a person as a pupil because of the person’s sex”, rather than “due to” it. It may well be that my hon. Friend’s use of language is more elegant than that contained in the laws already on the statute book, but I hope he will agree that there is some virtue in linguistic consistency in the law. That is the reason behind that choice of words.

9.45 am

My hon. Friend’s amendment 4 clarifies that it does not matter if person (A) specified in the Bill—the perpetrator of the offence in question—is a man or a woman. Although the majority of reports of public sex-based harassment have been by men towards women, the Bill applies totally equally to both sexes, and at no point does the Bill mention anyone’s sex. There is no ambiguity in the Bill on that point. If my hon. Friend is concerned that this may not be clearly understood in practice, such as by the police, it may be a candidate for inclusion in the statutory guidance to which we have already referred. As he will recall, the guidance specifies interpretation of reasonable conduct but is not limited to that. If, perhaps after taking soundings from the public, there turns out to be some ambiguity in people’s minds—if not in the Bill—there is the opportunity to address that.

Amendments 2 and 6 would introduce a concept of subsidiarity and primacy. In other words, an offence would be committed only if the sex-based harassment was the primary motivation or aspect of the behaviour, rather than one of a number of aspects. I completely understand the point my hon. Friend puts forward, but I will say two things in response. First, one of the purposes of the Bill is to bring harassment on the grounds of sex in line with the existing law as it affects other protected characteristics, such as race. To take race as an example, to be guilty of the aggravated offence of public harassment on the grounds of race does not require the racial elements to be the primary element of a torrent of abuse that one person might direct at another. Nor is public racial harassment defensible on the grounds that racist harassment was merely a secondary aspect of the behaviour in question.

Indeed, not only is there the argument of consistency, which the Bill seeks to address, but, in this case, it is right that it is framed in this way because racist abuse should not happen at all. The law should be clear on that, and that applies equally to harassment on the

grounds of someone's sex. For reasons of consistency with the established law elsewhere and, in my view, what is right, we should not introduce a special filter for primacy on the grounds of sex that does not already apply to race and other offences that already have this protection.

Amendments 7 and 6 would delete references to “(or presumed sex)”. The current treatment in the Bill is, again, drafted to be consistent with the Bill as it applies in other contexts, particularly to protected characteristics. To use the example of racial harassment again, section 28 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 makes it clear that an offence is racially aggravated if the offender demonstrates hostility

“based on the victim's membership (or presumed membership)” of a racial group. It is not always possible with 100% accuracy to determine a person's race or sex in a public place. Indeed, Shakespeare would have been robbed of many a dramatic plotline were it otherwise. But that does not mean it should be acceptable to hurl abuse intentionally at someone who turns out not to be of the sex that was assumed, any more than it would be acceptable to scream racial abuse in public at someone who turned out not to be of the race that the perpetrator presumed them to be. Therefore, again, for reasons of consistency with the existing law and for reasons of justice, I think the drafting of the Bill has it right.

In amendment 9, my hon. Friend, as presaged in his earlier intervention, seeks to specify a commencement date of 1 August this year for the legislation to come into effect. I am very grateful to him for his impatience to get on with changing the law. He is quite right, in all seriousness, that if Parliament passes legislation, that signals the intention of Parliament that the law should change and the Government should not act as a brake on the law being changed in practice. Indeed, it would be unconscionable for the Bill to sit on the statute book uncommenced and therefore unusable to the police and courts. Those who might be watching these proceedings, or reading reports of it, will have a legitimate expectation that if the Bill passes, the law has been changed or will change shortly.

Should the Bill be approved by the House today, as all colleagues know, it would then need to go to the House of Lords, whose procedures and timings are not always clear to at least this Member of this House. If my new clause 1, requiring statutory guidance to be issued, is inserted by the House, that will, as we discussed a few moments ago, take some time, especially if we provide an opportunity to take soundings on it before it is adopted. So I fear that 1 August may be a little too specific and early to be in the Bill as the date by which commencement must be made. I do not want in any way to separate myself from my hon. Friend's motivation—quite the reverse. Should the Bill attract the favour of the House and the other place, I hope that he will join me in pressing the Government today to commit in seriousness to commencing the legislation as soon as is practically possible. Should that commitment turn out not to be enacted in practice, I hope he will bolster my efforts in harrying the Government at every opportunity, and relentlessly—given his considerable experience, and indeed success, in that—until the legislation is commenced.

In conclusion, I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his thoughtful and apposite amendments. I hope he can tell that I have seriously considered their effects. In

no case am I antipathetic to the quite reasonable questions he raises about them, but I do think they have answers in the current drafting of the Bill, with the new clause I am moving today, so I hope that at the end of the debate he will feel able not to press amendments and, should circumstances arrive, to join me in continuing a campaign for great dispatch on the part of the Government.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I rise as the person who tabled the original amendments in Committee that prefigured new clause 1, to recognise this as the best of Parliament. When we come together to write legislation we believe will make a positive and constructive difference to people, listening to each other's concerns and recognising the positive part that scrutiny can play in the process, it can bear fruits that we can all support. I welcome and support new clause 1 as a recognition that there was a concern and an issue with the concept of reasonableness being at the heart of public order offences. Let me clarify what I mean by that.

Let me clarify what I mean by that: this legislation is about harassment, and other forms of harassment legislation have always had within them a test that someone's behaviour cannot be considered reasonable if general opinion would be that their behaviour was unreasonable. In layman's terms, when it comes to the harassment that we are talking about, if someone were being followed down the street and shouted at—particularly about their sex or presumed sex—even if that person were to claim it was reasonable, a magistrate should be able to say that it was patently not. The person responsible should not be able to evade prosecution under this legislation. However, this Bill was originally based on public order offences legislation, which does not include that distinction about whether somebody ought to know that their behaviour was unreasonable.

It is very welcome that the Government have listened and agreed to put out guidance to consider that point. I hope that setting out what I believe that guidance should cover will be a helpful guide to the Government, and perhaps will answer the genuine queries from the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) about whether there can be involvement in it. For many of us, getting this issue right goes to the heart of how this legislation will deliver the effective freedom that we hope for particularly, but not exclusively, for women, as it is women who are overwhelmingly reporting the kind of incidents that we are talking about in this legislation.

One of the challenges will be the initial decision as to whether someone has committed an offence. Many of us are extremely used to the idea that the challenge is our reaction to someone's provocation, rather than the provocation. I hope that new clause 1 will recognise that, consistent with other forms of harassment legislation, a defendant arguing that their behaviour is reasonable should not be a reason not to proceed with a charge. I want to be clear about that, because I understand why people would be concerned. No one is suggesting that the reasonableness defence should not remain; we are arguing that it should for the courts or the magistrates to decide whether the behaviour was reasonable, rather than the defendant. In setting out the guidance, I hope that the Government will give weight to the idea that the presentation of a reasonableness defence, which is quite frequent in harassment cases but not necessarily



[Stella Creasy]

in public order offences, should not deter the CPS or the police from seeking to proceed with a prosecution. In that sense, it would be consistent with the guidance on the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 or the Protection from Harassment Act 1997.

In reference to some of the amendments tabled, agree with the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) about the importance of consistency in the law. I add my support to his argument about retaining the provision on presumed sex within the Bill. The most important thing about this legislation is that it turns the lens from the behaviour of victims—women in particular, because although this legislation covers both men and women, and male and female perpetrators, women will particularly benefit from our clarifying that street-based harassment is unacceptable and is illegal already, and therefore carries a higher penalty if it is targeted in this way. Too often, the victim's behaviour has been called into question in decisions whether to prosecute. It is important that the legislation is written in such a way to turn our attention back to the perpetrator. Were we to have loopholes, whether around reasonableness or the status of the victim, we could inadvertently undermine the capacity of the police and the CPS to secure that outcome.

I recognise the attempts from the hon. Member for Christchurch to test the legislation. If he read the scrutiny of the legislation in Committee, he would appreciate that, because that is where new clause 1 has derived from. I hope he will understand that many of us feel that the changes he suggests would undermine the Bill, because it would not be as clear that our sole concern is the people who harass, intimidate and abuse other people in public because they are focused on the sex or presumed sex of the victim. The important message that we want to send by passing this legislation is that the existing crimes should not be diminished, ignored and seen as part of everyday life, and that we should address them.

That is what I wanted to say, as the person who originally drafted the amendment that has led to new clause 1. I also recognise the cross-party working to get this legislation right. I hope that those who had concerns about new clause 1 or other parts of the legislation will see the benefit of having had these discussions, and that the Bill will benefit many of our constituents as a result.

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), who I know takes a great interest in this particular subject. I am delighted that she included in her remarks a reference to the fact that this legislation applies equally to men who are victims as it does to women who are victims.

10 am

When I looked at the Committee report, one of my concerns was that there was not even a mention of men and boys being victims. I therefore wanted to ensure that emphasis was given to the fact that the Bill applies to men and women equally. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg

Clark) for emphasising that point and saying that, if needs be, that could be included in the guidance produced for prosecutors.

I want to emphasise the significant extent to which men are being sexually harassed. A report from Diversity Dashboard says:

“Sexual harassment in the workplace is widespread, and women suffer the most...although...a significant percentage of men are also victims of sexual harassment.”

According to the *Nursing Times*, many people do not report to their employer that they have been harassed and

“only 17% of sexually harassed male nurses actually report it to their employer. Overall, female nurses are more frequent subjects of sexual harassment. However sexual harassment statistics by gender tell us that men aren't spared either.”

Indeed, 51% of the male respondents to the *Nursing Times* survey said they had been sexually harassed, which is a very high percentage. Diversity Dashboard goes on to say:

“Research shows that, when a man suffers a sexual assault in the workplace, a woman is a perpetrator in 76% of the cases...Additionally, it's worrying and insensitive that such behaviour is seen as a joke when it involves male victims.”

That is why although men are overwhelmingly responsible for sexual harassment against women, we need to take into account that men are on the receiving end as well.

The reason this issue is so important at the moment is a growing belief among experts, including those in professions relating to psychiatry and psychology, about the impact of sexual politics, as it is called, on young men. Madam Deputy Speaker, you may have seen the recent article in *The Spectator* by Gus Carter, in which he says masculinity is now in crisis. He goes on:

“The polling company YouGov found that just 8 per cent of people have positive views of white men in their twenties, by far the lowest of any ethnicity or age group. Males are routinely presented as inherently dangerous, aggressive and animalistic, incapable of controlling their own instincts. You can see it on public transport, where government adverts announce that staring is sexual harassment. Us blokes can't even be trusted to use our eyes properly.”

This is a very serious aspect of the debate around harassment and, as I prefer to put it, common decency, standards of behaviour and politesse. The sexualisation, in a sense, of harassment is having an adverse effect on young males. Teenage boys are being routinely disciplined by schools in circumstances in which their female counterparts are not. A female former teacher who left the profession last year is quoted in the article:

“Boys are now seen as potential perverts... There was this obsession with the victimisation of women. I thought we had been getting somewhere with sex and relationships, teaching the children to treat people with respect, but that has been totally set back.”

I will not go into all the other points that the article makes, but one that is relevant to this debate is that

“there seems to be an inability to hold two notions in our heads: that sexual assault is bad and that treating men as inherent sex pests is also bad. A reasonable worry about assault appears to have morphed into an institutional misogyny. There is a lack of recognition that, as with all crimes, the proportion of perpetrators is vanishingly small. The awful behaviour of a few is leading to the mistreatment of all.”

The consequence of all this in relation to mental health issues for boys and young men, unless we are extremely careful with the language we use, will be that a situation

that is already bad gets even worse. Since 2017, the NHS has found that the proportion of boys with probable mental health issues has increased by more than 50% to nearly one in five. The suicide rate for boys aged 15 to 19 has more than doubled over the past decade. The child psychologist Julie Lynn Evans has said that she thinks the pendulum has now swung too far in the other direction:

“The boys came out of lockdown into this slightly hysterical atmosphere of ‘Don’t touch, that’s inappropriate, that’s assault.’ They are being treated as guilty until proven innocent.”

The article, which I think very telling, goes on to ask what we are going to do about this. Are we going to recognise that young men aged 18 to 24 are significantly more likely to be unemployed than women in a similar age group, and that women are outperforming men in university? We have this problem of workless men living with their parents and almost being discouraged or intimidated into not going out on the street—not only not finding jobs, but not finding girlfriends and so on.

A really serious problem is developing for us, which is why I thought it important to table an amendment to put it right. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells for recognising the significance of the issue. Even—I say “even”—the hon. Member for Walthamstow seems to accept it, and I hope that when she makes remarks on the subject in future she will always emphasise that it is about not just one particular group of victims, but people in general, of both sexes.

Other amendments that I have tabled were designed to develop the debate, and I think we are having that debate. Let me deal first with the timescale and the fear that the guidance will be much delayed. I am not sure that the requirement to produce guidance is necessarily a reason that the Bill could not come into law first, with guidance to follow. The offence could still be created without being conditional on the guidance being produced first, so I do not think that an adequate reason for the Government not to accept a specific date of implementation. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells generously says, “I try to keep an eye on some of these things.”

One reason why amendment 9 would put a specific date in clause 3 is that I had a similar experience with the Bill brought to this place by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) on the abuse of parking rules by rogue parking companies. I suggested that the guidance that followed from the Bill should have to be delivered within a specified period; if it was not, the legislation would not take effect. I am afraid to say that as of today—this was, I think, two years ago—the legislation has still not come into effect. My right hon. Friend was sympathetic to my amendment, but the Government persuaded him to encourage me to withdraw it, in order to protect his Bill. I cite that as an example of the problems arising when we leave it to the Government to decide when and if legislation should take effect.

Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire will, when responding to the debate, deal with the issue around prisoners. One can understand that the Government might be nervous about a consequence of the legislation being that more people may be sent to prison. Certainly, that was one of the objections of a previous Government to the suggestion that we introduce more severe penalties for people convicted of causing death by dangerous driving. The argument was that it

would result in extra prison places being taken up. I hope that he will say that the number of people in prison is not relevant to the debate, because surely the law should take its course; punishment should not exclude prison if prison is merited, just because we do not have enough room in prisons. If we do not have enough room in them, we need to remove from them some of the people who are still on indeterminate sentences, which I think are pretty unjust, and/or we need to build more prisons. That is why I think it is important to put a fixed date in the Bill, and I chose, arbitrarily, 1 August 2023. Actually, it is not that arbitrary; I assumed the normal rule would apply, so I gave a date two months after Royal Assent might take place, and assumed that the Bill, all things being equal, would get through the other place before then.

I turn to my other amendments. On whether to use “because of” or “due to”, I concede that it is a “how many angels can dance on the head of a pin” issue. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells for having looked at that point. On amendment 2 about primacy, proposed new section 4B(1) of the Public Order Act 1986, inserted by clause 1, says:

“A person (A) is guilty of an offence under this section if—

(a) A commits an offence under section 4A (intentional harassment, 5 alarm or distress), and

(b) A carried out the conduct referred to in section 4A(1) because of the relevant person’s sex (or presumed sex).”

I assumed that that would be the sole reason for that behaviour. Indeed, in discussing this with my right hon. Friend, I thought that that was his understanding of his Bill and no subsidiary or other reasons would be taken into account. However, I looked at the subsequent provisions and saw that proposed new section 4B(3) of the 1986 Act stated:

“For the purposes of subsection (1)(b)—

the one to which I have just referred—

“it does not matter whether or not—

(a) A also carried out the conduct referred to...because of any other factor”.

I could not understand why “any other factor” had been introduced, because it seemed redundant and it undermined his contention that when drafting this Bill he wanted it to be clear that this was the primary, if not sole, reason for the conduct being referred to. He has used a slightly different explanation today as to why he is unhappy with my amendments and is citing various precedents from other Acts and claiming “consistency”.

10.15 am

I would be grateful to the Minister if he could spell out whether he accepts that “the relevant person’s sex” must be the main reason for the conduct carried out, otherwise there will not be an offence being committed under the provisions of this Bill. If he is able to spell that out, and perhaps it will be repeated in the guidance, I will go home as a relatively happy bunny. On that note, at this very moment the other place is debating the Third Reading of my Mobile Homes (Pitch Fees) Bill, which is about changing the rules from using the retail price index to using the consumer prices index. I hope that I will be able to go home a happy bunny on the basis of its getting Third Reading in the other place, and I am most grateful to Lord Udny-Lister for taking it through that House. That, however, is an aside.

My amendments 7 and 8 talk about “sex” or “presumed sex”. Let us suppose that someone is in the business of harassing people on the basis of their sex—I hope that not many people are. Let us then suppose that that person thinks that they are harassing a man but it turns out that the person they are harassing is not a man and is in fact a woman—it may be the other way round, and they may think that they are harassing a woman and it then turns out that the person is not a woman but a man. The amount of alarm or distress that will be caused to the person on the receiving end will be significantly reduced if they are not of the sex that was intended by the person who was harassing—

**Greg Clark:** I do not seek to quarrel with my hon. Friend. But let us consider the analogous situation in which a person with brown skin, relatively dark skin, were the subject of a humiliating torrent of racial abuse in the street but was not a member of a given racial group, I do not think that would diminish the impact and the offence intended by the person. Surely the same would apply in this case, and the person on the receiving end would feel humiliation and the perpetrator would have had exactly the same intention.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** With the greatest respect to my right hon. Friend, I think he is conflating two dissimilar situations, because the situation he is describing is already an aggravated offence and what we are talking about here are offences that are not aggravated. Indeed, this Bill has been introduced because they are not regarded as aggravated offences and thereby qualifying for greater punishment.

It is a mistake to try to equate a situation where something is already an aggravated offence with the situation described in this Bill. If a person is harassing or making remarks to somebody in the mistaken belief that they are trying to insult a woman, but it turns out that they are a man, that seems to me to be a mistake. Although that will probably still enable the person to be convicted of a public order offence, it will be a public order offence not because of their behaviour, but because of that person’s sex. It is semantics, I am prepared to concede, but that is why I introduced that amendment.

**Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con):** Before the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), was my hon. Friend saying that misgendering somebody would cause less offence to them as opposed to greater offence? To my mind, any sexual-based harassment, whether it be misgendered or correctly gendered, will still cause offence.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** I have tried to avoid—and have done so up to now—getting into the debate about the difference between sex and gender. I will not rise to my hon. Friend’s bait to try to develop arguments around that. The Bill, commendably, is specific to sex, and it leaves out gender. I will leave it at that if that is all right with my hon. Friend.

This brings me to the conclusion of my remarks. I will not say what my intentions are in relation to these amendments until I have heard from the Minister, which I hope, Madam Deputy Speaker, you will think is a reasonable approach to take.

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

**Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op):** First, let me say how pleased I am to see the Bill finally making its way through the House today. I thank all of the campaigners and people who have worked tirelessly on this issue, including, obviously, the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) with all of his engagement, the civil servants who have been working with him, my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and the many other Members who have contributed to discussions on this subject for such a long time.

As we near the end of Women’s History Month 2023, I can say that the Bill is a welcome step in the right direction. I will, if I may, pull us back to the main subject at issue, which is around public sexual harassment. It does remain a major problem in our society. Plan International UK found that three quarters of girls and young women aged 12 to 21 experienced a form of sexual harassment in a public space in their lifetime. Those numbers increase for disabled women and girls, and for women and girls from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background. The impact of this harassment is shocking. Perhaps it is worth reminding the House about that as we discuss the Bill. In 2020, the Girl Guides found out that 80% of girls and young women feel unsafe when they are out on their own, increasing to 96% of young women aged 17 and 18.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. Just a reminder that, at this stage, we are discussing the amendment. There will be, I am sure, a very good opportunity on Third Reading for the wider issues, but at this point we are on Report. If the hon. Lady prefers to wait to Third Reading, that is absolutely fine.

**Anneliese Dodds:** In that case, I will just say that I mentioned those points in relation to new clause 1 and the other amendments. I believe that the right hon. Gentleman has set out very clearly the rationale, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow, spelling out why we require guidance—we all hope that it will come speedily—but also why it is important that the legislation is consistent with other Acts in this area. I hope that the House will bear those remarks in mind when deciding how to vote.

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** It is a great pleasure to speak to the amendments before the House on Report. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) for his new clause 1 and amendment 1, and I am happy to confirm formally that the Government support those amendments.

As my right hon. Friend has set out, the new clause would require Ministers to publish statutory guidance for all police forces, to which those police forces would have to have regard. In particular, the guidance would need to include material about the reasonable conduct defence that has been the focus of so much discussion. There has been some concern, expressed by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and others, that a subjective interpretation of the reasonable conduct defence might be adopted by defendants in an attempt to repudiate responsibility for their actions or to avoid conviction.

It is the view of the Government that what constitutes reasonable conduct can be defined objectively with regard to their conduct, without needing to have regard



to somebody's internal thought processes. However, we agree that guidance would be valuable in order to be completely clear about that point and to remove any ambiguity, so we are happy to support new clause 1 and amendment 1 in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells.

It will of course be possible for many other people besides the police to refer to the guidance, including the Crown Prosecution Service, which we would expect to operate on the same basis as the police when prosecuting those offences. To respond to a very reasonable question from my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), we want to get this done as quickly as possible. I certainly would not want or expect it to take anything like so long as a year, which he referred to in his speech in a different context; I hope it can be accomplished in a matter of months.

My hon. Friend also said that the guidance should be subject to input and scrutiny to ensure that it is constructed in a way that is proportionate and reasonable, and I am sure the hon. Member for Walthamstow would agree. I would therefore expect opportunities to be provided to interested parties to provide that comment and I will give consideration to whether we should have a formal consultation process on the guidance. We should be mindful that that would introduce additional delay, but, given that the point has been raised, we will give it thought and strike the right balance between getting the guidance done quickly, which everyone wants, and making sure that interested parties both in Parliament and outside have an opportunity to input into its construction.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells for tabling the amendments and to other hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member for Walthamstow and my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch for offering their comments.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** Would it not be normal to produce the draft guidance and then consult on it, rather than expecting the Government to come up with the perfect solution after they have received representations in general? I strongly urge my right hon. Friend to take the approach of having draft guidance first.

**Chris Philp:** It is occasionally possible for the Government to come up with something perfect straight away, but I accept that that does not always occur. The process that my hon. Friend just set out, where the Government might publish a draft and invite comments on it, either informally or via a formal consultation, seems to me a sensible way of arranging matters.

**Stella Creasy:** One of the concerns behind much of this is about consistency in the law. With other forms of harassment legislation, how reasonableness is defined is already written in. I invite the Minister to consider whether the important thing is not to come up with a whole new set of guidelines, but simply to clarify and be consistent in how we expect courts and juries to consider that concept when somebody claims, "I thought my behaviour was reasonable," and the law says, "Well, you ought to have known," in other forms of harassment legislation. This is not about a new piece of guidance; it is about clarifying matters so that we do not inadvertently damage the ways in which our courts can work. For example, the CPS guidance on the Serious Crime Act

2015 talks about how defendants "ought to know" about the course of conduct—again, with oblique directions that judges can give. There is plenty of guidance out there; we really just need to compile it into one document, do we not?

10.30 am

**Chris Philp:** I completely agree with the hon. Lady. There is existing guidance and practice in other areas that quite rightly clarifies or confirms that the assessment of reasonableness includes what somebody ought to have known, and that inferences can be drawn from their behaviour. She is quite right to point to that existing guidance and practice, and I completely agree that we should be consistent on that. I am sure that looking at that would help to draw up the draft in a quick manner. A combination of the approaches suggested by the hon. Lady and by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch will quickly lead us to the right answer and enable us to publish something—a draft—and get views on it, as my hon. Friend suggested. It sounds to me as if there is a rapid, sensible, pragmatic and consistent way forward.

Let me turn now to the amendments moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch. On the topic of his good humour, I have been informed by the Government Whips—a source of unimpeachable reliability, obviously—that his Mobile Homes (Pitch Fees) Bill has successfully passed its Second Reading unopposed in the other place. I hope that that provides an early boost to his good humour. Although it does not relate directly to an amendment, I just want to respond to one important point that arose in his speech, on something that I have noticed, too: adverts on London underground tubes referring to people's behaviour in terms of where they look. He said that those were produced by the Government. For the sake of clarity, those advertisements are in fact produced by the Mayor of London in his capacity as the head of Transport for London.

As the House has heard and would expect, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells has given the various amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch close and careful consideration, as have colleagues in the Home Office. We completely understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch has tabled the amendments after a great deal of consideration, and we have taken them very seriously indeed, so I will go through them one by one.

First, amendments 2 and 6 would require the other person's sex—the victim's sex—to have been the principal motivation for the defendant's behaviour. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells has set out, he has drafted the legislation in the way that he has so that we are following precedent, and, as the hon. Member for Walthamstow said a moment ago, it is best that, where possible, we are consistent in the way we legislate. If any component of the motivation for the defendant's behaviour is concerned with the sex of the victim, that is, in itself, of great concern. It may not be the principal component in some cases—it may simply be one component or a subsidiary component—but it is serious none the less.

The aim of the House is to protect people from sex-based harassment, and it strikes me that, whether the sex-based component is the principal component or

[Chris Philp]

a subsidiary component, the seriousness remains. Having considered that very carefully and, of course, discussed it with the Bill's promoter, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells, our feeling on balance is that the drafting as it was best translates the House's intention into legislation and is consistent with the rest of the statute book.

Amendments 3 and 5 would replace the words "because of". Once again, as my right hon. Friend has set out, those words appear in a number of other contexts, in other pieces of legislation, and although we cannot, as he said, dispute the command of the English language and elegance of expression of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch, there is a great benefit to consistency with other pieces of legislation. We feel that following precedent and maintaining that consistency is a good idea.

Amendments 7 and 8 would restrict the new offence to cases in which the harassing is done because of the victim's actual sex, rather than what the defendant presumes the victim's sex to be. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch that getting into wider discussions about the distinction between sex and gender would probably not be helpful in the context of this debate. We are considering here a circumstance in which someone harasses someone else in the erroneous belief that that person's gender is the opposite of what it actually is. I think that what matters is the intent to cause sex-based distress and harassment, and that even if the perpetrator, or the alleged perpetrator, was mistaken in their assumption about the sex of the victim—or the purported victim, the complainant—that does not minimise or mitigate the seriousness of the act, because the intention was there and the act was undertaken.

At this point I should say that I had meant to address at the start of my speech a question that arose while my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch was speaking. Let me deal with it now. I agree with my hon. Friend that concerns about prison capacity should not constrain what the House may do in framing new legislation. It is of course incumbent upon Parliament to legislate and set out criminal offences. The police will investigate, the Crown Prosecution Service will prosecute and the courts will, if appropriate, convict. It is then up to the Government to ensure that adequate prison capacity is available. I know that my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice is engaged in a substantial prison building programme, and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch that prison capacity constraints or availability should in no way fetter the House as it considers legislation.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister is making some very good points, with only one exception: I think that the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has had a good record in this general area. When it comes to the prison population, however, is it not about time that we did something about the 1,000 young people who are convicted under joint enterprise? That could open up so much capacity in our prisons.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. Let us stick to the amendments.

**Chris Philp:** The hon. Gentleman has made an important point, and I am sure that—as you have implied, Madam Deputy Speaker—the House will have an opportunity to consider it on another occasion.

Amendment 4 would make the Bill state that the defendant can be a man or a woman. As we heard earlier from my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells, the defendant could indeed be a man or a woman, and indeed the victim could be a man or a woman, because, as we have established, the Bill makes no distinction between men and women. We do not generally set out in legislation the permitted genders of potential perpetrators, or those who might be guilty. Almost every offence is capable of being committed by a man or a woman, but we do not usually need to put that on the face of a Bill, and I do not think we need to do so in this instance. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch was right to raise this issue and to seek the clarification that I am happy to provide.

Amendment 9 requires the Bill to come into force on 1 August this year. I entirely share the desire of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and the hon. Member for Walthamstow to get the Bill activated quickly. Let me be candid and say that, as a Minister, I sometimes find it frustrating that it takes longer to get things done than perhaps it ought to, so I share the sentiment expressed in the amendment. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells said earlier, there is some uncertainty about the timing of the Bill's passage through the other place. Obviously, their lordships regulate their own business, and we cannot be certain about how they may seek to dispose of the Bill.

There is also the question about the guidance, which we have discussed already, and the suggestion that we publish a draft that people can then comment on. That will take a little time. I hope it is a few months, but I do not want to create a tripwire that we inadvertently stumble over. I suggest that we proceed, as is often the case in primary legislation, with commencement via a statutory instrument, with a firm undertaking from the Government that we will seek to do this as soon as possible. The Bill clearly commands, in principle, widespread support across the House, and for the sake of protecting women and men it is important that we get this on to the statute book, and operational and effective, as quickly as possible.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*New clause 1 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.*

### Clause 3

EXTENT, COMMENCEMENT AND SHORT TITLE

*Amendment made:* 1, page 2, line 20, after "1" insert "(Guidance)".—(Greg Clark.)

This amendment is consequential on NC1.

*Third Reading*

10.41 am

**Greg Clark:** I beg to move, that the Bill be now read the Third time.

I am grateful for the debates that we have had in Committee and in the House this morning. The amendments that have been accepted reflect our substantial

debate in Committee. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his amendments, which have afforded us the opportunity to clarify some important aspects of the Bill, and have some commitments made from the Dispatch Box that will be useful to us if, as I hope, the Bill continues to make progress.

We have taken some time this morning, and I am conscious that other colleagues have Bills that they are anxious to progress. If those Bills are to be properly scrutinised, that requires me to be brief. If the House decides to give the Bill its Third Reading, it will be an historic day. For the first time in our history, deliberately harassing, following, shouting degrading words or making obscene gestures at women and girls—and yes, on occasion, at men and boys—in public places, because of their sex, and with the deliberate intention to cause them alarm or distress, will be a specific offence, and a serious one at that.

The astonishing thing is that that has not been an offence until now, many years after it was made an aggravated offence to harass someone in public on grounds of their race, religion or sexuality, for example. Indeed, women—it is mostly women, although the Bill also applies to men—have had to alter the way they live their lives: to walk home using different routes; to arrange to be accompanied rather than walk alone; to have, or pretend to have, conversations on a mobile phone while walking alone; to hold keys clenched in their hands as a safeguard.

So prevalent is this that when visiting a sixth form at one of my local schools a few weeks ago, with young men and women of 17 and 18, I asked how many students in the class typically walked home with keys in their hands. Instantly, without conferring, every young woman in the class put up their hand. Not a single young man did, and they expressed some mystification that this happens at all. Such are the changes and accommodations that have, sometimes subconsciously, been made because of the potential and reality of harassment in public.

Our streets belong to women just as much as they belong to men. Women should be able to use our streets as confidently and safely as men do, free from abuse, humiliation, and physical or verbal violence. The Bill makes the specific but important step that harassing women—or men or boys, if it applies to them—in the street with the intention to degrade or terrify is not normal, natural or “just the way of the world”; it is a crime, and a serious one at that. The Bill will address that anomaly and move our legislation forward. I commend it to the House.

10.45 am

**Stella Creasy:** This Bill has been a long time in gestation. It reflects years of campaigning about a simple concept, clearly articulated by the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), and the surprise that those not affected by it feel when they realise and see it: that misogyny is driving crimes against women and girls. It is a simple statement but a clear recognition, for the first time ever in legislation, that women are being targeted simply because they are women; that young girls in our society walk holding their keys, get asked, “What were you wearing?”, are told not to

get on buses at a certain time of night, and are made to feel frightened and to be wary in a way that young men are not.

I want to address head-on the point made by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) because I agree with him that we have to stand up for our young men. We have to stand up for the bulk of young men who know when they see that and who realise what is happening to their sisters, mums, friends in school, aunts and cousins, and how awful it must be that 51% of our society does not have the same freedom to go about their daily business. Those young men deserve better than the idea that somehow this kind of behaviour is inevitable and that “boys will be boys.” In passing this legislation today, we are standing up not just for men and boys, because the legislation covers men and women equally, but for that quiet majority of young and older men who recognise that this behaviour is completely unacceptable, that it is criminal and that, for too long, nothing has been done about it.

I know that the hon. Member for Christchurch is somebody who very much cares about the evidence, so let me give him the detail. Where those police forces have been taking seriously crimes that are motivated by sex or presumed sex and are recording that data, the story they tell is compelling for why the legislation matters. Twelve of the 43 police forces in England and Wales now use this policy. The crime survey for England and Wales found there were 67,000 reports of hate crime based on gender between March 2015 and 2018, and 57,000 of those were targeted at women. This police policy started in Nottinghamshire, under the leadership of Sue Fish, and it showed a clear difference. I hope all of us in this House will pay tribute to Sue Fish and the tremendous work she has done in recognising the benefits to policing of taking this approach.

In that same time period, Nottinghamshire Police received 269 reports of misogyny, 125 of which were classed as hate crime and 144 were classed as non-crime incidents. Of the 265 misogyny hate crime victims, 243 were female. The same pattern emerges in Avon and Somerset, where just over 90% of the victims were female, but men did also come forward, so we know that men will be able to use this legislation.

My point in raising this is not to say that it somehow does not matter that young men might experience sex-based harassment; it is to recognise that at the moment in our society it is women who are paying the price for our failure to understand how misogyny has driven crime against them and to recognise that in law. What the law will do is correct that imbalance. It will bring us the opportunity not just to record that data, but finally to acknowledge it in the courts. In doing so, we stand up for all those young men who do not want to see this behaviour, who do recognise that it is abuse and harassment, and who do recognise that their sisters, their mothers, their aunts, their cousins and their friends at school deserve the same freedoms to go about their daily business as they do. This Bill, and the concept of recognising, as we do with other protected characteristics, that there are those out there who perpetrate crimes because of their hatred and anger towards somebody because of their sex or their presumed sex, is about equality of emancipation.

I say to the hon. Member for Christchurch, who I will know will be as deeply concerned as I was by the reports of sexual harassment among his own police force in



[Stella Creasy]

Dorset, that one reason why many of us campaigned for this legislation and this recognition was the evidence from police forces about just how transformative it is. Let us be very clear: we are not talking about new forms of crime. We are talking about changing a culture in which women coming forward to report crime have been told, “Well, that’s just life. We couldn’t really find this person.” Not everybody who follows a woman down a road shouting abuse, suggesting that they might want to touch them in various sorts of ways and thinking that somehow that is an appropriate way to introduce themselves to somebody, becomes a rapist or a sexual abuser. But many of those who are rapists and sexual abusers start with that sort of behaviour. The kind of data the Bill will allow us to gather helps us to detect and prevent crimes. It helps us to change the culture within policing. In this week of all weeks, we know how important that will be for the safety of everybody in our constituencies.

I share with the hon. Member for Christchurch deep concern about the role models our young men have. I look on in horror at the material Andrew Tate promoted. I look on in horror at the things that can be found online that we know our young men are consuming. But I have great faith in the young men of this country. They do not need to be cosseted or nannied. They need us to stand up for their ability to be good allies, good brothers, good fathers, good friends and good work colleagues who are not likely to behave in those ways. Those who do behave in the ways we are discussing need to feel the force of the law. The law needs to be on the side of the victims, by recognising that behaviour in the way that we do other forms of hate crime.

By passing the Bill, we are sending a powerful message to our young men that they deserve better than the caricature of “boys will be boys” and the idea that they somehow cannot help themselves. We know they can. We know it is as much about our young men and the message we send them as it is our young women and their freedoms we are fighting for in this legislation. I welcome the fact that there has been cross-party work on the Bill. I pay tribute to Citizens UK, Our Streets Now and the Fawcett Society for the work they have done to make the argument that we should not minimise harassment in public. We should recognise it, treat it equally and prosecute those who behave in those ways.

I suspect that across the House there is a common agreement about how much this debate is changing. We are all of a certain age. We remember things that were on television when we were younger that we now know are not acceptable. The hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French) is shaking his head. I am sure afterwards we can compare notes on just how awful our ’90s fashion was. We remember things that were on television, and cultural ideas about race and ethnicity, that we would now recognise are inappropriate, and indeed that created a culture in which racial hatred and abuse was encouraged. We hope, in time, that working against targeting people on the basis of their sex or presumed sex will have the same effect: that we can challenge myths, challenge expectations and challenge behaviour. But we cannot do that if the law is not on the side of women who have not come forward to date—the 80% of women who experience street-based harassment

but do not report it. The Bill will change that. It will also support young men, and it will support our society to be a better version of itself.

I hope Members will support the Bill. This is the start of a process. I hope the Minister will talk about the training that will be given to the police and the CPS to ensure that the legislation is effective. But let us have no more minimisation, no more shaking our heads and saying, “It’s just the way of the world.” Let us have no more teaching young women to be frightened, to go on self-defence courses, to travel with their friends and to carry those keys, any more than we say to young men, “Well, try not to do it again.” Let us change that culture. Let us change the law. Let us make this a society where everybody is just free to live their lives in peace. I will wager, left or right, that is an ambition we can all get behind.

10.54 am

**Jackie Doyle-Price** (Thurrock) (Con): I will be brief, but I could not let this legislation pass without commenting on it, particularly in the week when we saw the Casey review, to which the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) referred. That review reminds us all just how everyday an experience sexual harassment is for so many women and girls. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) for taking up this cause. In the 13 years that I have been here, we have talked a lot about these issues, and about violence against women and girls, but it has not got much beyond words and into concrete action.

There has been much resistance to the measure because of the additional pressures that it might put on the police. By resisting it, this place was sending the message to women and girls that this was their lot; it was normalising the behaviour that we are talking about. The Casey review shows that if we normalise that behaviour in society, we give a green light to it in our police services, and the police are exactly the people who should be keeping us safe.

The Bill marks a real turning point. At last, we are sending the message, “No, we will not put up with this. This is not acceptable behaviour.” It should not be acceptable that anyone experiences harassment. Nobody should think that they can get away with it. Nobody should abuse their power and make people feel uncomfortable and distressed just because they can. I am hugely grateful to my right hon. Friend for the Bill, and really grateful to the Government for embracing and supporting it. This is a rare moment of unity; we are all on the same side. I hope this marks the beginning of many more measures that give us women the opportunity to participate in society without having to put up with intimidation day in, day out.

10.56 am

**Peter Gibson:** It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this debate. I once again congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) on bringing forward this important and hugely welcome Bill, which will better protect all our constituents.

As I outlined in my Second Reading speech, we have a long heritage of protective legislation brought forward by Conservative Governments; there is the Children Act 1989, the Protection from Harassment Act 1997,



the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, the Modern Slavery Act 2015, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and even my private hire and taxi legislation, or Sian's law. We can add my right hon. Friend's Bill to those. I also look forward to seeing very soon the draft legislation promised by the Government on banning conversion practices, which will add further to that range of protections. I appreciate that time is short, so I conclude by again congratulating him on the Bill's Third Reading. I am happy to give it my full support.

10.57 am

**Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): I will be brief, too, given the limited time available. I rise to support the Bill, which provides greater protection from sex-based harassment. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) for all his great work, and all the campaigners who have campaigned so hard on the issue.

May I please again urge the Minister to review the Metropolitan police's tri-borough policing model? It was mentioned in Baroness Casey's review this week, which highlighted a number of issues. I will raise one that is particularly relevant to this Bill: the review highlighted that 50% more sexual offences occur in the south-east basic command unit area, which includes my home of Bexley, than in the central north BCU, which includes the likes of Camden and Islington. However, as Baroness Casey points out, under the one-size-fits-all policing model introduced by the Mayor of London, the resourcing model is the same for both BCUs. That is not right. Alongside that, the Mayor's disastrous ultra low emission zone plans will impact many women travelling home at night and their safety. I again urge the Minister to look into the matter of the tri-borough policing model.

10.58 am

**Mr Sheerman**: I will speak very briefly. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) on introducing the Bill. I wanted to speak in support of it as a man on the Opposition Back-Benches; we in the Opposition have some very able women who have led this campaign. I have a vested interest; I have daughters—Lucy, Madlin and Verity—and I have granddaughters: Megan, Lola, Gwen, Elodie, Rosa and Arwen. They are girls, and I want them to grow up in a world where this abuse no longer exists.

10.59 am

**Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): I warmly welcome this Bill from my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark). Too many women and, even more concerning, many girls have experienced a form of sex-based harassment in public places. The Government's call for evidence ahead of our violence against women and girls strategy received 180,000 responses, showing the depth and breadth of feeling among British women on their safety and exposure to harassment when they are just going about their daily lives. As part of this strategy, Barnstaple in my North Devon constituency has received £348,000 of safer streets funding to tackle violence against women and girls. I know that my police and crime commissioner and local force have been

tackling these crimes, which act as barriers to women and girls enjoying their local community. I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank my right hon. Friend for his work and to place on record my support for this important Bill.

11 am

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I will also speak briefly and begin by paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) for securing the passage of this Bill. It has been great to hear it being warmly supported in the House today.

I rise primarily to pay tribute to a group of girls who really helped me understand this issue. Sandbach High School is not in my constituency—it is in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce)—but she kindly agreed for me to visit, because so many of my constituents go to school there. It is a girls school, and I had a session with a group of girls who put across to me how frequently this was an issue for them, even at this point in their lives, and how commonplace it was for them to experience harassment.

I also pay tribute to a charity in Crewe called Motherwell, founded by Kate Blakemore. What we have discussed today is recognising that this issue sits within a bigger picture of how we think about and treat women and girls in society. Motherwell is a women and girls charity dedicated to empowering women in all sorts of different ways, including looking at issues of their own safety. That organisation and that group of girls helped me understand this issue. I am pleased to be here today to pay tribute to them, and to my right hon. Friend, in supporting the Bill.

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

11.1 am

**Anneliese Dodds**: I gave my thanks previously to those who have done such an excellent job in bringing the Bill to the House, so I will be brief, but I wanted to underline an incredibly important point that has been made by a number of speakers. This Bill will be positive for everyone. The evidence for that has already been set out, including by the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark). When we look at the evidence about the impact of this kind of behaviour, especially on girls, I know that all of us in the House are incredibly concerned. Girlguiding UK found that a third of girls aged 17 and 18 first experienced harassment at the age of 11. It will be good for girls and women, and for boys and men, to be clear that the atrocious behaviour of a minority is truly rejected by the majority. This is therefore important legislation.

While it is good that the Bill has Government support, it is a shame that some of these important issues seem often to be relegated to private Members' Bills. It is two years since the violence against women and girls strategy was launched, and we have not seen enough progress. We need to see more. Yes, the Bill is positive, but we need to see misogyny being made a hate crime. We need to see specialist rape courts across the country and domestic abuse specialists in every 999 room. Ultimately,

[Anneliese Dodds]

we need to see a cross-Government approach. While it is absolutely right that we focus in this Bill on criminal justice and policing matters, the solution will be found more widely in our schools, hospitals and workplaces. Not delivering that solution will fail women and girls.

11.3 am

**Chris Philp:** I will be extremely brief, because I know that many other Members want to bring Bills forward today, and other Members have made excellent contributions. I quickly congratulate again my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) on bringing forward this legislation. I congratulate many Members on the work they have done on this issue, particularly the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price).

It is important that this Bill is only one part of a wider piece of work to protect women and girls. Of course, this is a Government who brought forward legislation on forced marriages, stalking, upskirting and making sure that serious sexual offenders spend more of their sentence in prison. We have brought forward the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, introduced the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and legislated on female genital mutilation. There of course is a lot more work to do, and I look forward to working with colleagues in government and across the House to make further progress.

11.4 am

**Greg Clark:** With the leave of the House, I will briefly thank all those who have aided the passage of the Bill.

I start by thanking my constituents who, over the years, have shared with me their experiences and encouraged me to bring forward this legislation, supported by campaigning groups from across the country.

To turn those intentions into prospective legislation, one requires advice and support. I am grateful to officials and Ministers in the Home Office, including the former Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), and the current Home Secretary and her ministerial team.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Miss Dines), who has seen the Bill through its previous stages, is indisposed today. I want to put on record my thanks to her and to my right hon. Friend the Minister for very ably picking up the brief today and responding during the Report stage. I am grateful to him for that.

I thank the excellent Clerks of the House. In particular, I would like to single out the Clerk responsible for private Members' Bills, Anne-Marie Griffiths, who does a tremendous job, supported by her very able colleagues. We are grateful for the advice that she has given.

Finally, I thank the no less able Whips on both sides, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris). She has developed a reputation for sensing the mood of the House. In a House that can sometimes be a forum for contention, my hon. Friend has great skill in being able to bring us together on occasions such as this one.

Having put on record my thanks, I commend the Bill to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I thank the right hon. Gentleman. Anne-Marie Griffiths was here earlier and she will be back, but we will ensure that she is aware of those kind words.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

## Ballot Secrecy Bill [Lords]

*Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee, considered.  
Third Reading*

11.7 am

**Paul Bristow** (Peterborough) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

First, I want to thank Lord Haywood for his tremendous work on the Bill and for sponsoring it in the other place. My notes say that it is largely because of him that the Bill is brought before us today for Third Reading. However, the truth is that it is almost entirely because of him that it is under consideration by us today.

I am grateful to the noble Lords of all parties in the other place who have worked together on the Bill. I am also grateful to the Ministers and the officials in the Department who have assisted its swift progress through both Houses.

The Bill is important to the integrity and democracy of our elections. It has cross-party support and it has been a great privilege for me to sponsor it in the House of Commons. I have spoken before about the importance and relevance of the Bill. It seeks to tackle the issue of family voting, when two or more people attempt to vote together in a polling booth, potentially leading to someone being intimidated or their decision being influenced. It is vital that voters cast their votes in secret. Once inside the polling station, no one should feel intimidated or be influenced by someone else on which way to vote, or whether to vote at all.

The Bill will clear up the powers that presiding officers have at polling stations and how they can better deal with the issue of family voting. Currently, those powers are unclear, which is partly why this issue has become so prominent. That is not a criticism of polling station staff members, but there is a grey area of what they can and cannot do if they witness offences such as family voting at polling stations.

This legislation will clear up the powers and responsibilities of presiding officers and polling station staff to prevent family voting from occurring. For those who do not think that this is a prominent issue, I will read out some statistics from a report by Democracy Volunteers on the May 2022 elections, which outlines how widespread family voting is. Some 1,723 polling stations were observed across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Each observation lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, and family voting was witnessed at a staggering 25% of polling stations.

The problem is not exclusive to any one area and affects all of the United Kingdom, as is evident when we break the figures down further—21% in England, 42% in Northern Ireland, 19% in Scotland and 34% in Wales. The numbers in Northern Ireland are higher due to the elections for the Northern Irish Assembly requiring voters to elect several representatives rather than just one under the single transferable vote system. That can lead to people becoming confused and needing assistance. It is not a reflection of family voting being more prominent in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, family voting affects women the most.

The report states that more than 70% of those affected by family voting in the May 2022 elections were women. We must get a grip on this ugly practice. Women should

not feel intimidated or have their vote influenced by anyone at a polling station. The report's findings are truly concerning. It was even reported that staff at polling stations were reluctant to intervene when they saw it occurring—I reiterate that this is not a criticism of the great work that those staff do. Guidance on what they can and cannot do should be—and will now be—clearer.

Democracy Volunteers produced a report of Peterborough during the 2019 by-election, where family voting was witnessed at an astonishing rate of 48%. That impacts confidence in election results—no matter how unfairly, perhaps. It cannot be good for democracy. When I speak to different communities and constituents across Peterborough, I hear widespread support for the Bill. It will rectify the issue and tackle family voting at polling stations. It sets out the amendments to the Representation of the People Act 1983. As a result, a person would commit an offence if they were with or near another person at a polling booth with the intent to influence that person in a particular way of voting or to refrain from voting. The word “intent” is important. It means that people who need help or assistance when voting due to disabilities can still receive it. It also means that parents accompanied by children standing alongside them are not committing a crime.

The people who practise family voting with an intent to intimidate and influence a person's vote have no respect for the secret ballot. It is wholly inappropriate and is a rising threat to our democratic right to a secret ballot in the UK. We must uphold our values and traditions. Secret voting was introduced just over 150 years ago, in 1872, to tackle many bad practices in elections at that time. The Bill is a continuation of the idea that voting should be done secretly. It will give presiding officers the correct powers to tackle the problem then and there at the polling station. There is only room for one person and one mind at the ballot booth. This Bill will ensure that that is always the case, which makes it a crucial piece in updating and protecting our democracy.

11.14 am

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I rise to support the Bill in the name of both my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow) and, as he rightly says, Lord Hayward in the other place, who has done a brilliant job over many years on electoral reform and ensuring that our ballots are cast fairly and properly.

It is a fundamental part of democracy that people can go to a polling booth if they are on the electoral register. They give their name, they show their polling card and they are issued with a ballot paper. No one should then influence them over which way they cast their vote. In my long experience serving in the London Boroughs of Brent and Harrow, we have witnessed that at first hand all too frequently: not just the influence of one man over one woman, but often a man over a whole family—and it can be a large family who go in, with the women and young men being told which way to vote.

In certain places, particularly London, we have elections on many different systems: we often have local elections the same day as a general election, and we have the London mayoral and assembly elections, where three ballot papers are issued at one time. There is potential for confusion and a need for clarification. My hon.



[*Bob Blackman*]

Friend the Member for Peterborough has outlined that it would not be an offence for someone to ask for help and assistance.

In my experience, presiding officers and clerks are always available to offer that help and assistance, particularly to those who have disabilities. They often go out of their way to come to the doors of a polling station if necessary, to assist someone who is disabled to register their vote properly. The problem arises when some people seek to influence others and make sure that they vote in a particular way, especially when it is against their will and they do not really want to do it.

The most important thing is that we safeguard the ballot in a free and fair way through this Bill, which I am sure will receive cross-party support. I know it was supported when I had the pleasure of serving on the Bill Committee—albeit very briefly—and hon. Members want to ensure that it makes progress. In my borough, we pride ourselves on being very diverse. We have someone from every country on the planet, every religion, every race, every background, every language—you name it, we have it. People need to feel free when they go to vote, and to feel that their vote is going to count in the way that they wish it to.

However, I am afraid we have had many experiences of families coming together into polling stations and almost being forced to vote in a particular way. That cannot be right and it needs to change. Many may agree with the candidates they are voting for, but the most important thing is that family voting needs to be outlawed.

In supporting this Bill, I say to my hon. Friend that it clears up one issue of concern. The Government have taken action on preventing personation, and the requirement for identity cards and suchlike to be used at polling stations to prove that someone is the person entitled to cast the vote is an important reform. I look forward to that having a massive impact on stopping people from personating other individuals on the register.

My one concern is that we have seen rapid growth in the use of postal voting. I support this Bill completely, but, where large households register for and are sent postal votes, there is still the risk of those people being coerced into voting in a particular way, or—even worse—not even voting themselves, but just filling in the identity element, with the head of the household filling in the rest of the ballot papers before they are sent back. That is something we must think about if we wish to safeguard our democracy.

I will end there, because I know other colleagues wish to speak and we want other Bills to go through. Despite that note of caution, I warmly welcome this Bill, which will improve the secrecy and sanctity of our ballots.

11.19 am

**Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend and very sound colleague the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow) for promoting the Bill and Lord Hayward for his sterling work in the other place and his work on electoral reform issues over many, many years.

It is absolutely fundamental for democracy that elections are free and fair. Fraudulent voter intimidation or any other form of undue influence on our democracy is

simply unacceptable. It is more important than ever that we foster trust in our political system and that the electoral process is above suspicion. Secret voting has been in place since the Ballot Act 1872. Our society rightly believes that it is up to individuals to decide how they will vote; it is not a decision for their family, for local leaders or for any other group to make.

Unfortunately, over recent years we have seen several high-profile cases of unscrupulous behaviour corrupting election results. This has damaged public confidence in the system. Although Tower Hamlets provides the clearest example in recent memory, the problem is by no means limited to any one part of the country. It has been going on for many years.

Having been a local resident in Calderdale at the time, I recall the shocking findings in Halifax during the 2010 general election, when Calderdale Council admitted that 763 postal votes from the Halifax constituency failed to match voter registration records. That prompted the local Conservative party to submit a lengthy dossier to West Yorkshire police, which highlighted a number of mis-practices that were then investigated. They included—but were by no means limited to—voter impersonation, bullying, multiple postal votes dispatched to empty properties, bogus voters and false registration. Much like in Tower Hamlets, I am afraid the police were far too slow to investigate the issues. Frankly, they were reluctant to get involved with what was incorrectly seen as a party political matter.

Lord Pickles rightly identified the practice of family voting as a specific concern in his 2016 review into electoral fraud, in which he recommended the strengthening of guidance and training. As recently as last year, as my hon. Friend pointed out, Democracy Volunteers, an impartial group that observes and reports on UK elections, suggested that family voting continues to be an issue and was witnessed in more than a quarter of the polling stations it visited.

I am particularly concerned that family voting and voter intimidation disproportionately affect women in Asian communities. A 2015 Manchester University paper for the Electoral Commission found evidence among interviewees in Pakistani and Bangladeshi-origin communities that hierarchical family structures often mean that women are expected to follow the lead of the head of the household. This creates additional family voting vulnerability, especially among ethnic minority households. That was also the conclusion of the Democracy Volunteers report on the Tower Hamlets election, which found:

“Those subjected to family voting...were invariably women...from the Asian community and those causing family voting were generally men”.

That absolutely runs contrary to British values. I am concerned that this is just one example of an issue to which cultural sensitivities and misplaced political correctness have frankly caused a blind eye to be turned for far too long.

By introducing a specific new offence, the Bill will clearly demonstrate our commitment to secret voting and will reaffirm an individual's right to freely choose who they vote for. It will give our brilliant presiding officers more confidence to challenge any suspicious behaviour and, if necessary, involve the police. I believe this is where the Bill will have the most impact, by making it clear that individuals who accompany a voter



to a polling booth, or who position themselves nearby with the intention of influencing a voter, will be breaking the law. By making this clear, and by giving presiding officers confidence, we will have the best chance of preventing family voting and ending undue influence at our polling stations. If these practices are not challenged at the polling station, they will simply continue. In passing this Bill, I hope the Electoral Commission will update its guidance to make clear to all concerned the importance of ending these practices once and for all.

11.25 am

**Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow) on introducing this important Bill, because a private vote is at the heart of our democracy. Every citizen over the age of 18 is eligible to have their say, from electing a local councillor to national referendums. Without this basic principle, voters are exposed to the risk of bribery, blackmail and other forms of peer pressure and unfair influencing.

The current situation allows someone to enter the voting booth with another person. In some cases, this can lead to a voter being unduly influenced and coerced in how they vote. This practice may be used by a husband to instruct their wife on which way to vote, which is clearly unacceptable and flies in the face of what the suffragettes fought for more than 100 years ago. Women, and men, from every background have the right to vote for the candidate who best reflects their interest and, I dare say, this sometimes might not align with their husband's interest.

I welcome the exception for children who enter a polling booth, as teaching our youngsters about the democratic process in such a hands-on way is vital to ensuring that they engage with democracy as they grow up. Similarly, there will always be those who require physical assistance with the voting process but, in making sure that we maintain the strength of our democracy and represent all our constituents and their needs, I warmly welcome this Bill and the support it will provide in ensuring the right to a free and private vote.

11.26 am

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I, too, thank my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow) for introducing this Bill, as it is vital that we protect the secret ballot as part of our democracy.

As is often the case with private Members' Bills, I have come to understand an area of our law and history that I previously did not understand so well. We take the secret ballot for granted, but we have not always had it. Previously, people had to declare for whom they had voted, and they were subjected to all kinds of harassment, intimidation and bullying by, for example, their landowner or employer to vote a particular way. The first attempt to introduce a secret ballot was made in 1853 by Thomas Thompson, the Radical MP. The issue gained more traction in the 1860s, with the secret ballot being established in the 1870s. It has been a fundamental part of our electoral process ever since.

Members have spoken about the importance of the secret ballot in preventing people from being intimidated or pressed to vote in a particular way but, of course, it is also important because it reduces the chance of a voter

being bribed. Our vote cannot be bought if we cannot show how we voted. There are two facets to the secret vote.

We have covered some of the other changes made to our voting system since the introduction of the secret ballot. There are other things on which we need to work, but I welcome this Bill because the secret ballot is such a fundamental part of our democracy. My hon. Friend spoke about the fantastic work done by Democracy Volunteers. As MPs, we see how, in all sorts of ways, our communities and civic life are improved by volunteers, and voting is no different. I have learned today that voting is another area in which volunteers play an important role.

My hon. Friend mentioned that more than 200 people across the nation volunteered to take part in the research, which gives us a powerful insight and shows that this is not a small or one-off issue but is widespread. Twenty-five per cent. of the observations found this practice was taking place, which demonstrates how important it is that we do everything we can to ensure privacy in the polling booth. It cannot be easy for the people who work at the polling station, and we are very sensitive to the fact that people in the polling booth should feel comfortable and respected. It would feel uncomfortable to be approached, or to be interacted with in any way, in the polling booth, and this Bill will give staff the confidence and legal clarity they need to tackle these issues. This is not about blaming them, as it is not their fault, but they will need a lot of support to be able to intervene in what is a very sensitive area.

I welcome the exceptions in this Bill. We all have constituents who would physically struggle to make that journey to the polling booth. Yes, we can encourage them to take up the offer of a postal vote, but we also know that some people absolutely want to make that journey, no matter how difficult that might be physically for them. This is important, so I welcome the exception that has been made. If even a single person is having their vote influenced in this way, we should do everything that we can to stop it. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow) for introducing the Bill and to my friend, Lord Hayward, who is in the Gallery, for taking it through in the Lords. I am glad that we have made progress today, and I look forward to the Bill being passed.

11.30 am

**Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): I rise in support of the Bill, which, as a by-election winner, holds a special place in my heart. That is not only because my noble friend, Lord Hayward, was the chair of my selection meeting, where his passion and knowledge of electoral matters was clear to all of us, but, as we have heard already, because it was during a by-election more than 150 years ago, in 1872, that a secret ballot was first used. This followed the Ballot Act 1872, which made provisions for every elector to be entitled to mark the ballot paper without being seen by anyone else.

The principle of the secret ballot is the bedrock of our system and an essential democratic principle. It is therefore unacceptable that there are some cases that undermine that principle, namely through family voting, where, as we have heard already, a voter is accompanied

[Mr Louie French]

by another person into or near a polling booth with the intention of influencing their vote. I welcome the fact that the Bill introduces an important and specific new offence for individuals who accompany a voter to a polling booth, or position themselves nearby with the intention of influencing a voter.

I also welcome the fact that the Bill does not apply to, first, a companion of a disabled voter who has made the required written declaration to allow them to assist a disabled voter, and, secondly, to a child of a voter accompanying them to the polling station. I am sure that I am not the only Member in this Chamber today who, as a child, went with their parents when they voted—I can remember it well. In my case, I went with my mum, who is hugely passionate about women exercising their hard-earned right to vote, and who instilled this passion in me, which is one of the main reasons why I support the Bill. Thankfully, for me, my mother also votes for me in person, but I do not unduly influence her. *[Interruption.]* Or so she tells me, yes.

As Democracy Volunteers discovered, more than 70% of those being affected by family voting were women. Further to that, I welcome the fact that the Bill also provides our brilliant polling station officers and presiding officers across the country with the clarity and support that is needed effectively to act on these issues when they occur.

The Government are committed to protecting our democracy against those who seek to harm it, which was demonstrated by the Elections Act 2022. I welcome the fact that the provisions in the Bill complement that important work. Voter fraud remains a serious issue, particularly in parts of London and, as we have heard, particularly around postal voting, which my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) has already highlighted. We need to come back to that matter and do all we can to stop voter fraud.

**Bob Blackman:** As a fellow London MP, my hon. Friend will know that we have multi-member constituencies, particularly for local elections. That can lead to confusion in voters' minds. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to ensure that the guidance tells people how many votes they have and how they should cast them?

**Mr French:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. Some of the clarification and changes, particularly around the mayoral elections in London, will help with that clarity for voters and the voting public.

I wish to thank my hon. Friend for steering the Bill through the House and ensuring that our democracy receives the protection that it deserves. I also applaud him for that fantastic new suit that he has worn today to deliver that. I pay tribute to Lord Haywood again for his tenacity in pursuing this issue, which is a reflection of his passion and expertise in our democracy and other electoral matters, and I am pleased to support the Bill.

11.34 am

**Peter Gibson** (Darlington) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow) for ably taking up this Bill on behalf of Lord Haywood, whom I also commend for all his work, including on this Bill.

The integrity of our elections is essential to our democracy. We must ensure that people have faith in the electoral process, and this Bill is another step towards strengthening our existing voting laws, by safeguarding the secrecy of voting in our elections. This Bill will tackle concerns about so-called “family voting”. We have a secret ballot for a reason. The fact that current rules allow someone to be accompanied into a polling booth, out of sight of the poll clerk, and potentially influenced into voting a particular way, drives a coach and horses through the whole idea of ballot secrecy. This Bill strikes me as an entirely common-sense reform.

There should be no need for voters to go into the polling booth with someone else, unless they have gone through the formal process of requesting the assistance of a companion due to a disability or inability to read or write. I am pleased that this Bill does nothing to disenfranchise voters who may need assistance, ensuring that disabled voters and voters unable to read will continue to be entitled to assistance necessary to exercise their vote. Indeed, section 9 of the Elections Act 2022 includes provision for

“such equipment as it is reasonable to provide for the purposes of enabling, or making it easier for...persons to vote independently”. That extends the very narrow and prescriptive provisions that preceded it.

I am pleased that both the Government and the Opposition have been supporting this Bill, which will deliver measures to eliminate voter fraud and voter control. Ahead of the local elections, which we are swiftly approaching, we all have a duty, as parliamentarians, to encourage democratic participation. Having served on the Bill Committee for the 2022 Act, I welcome the measures the Government have taken to guarantee the security of the ballot. I also pay tribute to the excellent campaign being run by the Electoral Commission to make voters aware of the new requirement for photo ID in order to vote, which takes effect in May's local elections. Finally, I am delighted to support my hon. Friend's Bill and I look forward to it passing its Third Reading.

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

11.36 am

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): I add my congratulations to Lord Haywood on initiating this important Bill in the other place and on securing its progress so far. If it is successful—I think we can have complete confidence in that success—it will be the first private Member's Bill in several years to start in the other place and make it on to the statute book. That will be no mean achievement and I know that we will get a decisive step closer to that goal today. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow) on his leadership of this legislation in its proceedings in the Commons and on the case he has ably made for his Bill today and in previous sittings.

Significant contributions were also made by other Conservative Members. I want to cover the point made by the hon. Members for North Devon (Selaine Saxby), for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) about disability in a moment, because it is such an important point—let me associate myself with the comments they made about its importance.

First, however, I wish to deal with something that the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) said in an intervention. He always has interesting points to make on our democracy and how it runs, some of which I agree with and some of which I do not, as he knows. The one he made about guidance is so important—guidance is always important. We are all saying today that voting is an individual act, a “private act”, as the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) characterised it. If that is the case, we have to make it easy to do, so that, in general, a person would not need to solicit support because the guidance is so clear and things are obvious.

I am less of a fan of the more complicated and novel systems of election, but sometimes there may be multiple candidates and that does get tricky. When the single transferable vote is used, people wonder whether to vote in the first column or the second column—that can get tricky. It is up to the regulators and, obviously, the leadership in this place, to make sure that that guidance is so clear. That touches on the point made by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) about the staff working in the polling stations, as we need things to be easy for them too. We cannot now have a significant range of burdens, or even tensions or anxieties, for them in respect of having to become enablers and supporters of votes; they do not want to be going anywhere near those booths either. The guidance has to be really clear, both for the individuals and for the staff we ask to administer those elections.

I wish to make a point or two of my own, but I am pleased that there is such consensus on this issue. As the hon. Member for Peterborough said, this is fundamentally a point about clarity. No matter how well established the spirit of the Ballot Act may be, 151 years later there is a lack of clarity, and the Bill adds that clarity. Our democratic processes must be free from intimidation and—a point made by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan)—free from inducement as well. That was the spirit of the Act which put into law the secret ballot that we enjoy to this day. In one fell swoop, it put an end to the egregious practices of landowners and employers influencing their workers’ or tenants’ votes.

However, a clear and identifiable problem remains with the Act: it does not give presiding officers the right tools to fully tackle the problem of people being compelled to vote in one particular way, or indeed not at all, by others. Those practices are always unacceptable, but they do happen, and this is the moment for us to act to end them. Intimidation of this kind goes against all our democratic principles, but there is an ambiguity, which the Electoral Commission has highlighted, so the case for change is clear.

In the other place, the Government provided important reassurances about the continuation of any assistance that disabled voters may need in order to vote. That is right and proper, and I am glad that it will not be affected by the Bill. As we heard from my hon. Friend for Darlington (Peter Gibson), there was a “build-out” for this in the Elections Act 2022. Nevertheless, I think that, as far as humanly possible, we should collectively seek to render this moot by providing appropriate assistive technologies enabling disabled people to vote independently, which would remove the need for another person to be there.

In Committee I mentioned the My Vote My Voice campaign, which aims to improve participation in voting by adults with learning disabilities and/or autism, as well as campaign groups representing deaf people, blind people, people living with Usher syndrome, and deaf-blind people more generally. They want the right technologies and support to ensure that as many people as possible—indeed, virtually everyone—can vote, and vote independently. That should be our aspiration. As I have said, the Elections Act has moved us in the right direction, but I suspect that we will need to monitor the success of its provisions and those of the Bill, and I dare say we may need to go further still in the fullness of time.

Notwithstanding those points, the Opposition welcome the Bill and are glad to support it today. It is vital for us to have clear law in this area, with no ambiguity about what is and what is not acceptable practice at polling stations, and the Bill constitutes an important step towards ensuring that happens.

11.42 am

**The Minister of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Rachel Maclean):** It is a great pleasure to be at the Dispatch Box today to set out the Government’s full support for the Bill, which makes important changes to tackle so-called family voting. We have had an excellent debate, and it is a pleasure to see so much cross-party support for legislation of this kind. All of us are here because of the integrity of our democratic process. It is lovely to have consensus on issues such as this, as we sometimes do, particularly on Fridays.

The Bill seeks to enhance the integrity of voting at elections and to safeguard our democracy against those who would harm it, and I therefore welcome the progress that it has made in both Houses. Today gives us an excellent chance to see it speed its way towards the statute book. The new offence will be a hugely important addition to the various other measures, arising from the Elections Act 2022, that the Government are implementing to protect our electoral system against those who would undermine it.

As other Members have mentioned, the Government tabled a number of amendments to the Bill during its Committee stage in the other place in order to address issues with its specific drafting. Those amendments were designed to prevent the offence from criminalising innocent behaviour, particularly when two people are at a polling booth, so that only the one intending to influence the other is caught. The original drafting would have inadvertently caused the victim of the coercion to have also committed an offence. The amendments were also designed to secure exceptions for companions of disabled electors so that they could continue to be able to provide assistance if necessary. They were agreed to in the other place, and no further amendments have been tabled in either House.

It gives me great pleasure to thank all the parliamentarians who have engaged with the Bill, both in this place and the other place. I thank my noble Friend Lord Hayward, who I can see in the Gallery. He has been instrumental in driving forward the legislation by sharing his knowledge and experience on electoral matters and sponsoring the Bill in the other place. I am hugely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for



[*Rachel Maclean*]

Peterborough (Paul Bristow) for his expertise and for setting out so well—both today and in his Westminster Hall debate—the need for this important piece of legislation.

It has been a huge pleasure to hear speeches from many Members today, including my hon. Friends the Members for Darlington (Peter Gibson), for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), for Blackpool South (Scott Benton), for North Devon (Selaine Saxby), for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) and for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French). It falls to me to thank the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley), who responded for the Government in the earlier debate, and other Members who have given this legislation the benefit of their scrutiny, including my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore), as well as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who aided the legislation along the way—it is strange not to see him in his place; we are all poorer without him.

**Peter Gibson:** The Minister may or may not be aware that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) is celebrating his birthday tomorrow. Will she join me and everyone else in this House in congratulating him?

**Rachel Maclean:** My hon. Friend has done me a huge service, allowing me to say a very hearty “Happy birthday” to the hon. Member for Strangford, who I also understand has tabled an early-day motion to thank Dolly Parton. I suppose it is probably quite unconventional to support an EDM from the Dispatch Box, but if you will make an exception in the spirit of the occasion, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish the hon. Gentleman a happy birthday and hope that he is serenaded by Dolly Parton—I cannot think of anything better.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) for her contribution in Committee, and the hon. Members for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), for Caerphilly (Wayne David) and for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) for their interest in and engagement with the Bill.

I also thank my officials at the Department for Levelling Up, my private secretary James Selby, and the policy team—namely, Peter Richardson and Guy Daws—for their tireless work in supporting the Bill. I know how much effort they have put into ensuring that it proceeds smoothly. I am very grateful to His Majesty’s official

Opposition, particularly the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), for all the work that they have done to support the Bill.

The Government take the integrity of our electoral system extremely seriously. We warmly welcome the changes being made, which will make such an important contribution to strengthening the integrity of voting. The Bill will ensure that there is clarity in the law so that presiding officers have the confidence to challenge inappropriate behaviour where it occurs and to stamp down on any opportunity for coercion to take place at our elections. I therefore commend the Bill to the House.

11.47 am

**Paul Bristow:** With the leave of the House, I rise again—all too briefly—to thank once again my noble Friend Lord Hayward for all his efforts to get us to this stage. His passion for and dedication to this issue have been evident for some time, and it has been a real honour to stand with him and bring this piece of legislation to where it is.

I also thank Councillors Sandy Tanner and Peter Golds, who advised me on the Bill. They are passionate about this issue and have been a vital source of advice. I thank the Minister for all her efforts, and the Ministers at DLUHC for all their support and guidance. I thank the shadow Front-Bench team and the Opposition for their support. This is a cross-party issue, and it is absolutely crucial that we make that completely clear.

I also thank the hon. Members who served on the Bill Committee. It was quite an experience trying to go around and drum up support for it, and I thank everyone who did that and who has contributed to this debate. I thank the Clerks and officials, and the Comptroller of His Majesty’s Household, my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), for their guidance.

This is quite an historic occasion. It is my understanding that it is very rare to see a private Member’s Bill instigated in the other place become law—it has been some years since that last happened. Again, the fact that we are at the point where the Bill is likely to become law is testament to the leadership and passion shown by my noble Friend Lord Hayward. It has been a pleasure to be part of this—we are seeing an element of history. I hope that we can now protect our democracy.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, without amendment.*



## **Workers (Predictable Terms and Conditions) Bill**

*Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee, considered.  
Third Reading*

11.49 am

**Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I am delighted that we are here today to take a further step forward towards introducing a new right for workers to request a more predictable working pattern. Throughout the passage of the Bill I have spoken of the importance of introducing this new right to tackle one-sided flexibility. Although zero-hours contracts are an important part of the UK's flexible labour market, the 2017 Taylor review of modern working practices found that workers on zero-hours contracts, as well as agency and temporary workers, struggle when flexibility is one-sided in an employer's favour.

Some employers misuse flexible working arrangements by scheduling or cancelling shifts with very little notice, leading to insecurity of hours and income for workers or, in the case of temporary agency workers, dismissal at short notice. Short-notice changes to working patterns can be hugely disruptive to workers' lives, for example when they are juggling caring or childcare responsibilities. One-sided flexibility can also create an unfair imbalance of power between workers and their employers, leaving workers afraid to ask their employer for more predictable terms and conditions, out of fear of being dismissed or denied future shifts. One-sided flexibility is particularly pressing at a time when so many workers with unpredictable working patterns are feeling the pressure of household living bills rising so acutely.

The introduction of a new right to request a predictable working pattern will empower workers to start a conversation with their employer about their working patterns. It will not only benefit zero-hours contract workers, because agency and temporary workers will also be able to take advantage of the new right. A qualifying worker will be able to make requests if their existing working pattern lacks predictability in the hours or times they work, or if it is a fixed-term contract for less than 12 months.

The Bill will not only benefit workers. On Second Reading my hon. Friend the Member for South West Hertfordshire (Mr Mohindra) aptly described the right to request a more predictable working pattern as a "win-win" for workers and employers. The new right will boost worker satisfaction and productivity, and allow employers to retain skilled staff. It is vital that we maintain the flexibility that zero-hours contracts facilitate for businesses and workers, which is why workers will be able to choose to continue working on a zero-hours contract, or in another form of less predictable work, if that is what works best for them.

**Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that in certain cases, particularly for the likes of students, for example, it is more desirable to have greater flexibility regarding when they can work around their studies?

**Scott Benton:** My hon. Friend is entirely correct. Whether it be for students who perhaps have different working patterns and ability to work shifts compared

with other workers, or the rest of the general workforce, zero-hours contracts are here to stay. They are an important part of the flexible working market, and rightly so, but they have to work not only for the employer but for the worker. This positive step forward allows those who are working flexible hours to request a more predictable working pattern. As I will explain, the business or employer in question does not necessarily have to accept the request, if for example it is too burdensome on the business. The Bill is a moderate and positive step forward that works for both employer and worker.

The right to request a more predictable working pattern will function in a similar way to the right to request flexible working. For example, an employer will be able to refuse a request for a more predictable working pattern on specific statutory grounds similar to those established for flexible working. I appreciate how important it is to balance new rights for workers with their impact on businesses; these grounds will act as a safeguard, ensuring that employers do not experience disproportionate burdens. My Bill will introduce that important new right and ensure that it can be properly enforced.

The clauses set out the eligibility criteria for the new right, and ensure that as many workers as possible who have an unpredictable working pattern can benefit from it. All workers who have worked for their employer for a set period before making their application will be eligible. That period will be specified in regulations, but is expected to be 26 weeks. Given that my Bill targets workers with unpredictable working patterns, they will not be required to have worked for their employer continuously during that period.

Specific provisions will be made for agency workers, given the unique way that their working relationship with their employer functions. For example, agency workers who make applications directly to hirers will be required to have worked for their hirer for at least 12 weeks continuously during the proposed 26-week period. That replicates a provision in the Agency Workers Regulations 2010 that states that after 12 weeks' continuous service, an agency worker will gain entitlement to the same set of employment rights that they would have had if they had been recruited directly. That ensures that workers cannot use the right to request a more predictable working pattern to circumvent the Agency Workers Regulations 2010 and gain entitlement to additional employment rights before they have worked for 12 continuous weeks.

Employers' responsibilities are also clearly set out. That supports employers when they receive a request and ensures that workers know what they should expect from their employer. Employers must deal with requests in a reasonable manner and notify the worker of their decision within a month. My Bill details the grounds on which workers may make a complaint to an employment tribunal. That protects workers if their employer does not consider their request in a reasonable manner, wrongly treats the application as withdrawn, dismisses or treats a worker poorly because of their request, or rejects an application on the basis of incorrect facts.

Workers will be permitted to make two requests for predictable working per year. That recognises that workers' and businesses' circumstances can change. This mirrors the number of flexible working requests that will be

[Scott Benton]

allowed under the Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi). Together, my Bill's clauses will create an important new right to request a more predictable working pattern, and will carefully balance the needs of workers in unpredictable work and their employers.

I thank the Minister for confirming the Government's continued support for the Bill, which of course delivers a Conservative election manifesto pledge. I am delighted to see such broad support for my Bill from across the House, and I thank all hon. Members who share my desire to ensure that the Bill proceeds to the other place, so that we can take a positive step forward for working people.

11.58 am

**Laura Farris** (Newbury) (Con): I rise in support of the Bill, which injects important clarity about zero-hours contracts. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) is correct to say that zero-hours contracts are here to stay and occupy an important role in the British labour market. They can certainly offer a degree of flexibility to students; to older workers who want complete flexibility when it comes to their hours; and to people with caring responsibilities, particularly parents. For example, one of the advantages of the bank model in the NHS, which is effectively a zero-hours contract by another name, is that people can take school holidays without having to apply to their boss and request the time off in the usual way.

I understand why zero-hours contracts are attractive, but we have to be honest: they exist in a grey zone between full employment rights and independent contractor status. We know that they have caused particular problems, which is why the Government have already legislated to ban exclusivity clauses where they applied. Some really high-profile cases about the contested grey zone, including the Uber case and the Deliveroo case, have reached the Supreme Court: are people independent contractors or workers with basic rights?

The Bill includes an inherent requirement that there be a right to request terms in the zero-hours arrangement that give some predictability. Whatever the advantages of flexible working, we know that some employers use zero-hours contracts on a quasi-exploitative basis. I have read grim stories in the newspapers, albeit not recently, of people travelling a long way by bus only to arrive at their employer's gates and be told that there was no work for them that day. That is clearly not an acceptable situation.

The Bill would amend the Employment Rights Act 1996. Section 1 of that Act requires that within the first two weeks of employment all employers must provide an employment contract that sets out the days workers are required to work, the rate at which they will be remunerated, what they will be paid and when, what their basic duties are and what overtime they will get. At the heart of all employment relationships is the requirement that people who come to work have a basic idea of what is expected of them, how they will be paid and what they are reasonably expected to do. Even in this grey zone, with all the flexibility that I otherwise

support, it cannot be right to allow a system to exist in which people have no idea from week to week and from day to day whether they will be required to work and, if so, how much.

Another important point of employment law is that, while of course it is correct that an employer can consider what it requires its members of staff to do and that it can set their duties and working hours, it does not have the unilateral right to vary the employment contract in any other context. It therefore seems to me right that, where reasonably possible, a worker should have the right to request predictability. The burden should be on the employer either to say, "Yes, we can offer you some predictability, and here is what it looks like"—something that would come pretty close to a standard contract of employment—or to say, "Such is the nature of our work that predictability is impossible in any circumstance." That would at least give the worker the opportunity to know whether or not they could begin to plan their life around the job. That approach is a counterpoint to some of the exploitative practices that linger at the uglier end of the zero-hours contract world. For that reason, I support it, and I support this private Member's Bill.

12.2 pm

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I support the Bill and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) on guiding its passage through the House. It is fantastic to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Laura Farris), who always does such a good job of outlining the complexities and ins and outs of employment law. She has made huge contributions to other debates and has done so again today.

The position taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South demonstrates the Conservative approach to the issue. We have heard again and again from the Labour party—I think this is still its current policy—that we must ban zero-hours contracts. Actually, as students I and many others benefited from access to zero-hours contracts and the flexibility to fit things in as we liked. We know that they are also hugely important in the NHS for people who may want to do a lot of hours one week and fewer hours the next. There is always a balance to be struck, and it may be helpful for the NHS that there is a balance between permanent staff and flexible staff.

I want to emphasise that the right way to approach things, rather than banning these contracts, is to do what we are doing: look at how we can advance the law in smaller ways to make the overall position better. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his contribution, which edges forward a situation that can be improved but certainly should not be banned.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale)**: I call the shadow Minister.

12.4 pm

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): I also start by welcoming the Bill brought by the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton). As a Member of this House representing one of the most deprived constituencies in the country, which is not unlike my own, he too will

know the role that bad pay, long hours and few rights play in trapping working people in a constant cycle of poverty and deprivation and entrenching poverty in his constituency—again, not unlike many constituencies up and down the country.

I am glad this Bill to address one of the biggest challenges faced by working people is finally reaching its conclusion today. I am glad the Government have supported the Bill through its passage. Given the negligible trickle of Bills that relate to the employment rights of working people have come before the House during their more than a decade in office—unless, of course, they concern taking rights away through their anti-trade union restrictions—in contrast with the recent flood of employment rights legislation proposed from the Back Benches, it would seem that the Government have suddenly discovered the exploitation suffered by working people. But that is not the case.

At the end of 2019—well over three years ago—the Government promised to introduce an employment Bill, which many, including Labour MPs, hoped would address the exploitation of working people and would help create an economy and workforce fit for the modern day. We warned the Government years ago, long before even the 2015 general election, about the exploitation of those on zero-hours contracts and in the gig economy. Trade unions have been banging on the Government's door urging for stronger protection for workers in a changing economy. We know full well that the Government knew of the hardships created for working people because of zero-hours contracts, so pleading ignorance is no defence for their failure to act. In fact, there is no defence at all.

**Dr Mullan:** Forgive me if the hon. Member was going to clarify this, but is it still the Labour party's position that it will ban zero-hours contracts?

**Imran Hussain:** Yes, it absolutely is, and I will go on to clarify that in my remarks. The Government's only excuse for their refusal to tackle the exploitation of working people before their support for this Bill is that Ministers were too busy hailing the alleged benefits of being on zero-hours contracts. The reality is that the advantages of these contracts asserted by the Government are frankly alien to people on them. What they face is no utopia of flexibility, but a prison of exploitation by bad bosses at worst or a world of uncertainty at best. As has been pointed out during the passage of the Bill, people are often compelled to accept shifts that they do not want—and so they struggle to work—because they know that if they turn them down, they may not get any hours at all in future.

**Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con):** I am listening carefully to what the hon. Member says, and I note his response to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan). My Aberconwy constituency is known for its tourism, hospitality and all that comes with that, including shift working. The reality for many residents in my constituency is that zero-hours contracts give them flexibility to juggle family and other commitments and to balance a range of employment. Does he accept there is some virtue of this model for some people some of the time at least?

**Imran Hussain:** The hon. Gentleman's constituency is known for the things he has said. He will appreciate there is a huge difference between shift working and zero-hours contracts. Those are two very different concepts, and I do not think anybody is arguing against shift working. Equally, nobody is saying there should be no flexibility. I accept that in a minority of situations—perhaps, for example, in the case of students, as was mentioned earlier—there may need to be that flexibility.

To answer the question from the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan)—I will cover this later as well—the reality is that over the past decade we have gone from around 150,000 people on zero-hours contracts to more than 1 million, as the Minister will know. To suggest that the majority of those people somehow benefit from some flexibility in zero-hours contracts—or some of the points that the Minister may outline later—is just not true.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Kevin Hollinrake):** The hon. Gentleman suggests that it is not true that a majority of people like that relationship, but surveys show that some 64% of people do not want more hours. He would ban zero-hours contracts, even though 64% of people want them. Where is the sense in that?

**Imran Hussain:** I will refer the Minister to another survey. By far the most over-represented groups of people on zero-hours contracts are women and those from ethnic minority backgrounds. The Minister quotes statistics, but in the current market people who have a choice between zero-hours contracts or no work at all are a different case altogether.

**Dr Mullan:** As this is obviously a strongly felt position from the Labour party, I assume that there is not a single Labour-led local authority employing people on zero-hours contracts. If the hon. Gentleman cannot confirm that, will he write to me and explain what steps he will take with his Labour local authority leadership figures to ensure that they do not make use of these contracts, which the Labour party clearly feels are immoral?

**Imran Hussain:** The point that the hon. Gentleman makes is political point scoring on a very serious issue. The fact remains, and this is perhaps where he could direct his energies, that his Government ordered the Taylor review more than five years ago, the findings of which were published in their "Good Work Plan" in 2018. Where has he been for the past few years not questioning his own Government on why they are failing working people, and frankly, why they have failed those being exploited by zero-hours contracts until today? That is perhaps the question he should be asking.

People on zero-hours contracts often face having the shifts they had planned and budgeted for cancelled, leaving them unable to make their bills add up at the end of the month. They are often offered shifts at short notice, forcing them to go to great expense to arrange childcare and transport. As I set out on Second Reading, when the Conservative party came to power, just over 150,000 people were employed on zero-hours contracts. At the last count, more than 1 million were employed on them according to the Office for National Statistics.



[Imran Hussain]

As the Bill recognises, for a small group of people who are okay with varying shift patterns and do not face significant outgoings, the contracts may fit better, but let us not kid ourselves: the flexibility of zero-hours contracts is flexibility for the employer, not for working people. As I have mentioned, it is also not as though the Government have never had a chance to improve the rights of working people before this Bill today. They commissioned Matthew Taylor to carry out a review on modern working practices and then accepted his recommendations in full as far back as 2018, but rather than implementing the recommendations, they sat on the review instead. Many of them, including recommendation 13 to allow workers on zero-hours contracts

“a right to request a contract that better reflects the hours they work”,

have gone unfulfilled. That is, until the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) introduced his Bill last year, four years on from the Taylor review.

That lack of progress in implementing the Taylor review’s recommendations almost five years later is lamentable for us, but is devastating for those working people who would be helped by the greater security at work that the recommendations would provide. It is right that the hon. Member’s Bill addresses that issue to some degree. We therefore support the Government in ensuring that this Bill and Bills like it get on to the statute book, because long overdue as it is, it is a step in the right direction towards stronger rights and better protections for an overexploited workforce. However, I cannot let the opportunity of today’s debate go by without asking whether Government support would have been quite so forthcoming had it not been for the relentless pressure they have faced from our trade unions, which have long campaigned for zero-hours contract workers to get the protections they need and deserve.

Although it has taken this Conservative Government years to take some form of action on strengthening workers’ rights by supporting the private Members’ Bills brought by several hon. Members, rather than by introducing their own employment Bill, the next Labour Government will not be so timid. As set out by the leader of the Labour party—the next Prime Minister—within the first 100 days of taking office, a Labour Government will bring legislation to the Floor of the House to begin to deliver our groundbreaking new deal for working people, which will ensure that our economy is fit for the 21st century and will transform the rights and protections afforded to ordinary working people for the better. That includes stronger protections for those on zero-hours contracts, with a ban on contracts without a minimum number of guaranteed hours and the right to a contract reflecting hours normally worked, and a requirement for employers to provide reasonable notice of shift changes, with wages paid in full to workers whose shifts are cancelled without notice, so they are no longer left to shoulder the burden and suffer the costs of unexpected last-minute changes.

12.16 pm

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I start by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) for all his work. He has been a delight to work with all the way

through and I have been delighted to support his Bill through its various stages. I reiterate the Government’s support for the Bill.

It has been encouraging to observe the support for the Bill from across the House. I was pleased to hear that reflected once again in this debate, including by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain), who represents part of the fine city of Bradford, in my county of Yorkshire.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South pointed out, zero-hours contracts are an important part of the UK’s flexible labour market, for both employers and individuals who may need to balance work around other commitments. We believe they play an important role, and 64% of people surveyed said they do not want more hours and that they are happy with the basis of their current contracts. As my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) pointed out, Labour is determined to take that option away from people, which once again illustrates that the Government believe in freedom of choice while the Opposition believe in state diktat.

Around 3% of workers in the UK workforce are on zero-hours contracts and such contracts may offer many of those individuals the kind of flexibility they want, but, of course, we are determined to tackle unfair working practices used by a small minority of employers. I endorse the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Laura Farris), who speaks in this House with such authority on employment matters, given her background. Many of those employers take advantage of what she describes, quite rightly, as “a grey zone”. Workers may be left waiting on standby for work that never materialises, unsure whether they will receive the hours they need to pay their bills.

We have already made significant progress in bringing forward measures that support individuals on zero-hours contracts and in low-paid work. In 2015, we banned exclusivity clauses in zero-hours contracts; in December 2022, we extended the ban to workers who have a guaranteed weekly income equivalent to or below the lower earnings limit of £123 per week; and on 1 April, we will increase the national living wage by 9.7%, to £10.42 per hour.

**Mr French:** In reference to the comments made by the shadow Minister, does the Minister agree with me that the Labour party’s words on sticking up for workers are rather hollow, particularly when they support the Labour Mayor of London’s ultra low emission zone expansion and tax rise, which will impact over 850,000 drivers in London and have been described as “anti-worker” by Unite the union?

**Kevin Hollinrake:** My hon. Friend is a fine champion on that issue; I would describe the measure as anti-worker and also anti-business, particularly at a time when we are all seeing cost of living challenges. It is simply the wrong measure to take and I applaud him for his constant campaigning on it.

The Bill in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South represents a further step towards addressing one-sided flexibility, as he says. In 2018, the Government consulted on the right to request predictable working and in 2019 we committed to introducing a right to request a more predictable contract in our

manifesto. That militates against the hon. Member for Bradford East's argument that we have suddenly discovered this concern. We have always committed ourselves to legislating in this area.

The new right to request a more predictable working pattern will apply to all eligible workers, not only those on zero-hours contracts, meaning that a wide range of workers who have unpredictable working conditions will benefit, including temporary workers, agency workers and workers with non-guaranteed hours. Crucially, that is a right to request more predictable hours, not a right to insist on them, because we also need to look after the interests of businesses in this conversation.

My hon. Friend's Bill includes a list of eight specific grounds on which any employer may decline a request, similar to those established for the existing right to request flexible working—for example, if the costs of providing a worker with a more predictable pattern would be too burdensome, or if accepting a request would have a detrimental impact on the ability to meet customer demand.

The Bill forms part of a wider package of six private Member's Bills on employment rights that the Government are supporting. I pay tribute to the businesses and business representative groups that have supported them, despite the obvious impact on businesses—if hon. Members have read the impact assessment, they will know the additional impact on business is £16.9 million, at a difficult time for them, so we should pay tribute to businesses that are willing to take on these extra duties.

The hon. Member for Bradford East talked about a ban on zero-hours contracts. I gently ask whether he is doing that in the full and certain knowledge of the costs on business, because I have not seen a figure from Labour to say what would be the cost to business of doing that. That is a reasonable concern that businesses may have about the extra costs of doing business under a potential Labour Government.

Taken as a package, these Bills will deliver on our 2019 manifesto commitments to enhance workers' rights and support people to stay in work. They will help new parents, unpaid carers and hospitality workers.

Before I close, I want to thank the officials who have worked on this Bill: Sasha Ward, Bex Lowe, Lizzy Blakeman, Mel Thomas, Sarah Boulton-Jones, Louis Ariss, Laura Robinson, Richard Kelly, Adrienn SzNagy, Rose Jefferies and Dan Spillman and, from my private office, Cora Sweet. I commend the Bill to the House.

12.22 pm

**Scott Benton:** With the leave of the House, I would like to thank all hon. Members for their contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Laura Farris), with all her knowledge and experience in this particular

area, gave a characteristically compelling speech in favour of the Bill. She was entirely correct to shine a light on some of the murkier practices that I am afraid are out there on zero-hours contracts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) is a superb advocate for blue-collar Conservatism and articulated that, as Conservatives, we can advance workers' rights—and rightly so—while also recognising that both the employer and the worker are often quite happy with the existing arrangements around zero-hours contracts. I was interested to hear him ask how many Labour-run councils across the country actually utilise zero-hours contracts.

I am afraid that in 2020, at the height of covid, Labour-run Blackpool Council in my own constituency dismissed dozens of zero-hours contract workers who worked in leisure centres. The circumstances around their dismissal left a particularly nasty taste in the mouth at the height of a pandemic when those families were particularly struggling. I am also interested to hear that protecting such workers remains a Labour manifesto commitment, but I suggest that the hon. Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain) communicates to Labour council leaders around the country that they need to up their game and practice what they preach on this issue.

I would, however, like to thank the hon. Gentleman for his support throughout the passage of the Bill. He alluded to the fact that my constituency is particularly deprived, given its reliance on the tourism and leisure sectors. My constituency will probably benefit from the Bill more than most, given the higher number of zero-hours contracts in the tourism industry in Blackpool. I know his constituency well, having grown up very close to it, and I know that his constituents will also disproportionately benefit from the Bill due to the specific labour conditions in and around Bradford.

As ever, I would like to place on record my considerable thanks not only to the brilliant Minister, but his fantastic private office team who have been an absolute joy to work with throughout the passage of the Bill. The Minister rightly articulated that it is this Conservative Government who have taken so many steps over the last 13 years to improve workers' rights, not least delivering on this private Member's Bill, which, as the Minister articulated, was a manifesto commitment of this party. I am always proud to defend this Government's record in my constituency, not least on the way we have supported working people and helped to take so many of them out of poverty since 2010. No doubt the Bill will be a further step on that journey.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to promote the Bill on Third Reading. I commend it to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

## Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees Bill

*Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee, considered.  
Third Reading*

12.26 pm

**Robin Millar** (Aberconwy) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I must start by thanking those from across the veteran community, including many of my own constituents, supportive charities and organisations for their support and insights during the passage of the Bill through Parliament. I would also like to thank Members from across the House who have supported the Bill to this stage, many of whom have a service background. In particular, the recent work of the all-party parliamentary group for veterans highlighted the urgency of the reforms proposed today. At a time when politics can seem more polarised, it is heartening that there has been a real sense of unity in ensuring that we care for those who have given so much to protect us. I am grateful for the cross-party support the Bill has received. I am also grateful for the comments, support and encouragement of colleagues who are members of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, again a very worthwhile cross-party initiative, who have brought thoughtful comments and encouragement from all parts of the House during the passage of the Bill.

The Government are determined to make the United Kingdom the best place in the world to be a veteran and I am proud that the Bill will help to realise that vision.

**Danny Kruger** (Devizes) (Con): I am very pleased to support my hon. Friend's Bill. He mentions the importance of this country as a place for veterans. Does the Bill extend to overseas veterans who served in the British armed forces?

**Robin Millar**: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. That is a very apposite question, because of course many of our veterans live overseas. However, the Bill deals with veterans and their family members who reside within the UK, so at this time it is limited to veterans who are within the UK. For veterans overseas who have concerns or questions about services and access to support, I would direct them to their local embassy or consulate, which will be able to help them.

The Bill will help to regularise the provision of support to veterans and their families. It gives Ministers the flexibility to adapt the support that has been made available to this community as circumstances change.

Former servicemen and women represent about one in 25 of our fellow citizens. In fact, my constituency sits within the county of Conwy in Wales, which has the highest proportion of veterans of any Welsh county. It has been a real privilege to meet and to listen to those veterans across Aberconwy. Last Saturday there was a roundtable in my office of a diverse range of veterans from all ranks and parts of our armed forces. It was fascinating and humbling to hear their accounts of life as a veteran and their transition into that life from their time in service.

It is no exaggeration to say that I have been inspired by the work of local charities and community groups, both those across the UK and in my own constituency.

Alabaré's Homes for Veterans is one that I have visited, where I talked with veterans about the challenges they have faced in access to housing and coming to terms with what we would consider normal civilian life. For someone coming out of the highly organised, particular culture of the armed forces, that can present a significant challenge.

**Danny Kruger**: I pronounce Alabaré differently—I had it out with them last week because it is a difficult word. It is an amazing organisation and has a number of houses in my constituency in Wiltshire, where there is a significant veteran population. Does my hon. Friend agree that the crucial thing is proper liaison with the local authority, which in Wiltshire I pay tribute to for its support for veterans. Demand is very significant, and there is only so much that the NGOs and the third sector can do. It is important that the Office for Veterans' Affairs, such charities and local authorities work together on homelessness.

**Robin Millar**: As ever, my hon. Friend makes an extremely relevant contribution. Perhaps I could argue that my pronunciation is a Welsh one, but I will not go there. I defer to his pronunciation and apologise for mispronouncing it.

My hon. Friend's point was excellent, however, because local authorities are very often on the frontline—if I may use that phrase—of providing support to veterans. The Government have introduced the armed forces covenant, which places a duty on local authorities to provide services to veterans, in particular focused on housing and education. He makes a good point that liaison between state bodies and voluntary organisations is crucial. I know that he does excellent work in this House on strengthening communities and bringing forward Burke's "little platoons"—to borrow an expression—in support of parts of society. He and I share a view that it is not possible for the state to reach all parts of society. Veterans are a good example of that. We need the state instruments—better organised systems and state bodies such as the veterans advisory and pensions committees—but they must be complemented by local and community-led initiatives, to reach effectively all parts of society.

I was naming some of the associations and organisations in Aberconwy, and I must mention Military Minds football club. This is a team set up by relatives of veterans in recognition of the support that they saw their family members needed as veterans in the community, with a particular focus on mental health. I had an inspiring cup of coffee—that might sound like a strange thing to say—with those guys. They set out their own experience of what they have seen—fathers, brothers, uncles and cousins. There is a place for this. They have taken that vision forward and have regular practice sessions, fixtures, sponsors and so on. It is all with the intention of supporting those who need help transitioning into society, and they are very effective.

I must mention Llandudno's Troop Cafe, which is a slightly more formalised initiative in the community. As it says on the tin, it is a cafe in which members of the armed forces will frequently meet and events will be held. One event is to do with repairing broken implements and appliances, which serves to help give people something to do and a place to meet where they can share and talk



with one another about the challenges they face. As well as its importance of veterans, it is delivering real value to the community, too.

Since being elected as the MP for Aberconwy, it has been eye-opening for me to support the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I spot some other alumni from that scheme today here. The scheme has given me and many other MPs an invaluable insight into the lives of those who protect our country. Very often, the conversations that I and colleagues have with members of the armed forces during those sessions are about what happens outside of the armed forces—what happens with accommodation and what happens after leaving the service.

Veterans make a valuable contribution to communities across my constituency of Aberconwy, and indeed across the country at large. This is testament to the fact that the majority reintegrate successfully and go on to live fulfilled, productive lives within society. Indeed, it would be wrong to characterise the veterans community as being wholly in need of support for disabilities, mental health problems and distress. That is an incorrect caricature of that community—of the roughly 2.1 million veterans in the UK. The vast majority are living quiet, productive lives within society, making huge contributions without any fanfare or fuss, drawing on their skills and experience to be effective in their families and communities.

For some, however, the transition is more challenging. Such individuals may require additional, often highly tailored, support. The Government have been working hard to improve the support for such individuals, most recently taking the historic step of enshrining the armed forces covenant as a statutory duty at all levels of public service. Sadly, the roll-out of support has not been as balanced as it might have been. Poor co-ordination at times between bodies, combined with varying levels of knowledge about the duties of those public bodies under the covenant means that support can be overly bureaucratic and confusing, leaving some to fall through the gaps.

That was a feature of the conversation that I had just last week with local veterans, who talked about the frustration of trying to work through a local authority housing allocation scheme, of being caught up on a list, and of approaching the top of the list only to find that others with needs will be placed before them. Very often, it is single males of working age who, because of need, receive the lowest priority within local authority allocations and who find themselves frustrated time and again. They ask what more must they do, or can they do, to get access to housing, which is a key part of that independence transition back into society.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland), who could not be here today, revealed on Second Reading, research by the all-party parliamentary group on veterans suggests that four in five veterans rate their experience of claiming compensation from Veterans UK as “poor” or “very poor”. That observation has been affirmed by stakeholder engagement by the Royal British Legion, which found that the roll-out of veteran support under the covenant has been slowed by “limited co-ordination and unclear relationships” between responsible bodies.

The pressing issues of co-ordination and consistency in veteran support point to the need for accountability, feedback and support at local level. The veterans advisory

and pensions committees appear to be the best placed bodies to fulfil these roles. The veterans support landscape is a complex one, but the VAPCs stand unique on this as statutory players across this landscape. The Bill, in enabling the VAPCs to play a more active role, presents a significant opportunity for a constructive contribution there. As distinct, identifiable and independent points of reference for veterans, these volunteer staff bodies already play a vital role in co-ordinating the views of veterans and their families, raising awareness and supporting implementation.

However, because VAPCs are limited at present in the services they can offer, they lack a clearly defined remit. As a result, their relationships with other stakeholders on and within that landscape can be frustrating. That can limit their ability to feed back the representative experiences of the veteran community and undermine their own ability to hold other organisations to account. That was a recurring point within the debates we have had and the conversations I had in the run-up to this Bill and its progression through this House.

Furthermore, these current frameworks also limit the veterans who can access their support. Members of such bodies have made clear their desire to do more and related their frustration at the legislative constraints upon what they can do. These men and women are volunteers and they do terrific work for the veterans in their community, and this frustration they speak of is palpable.

The Bill draws on the feedback of veterans, charities and public bodies. By tapping into the potential of the committees, it hopes to build a better landscape for veterans. First, the Bill will move the statutory powers of the advisory committees into the Armed Forces Act 2006. That move reflects the proximity of VAPCs to the implementation of the armed forces covenant.

**Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con):** Will my hon. Friend outline to the House in practical terms the measures that veterans in our respective communities will feel on the ground once this legislation becomes law? How will they interact with those advisory bodies?

**Robin Millar:** I thank my hon. Friend for that good question. In many respects, this is very much a boiler room Bill; it is in the background and it deals with the piping—with the knocking in of pipes and putting them in the right direction. It does not deal with the front-of-house expression of what happens. By giving these freedoms that I am setting out, for example, this first freedom of moving powers into the Armed Forces Act, it enables the Minister to make quicker changes in response to feedback that comes through the system. At present, two reviews are being planned—several probably are, but two spring to mind—one being the quinquennial review and the other being the review of Veterans UK. When those reviews report, I am sure that recommendations will be made, and the Minister would usually then have to think how those could be implemented.

Until this Bill, VAPCs, because they were established within primary legislation, could not easily be repurposed or changed in terms of what they can do. This Bill allows the Minister, through a statutory instrument—a much simpler process, as my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) will appreciate—to make those changes in response to recommendations. So I

[Robin Millar]

cannot say to a veteran today that their life will change in such and such a way, but I can say that the Minister will be able to respond faster to what is happening in the world around and will be able, through the VAPCs, then to make sure that a more relevant conversation is happening with veterans about the needs they have within their local community. As I have said, the Bill allows the Minister to amend the functions of the committee over time, and this will reflect the changing needs of veterans. It builds on this highlighted need for responsiveness to feedback, allowing Ministers to adapt to challenges and periodic review recommendations highlighted by the VAPCs on behalf of volunteers, veterans and families.

Secondly, the Bill widens the scope of the VAPCs' role and responsibilities. Monitoring and advising on war pensions and the armed forces compensation scheme is an important and historic but, in essence, limited function. Expanding the range of the VAPCs would reflect the broader range of support now available to veterans and their families, enabling the committees to link these services on behalf of individuals and better identify gaps in provision.

The broader remit also means that VAPCs will be able to provide greater scrutiny at ground level. This reference to ground truth and being the voice of veterans locally was, again, a recurring phrase and petition made to me in the run-up to this Bill. It is indeed the key component in improving any public service. The different groups I have spoken to are hopeful that this reform has the potential to improve feedback from veterans on important issues, creating a clear incentive to action by decision makers, a point the Minister may wish to respond to in his concluding remarks.

Thirdly and finally, the Bill broadens the cohort of veterans and families able to access support from VAPCs. Currently, only those in receipt of war pensions and provision from the armed forces compensation schemes are guaranteed help from VAPCs. Let me digress by noting the contribution of our national service veterans to our country over their time. Obviously, the Bill deals with veterans in service, but representations have been made to me on this by mail during the passage of this Bill and I note and acknowledge that at this time.

The current position prevents the VAPCs from attending to the broad range of social support that veterans and their families often need. It also limits the ability of the committees to communicate with the wider ex-service community, which in turn prevents them from providing representative feedback to Government. By widening the committees' remit to all veterans and their families, regardless of compensation entitlement, the Bill will both strengthen support services and give the veteran community a clear voice at the heart of Government.

These reforms provide a much-needed accountability mechanism to ensure that all levels of government uphold their duty to support veterans and their families. They improve co-ordination and knowledge sharing across service providers, they place a clear representative voice for veterans in central Government and they enhance the Government's ability to respond efficiently to that voice.

One thing that has emerged from the discussions with the umbrella organisations and other charities that work with veterans is the concept of a "future veteran." We

have heard talk of a future soldier, but there is also space for a future veteran. What do we see or understand as a veteran's role in society beyond their service? Shaping support to enable and support them in those roles is an exciting and current idea.

In all these regards, I am pleased to say the Bill has received support from stakeholders across the veteran community, as well as from vital veterans charities such as the Royal British Legion, Help for Heroes and the umbrella confederation of British service charities, Cobseo.

It remains only for me to encourage colleagues to support this Bill. In doing so, we send a clear message to service personnel and families—past, present and future. This country hears you, this country supports you and, when the time comes, this country will repay its debt to you.

12.46 pm

**Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): I commend the work of the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar) in bringing the Bill to Third Reading. As he knows, I tried to amend the Bill in Committee, to test the Committee's mood and to see what more we can do.

I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I am a vice-chair of the all-parliamentary group on veterans, which has undertaken a lot of work on the further support that is needed, particularly through Veterans UK. I saw this Bill as an opportunity to see what more we can do, but that takes nothing away from the Bill itself. The Bill's aims are excellent, and it will go a long way towards further increasing the support available to veterans.

I thank the Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families for meeting me and other members of the APPG, and for initiating a review of Veterans UK. Just over a year ago, I led a Backbench Business debate in which the House agreed that there should be a review. Unfortunately, we hit a few buffers along the way, and only since he took up his post have we seen the review move forward. I look forward to the review's outcomes, and the passage of this Bill will enable him swiftly to implement any recommendations.

Just yesterday afternoon, the Justice and Veterans Minister, Keith Brown, led an excellent debate in the Scottish Parliament on employment support for veterans. The debate was also an opportunity to highlight the support being put in place by the Scottish Government, within the powers they have. We must all take every step we can to help veterans. On that note, I am proud of Midlothian Council in my constituency, as I understand it is the first housing organisation in Scotland to sign up as a partner of Veterans Housing Scotland. The first family has now been housed through that process.

We provide better support when we all work together. This Bill will go a long way in making a real difference to a lot of people. There is still more we can do, and I will continue to make that push. Veterans have been in touch with so many of us and, in my constituency, Garry McDermott first brought some of these issues to my attention. A wide range of members of our forces community are finding it challenging to address the situations in which they find themselves through no fault of their own. I think we are all on the same page in wanting to do everything we can.

I commend the work of the hon. Member for Aberconwy, and I look forward to the Bill being passed.

12.49 pm

**Peter Gibson** (Darlington) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called to speak for the third time today. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar) on bringing forward the Bill. I know only too well what a privilege it is to be drawn in the private Member's Bill ballot, and to guide a piece of legislation through Parliament; it is hugely rewarding. I congratulate him on using the opportunity to raise this important issue.

Last year, I too had the privilege of taking part in the armed forces parliamentary scheme, just as my hon. Friend did. I place on record my thanks to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray) for his sterling work leading the scheme. I must give a special mention to Amy Swash in his office, who does such an incredible job.

**Katherine Fletcher** (South Ribble) (Con): I emphasise that point. I too was on the armed forces parliamentary scheme, and extend my thanks. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most eye-opening insights we got into our modern Army and how we look after veterans was at Tunnel beach in Cyprus, where we met Barry and the team who run the sailing there to help people with their mental health? It was a hugely valuable experience. I know that Barry will welcome the Bill brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar).

**Peter Gibson:** I am grateful for the intervention. The time at Tunnel beach was very special, and it was great to meet the team there.

Many of us in the House will have spoken to veterans in our constituency about their life in the forces and, inevitably, the challenges that they face after service life. I know that our veterans will welcome the Bill. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy for bringing forward such an important Bill; it will make a huge difference to the veteran community across the United Kingdom, which is more than 2 million-strong. They have given so much to our country, and give so much to our society, so it is entirely right that we support them to the best of our ability.

My constituency of Darlington has a large veteran community, in part due to its proximity to Catterick. Since being elected to this place, I have had the opportunity to engage extensively with them—in one-to-one meetings in my constituency; by meeting the great guys in the Darlington branch of the Royal British Legion; and by seeing the fantastic work at Plane Sailing for Heroes, where veterans suffering from distress are working together to build a Viking longboat. It would be remiss of me not to invite the Minister to visit Plane Sailing on his next visit to Darlington. There are many other groups in Darlington, and every one of them provides support to their members and contributes to our community. It is a privilege to serve them as their Member of Parliament.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy has outlined, there are 12 veterans advisory and pensions committees across the UK. Their statutory function is to engage locally with war pensioners and recipients of the armed forces compensation scheme, and to make recommendations and representations to Government. Satisfaction with the system is incredibly low. In the last

Veterans UK customer satisfaction survey, only 36% of veterans using the war pension scheme noted any level of satisfaction with it, and 32% of veterans scored the scheme a one—the lowest possible rating. Only 13% of those surveyed gave the armed forces compensation scheme any sort of positive rating above five, with half of veterans rating their satisfaction at one—again, the lowest possible option. Overall, the dissatisfaction rate with the Veterans UK claims process is a shocking 80%. That needs to change, and I am confident that the Bill is a step in the right direction.

The point of the Bill is to right some of the wrongs of the system, and to make sure that the statutory functions of veterans advisory and pensions committees reflect and serve the needs of veterans as they are now, not as they were when the initial legislation was put in place. My hon. Friend's Bill is excellent. I know that veterans up and down the country will warmly welcome it, and I am delighted to give it my support today.

12.54 pm

**Danny Kruger** (Devizes) (Con): Today is something of a veterans' reunion, because I too served in the armed forces parliamentary scheme, along with my hon. Friends the Members for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher), for Darlington (Peter Gibson) and for Aberconwy (Robin Millar), the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) and others—we were comrades in arms. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray) and his team, and particularly the team from the Army, who co-ordinate that brilliant scheme.

The Bill will put some really important, practical measures on the statute book. I commend and echo all the points my hon. Friends have made about the basic necessity of transferring the pension scheme to MOD legislation and widening the scheme's scope to reflect what is going on in wider society and the admirable expansion in the terms of reference that the Office for Veterans' Affairs.

I echo my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy in saying that the experience of veterans is not isolated today, if it ever was. Legislation should not be isolated to their experience as former soldiers; they are integrated into our society. Our society and our Parliament have an absolute obligation to ensure that the support they receive is properly interconnected and properly integrated into the wider service system. That is why the armed forces covenant was such an important statement of commitment from this country about what we owe to our veterans who have served the country and, crucially, to their families too. Importantly, the Bill will ensure that veterans' families are properly in scope.

I recognise and pay tribute to all the people who have contributed to the development of the armed forces covenant. I also pay tribute to all the veterans' charities and institutions that for decades—in many cases for 100 years and more—have quietly, humbly and doggedly served the cause of our veterans and their families. I am very proud to support a Government who have put into statute those important principles.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington, I am concerned about the satisfaction rating of Veterans UK in recent years. It is a source of real concern for us all. I am glad that with the appointment of the Minister



[*Danny Kruger*]

for Veterans' Affairs and the other rearrangements in Whitehall, we seem to be properly gripping the challenge, but we cannot rest until there are high satisfaction ratings among our veterans with respect to the services they receive. We have done a lot, but there is a lot more to do.

The reference to Future Soldier is significant. Our country's security depends on our armed forces, who in turn depend on their families and on the support given to them as human beings living in this country—members of local communities, with their children in our schools. They need to know that when they leave the Army, they will be properly supported in their pension arrangements and in all the other services they receive.

Although we would all individually wish for a larger armed forces, I pay tribute to Defence Ministers for what they have achieved in getting further funding from the Treasury for improvements in kit, welfare and capabilities. I look forward to seeing them succeed in their undoubted efforts to grow the size of the Army. I regret the diminution in manpower and headcount that is under way, but I am sure that as time goes on and as the economy and public finances allow, we will see the Army growing again.

I end by paying tribute to a group of units, formations and battalions. I wonder whether the Minister knows what the following have in common: the Signals, the Royal Military Police, the Rifles, the Armoured Infantry Brigade, the Household Cavalry, the Mercians, the Royal Logistics Corps, the Royal Tank Regiment, the Queen's Royal Hussars, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, the 1st Artillery, the Royal Welsh, the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and, let us not forget, the Royal Artillery. They are, of course, all located in the genuine home of the British Army, despite what my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty) might claim: in Tidworth, Bulford and Larkhill and the super-garrison there. I pay tribute to all the men and women who serve our country and are based in my constituency, and to their families.

12.59 pm

**Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar) on bringing the Bill to its final stage in this House before it proceeds to the other place.

I am proud to speak in this debate, as someone who comes from a proud military family. I tried to blag the beep test myself: despite being deaf in one ear, I tried to pretend I could hear the beeps going off, but was caught out because I did not realise that they had not yet pressed "play" on the machine. However, my grandfather Terry was a Royal Marine who served in combat during Suez, and my other grandfather, William, served in the Royal Air Force in Egypt and the United Kingdom. I have a living relative—a great-great-uncle, I think—Allan Gullis, a D-day veteran, who was partly responsible for the building of the temporary Mulberry harbours as we were landing ashore. It was a remarkable experience to see him in Portsmouth not long ago when world leaders gathered to celebrate the historic moment when so many people so gallantly risked their lives not just to protect us here in the United Kingdom but to free Europe from tyranny, and I am very proud that that involved a member of my own family.

**Robin Millar:** My hon. Friend has mentioned the Mulberry harbours. He may be interested to know one of the places where they were tested and developed is in my constituency. On the banks of the River Conwy is the Mulberry pub, which is on the site of their development. May I make a more serious point, however? Does this not reflect the diversity of the skills that members of our armed forces possess, and the value that that diversity brings to society after they have left?

**Jonathan Gullis:** I could not agree more. Let me say first that I would love to go to the Mulberry pub and have a drink with my hon. Friend. I am a teetotaler, so I will be quite dull—I may just have a lemonade and orange juice—but I shall be more than happy to sit there and join in with some joyous chat. As for that diversity of skills, I acknowledge it entirely.

We used to wind up my grandfather because every photo he had from his time in Egypt was of him enjoying himself lying on a sun lounger. I did once ask if he had ever actually done any service. I remember that when we visited a museum in Portsmouth to look at the D-day memorabilia we saw an old deckchair, and I, as a five-year-old lad, asked my grandfather, "Is that your deckchair from when you served in Egypt?" Let us just say that after the talking-to I received, that joke was never made again at my grandfather's expense.

The diversity of skills needed to serve in our armed forces and to be able to deal with the challenges that they face from day to day is truly remarkable. It would be remiss of me, Mr Deputy Speaker—I am sure that you will be kind and show me a little bit of patience, as much as, hopefully, the Prime Minister will show me after my vote on Wednesday—not to rattle off the names of some of the fantastic organisations in my constituency, run by veterans in most cases. Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke will be home to many who served in the Staffordshire Regiment and many who were recruited from this small but mighty city. The Veteran Support Network, led by Lee West, contains the Arts and Minds Gallery, based in the old Harper Street in Middleport. I have purchased two paintings by serving veterans, to be hung in my home to celebrate the history of the Potteries, but also to celebrate the fact that the ceramic poppies that were on display not long ago outside the Tower of London were made in the great city of Stoke-on-Trent. One display at Middleport Pottery, flowing from the bottle kiln down to the ground, was truly beautiful and remarkable, and it was truly special to have some recreated artwork to commemorate that.

We also have Tri Services, which operates across Staffordshire as a whole, and Operation R&R in Newchapel and Mow Cop, designed to give rest and respite to those brave veterans who do so much.

**Katherine Fletcher:** My hon. Friend has mentioned the creativity with which local voluntary organisations are helping veterans. Does he agree that some of the spirit that enabled them to serve so well comes across in that? For example, the Leyland veterans in South Ribble are on parade on Remembrance Day on their motorbikes, wearing their leather jackets. There is a little bit of a Lancashire nod and wink there. Everyone uniquely represents their own area as well as their own service, which is wonderful to see.

**Jonathan Gullis:** It is absolutely wonderful to see. My hon. Friend is a fine champion for veterans and our armed forces.

When it comes to parades, I—like other Members—am always astonished by the hundreds, if not thousands, who turn out in the town of Kidsgrove for the parade from the town hall down to the memorial gardens. Those gardens were taken over, without anyone knowing who owned the land, by those from the Kidsgrove and Districts Royal British Legion. It is safe to say that it is their land now—whether or not that is legal is another question—and they have certainly done their bit to ensure that the gardens are commemorative.

Local businesses invest in memorials to remember our glorious dead, who were willing to give up their tomorrow for our today. That is truly astonishing. I have been on the back of the bikes that have gone around—not that I am a motorcyclist—and was certainly gripping on tight to my veteran as he rode me around the great city of Stoke. Celebrations also take place in areas associated with mining. It is very easy to forget that many people served their country here at home. In Stoke-on-Trent, a proud mining community, an awful lot of people sacrificed their lives underground to ensure, especially in the first world war, that we were fuelling the war effort from home. The Chatterley Whitfield Friends placed a memorial to those who gave active service underground across the Stoke-on-Trent North and Staffordshire area, so that their lives are remembered—that is truly remarkable. There are also veterans' breakfast clubs, and Walk Talk Action, which gets people physically out and about to talk about their challenges.

Before I rattle off through the entire constituency, I would like to mention one particular individual. Tomorrow is a special day because there will be a parade and the opening of a memorial garden—created by Councillor Candi Chetwynd using her ward budget—to commemorate 20 years since the sad passing of Corporal Stephen Allbutt. He was killed very tragically in Iraq back in 2003, aged 35 years old, in friendly fire circumstances while in a Challenger 2 tank.

I spent time this week with Stephen's widow, Debi, and will be with her tomorrow, alongside Councillor Candi Chetwynd and the Stoke-on-Trent North and Staffordshire community, to commemorate his willingness to serve and to put forward his life—not just for us here at home, but to save the people of Iraq from an evil dictator so that they may have freedom and democracy. It is truly harrowing to see the pain that Debi and her two sons still go through today. One of her sons is registered blind, and he has shown such bravery to overcome his personal challenges as well as the mental health challenges that he and his brother have faced—one was 14 and one was eight when they lost their father. It was quite special that Debi allowed me to be part of that special day.

I thank my predecessor's predecessor, Joan Walley—a Labour Member who sat in this House for nearly 30 years serving Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke—who was a remarkable champion for Debi. She helped Debi in her fight—sadly, it was against the Ministry of Defence at the time—to get answers, demand better care for our servicemen and women out there, and demand better training. Had those things been available, Stephen's death could have been avoided. I praise Debi for her continued campaign efforts. I have

been raising her cause privately to ensure that we never again see troops put into a warzone without the right equipment, support and training. I know that the Minister takes that very seriously. The MOD team are largely, if not all, ex-servicemen and women. That is incredible to see, and it is great to have their experience and knowledge.

On the Bill, it is absolutely right that we use the veterans advisory and pensions committees, which clearly have not only the confidence and respect of veterans organisations, meaning that they are able to reference and pinpoint people in a much more co-ordinated manner, but the knowledge and know-how about what support is available. It is a shame that, in 2023, we are still having to amend legislation, but it is good that we are doing it to ensure that support gets to veterans in particular. I look forward to talking more about pensions when we get to my Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) (No. 2) Bill shortly.

This legislation will be critical not just for those who serve, but for their families, who also pay a price. As my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) pointed out, they see their loved ones go off overseas, or go away for months or years at a time. That is a huge, tremendous challenge. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy, and I thank the whole House for supporting the legislation, which I look forward to seeing go through to the other place and, I hope, pass into statute as soon as possible.

1.9 pm

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): It is a great pleasure as always to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis), who always gives a lively speech and informs the House of many things that emanate from the great city of Stoke. I rise to support my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar) and his excellent Bill, which will have a big impact on our veterans.

One of the problems in this country is when our armed forces serve overseas and are in action, it is all over the media and there is great sympathy and support from the whole country, but all too often, long after that action has ceased, we forget what has happened to them. When they leave, they are not praised as much as they should be. I contrast that with what happens in, for example, the United States. I have had the opportunity to visit the United States and see some of the actions that take place where they praise and celebrate veterans, but we do not do enough in this country to celebrate the service of men and women across the globe on behalf of this country. In my own constituency, as other Members have also mentioned, we have the annual Remembrance Day parade that veterans come to. The highlight is those people on bikes at the end of the parade. Members of Parliament will always go to our Remembrance Day parades with pride for our wonderful servicemen and women, and rightly so. I take it as an absolute duty to appear at the parade each year and to support it.

We have 2,723 veterans in Harrow, and many of them have experienced what has happened to people after they leave the armed forces. My constituency is home to RAF Bentley Priory, which was the headquarters of fighter command during world war two. It was from that centre that we fought off the Nazis in the Battle of Britain. We celebrate that every year. Sadly, most of

[*Bob Blackman*]

those veterans are no longer with us. However, we have a large amount of ex-service accommodation and, indeed, service accommodation in my constituency, and those individuals and their families have varying experiences of what has been provided to them.

One of my other duties in the House is being the co-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for ending homelessness. I am sad to report to the House that, in London alone, between 3,000 and 4,000 veterans are homeless every night. That is a disgrace to this country because we should be supporting those veterans as much as we can. Indeed, in my private Member's Bill—the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017—there was a specific duty on the Ministry of Defence and local authorities to assist and house veterans who have served this country. In some local authorities, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy pointed out, families will often receive help and assistance going from military accommodation into local authority accommodation where appropriate, but it is not the same experience for single men or even single women. They are often seen as low priority by local authorities, and that is something we must fix.

As has been mentioned, the lack of confidence that veterans have in the process is clear. That demonstrates that the law must be brought up to date and further action must be taken. The world has changed dramatically over the past 34 years, and it is about time that we update and modernise the way we treat our veterans. The Bill goes a long way to support that. In fact, one concern is that the process is so out of date and complicated that many veterans give up. They drop their claims and lose out on the compensation they deserve. That is also a disgrace to this country. Those frustrations often lead to mental, and possibly physical, health conditions. A spiral takes place that sadly ends in many of our veterans taking their own lives. That is something we cannot allow to continue.

It is also important that we remember the role of military service men and women's family. A toll is often taken by them when their loved ones are away for extended periods, and they naturally fear for their safety. They deal with the mental and physical strain of what happens when their loved one is in theatre or in action. I am therefore pleased that the Bill updates the statutory functions to extend not only to veterans but to their families.

Finally, let me put on record my appreciation for the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women. Every year, on the Sunday after Remembrance Day we have a parade, and people who have served, or the sons and daughters of those who served, march to the cenotaph, together with their medals. It is a hugely attended function. I have had the opportunity of being part of that parade ever since I was elected in 2010. I commend colleagues across the House to come along and participate, because that attendance will be appreciated. Unfortunately, not many MPs do attend, which is a shame. Often MPs have other functions on a Sunday—we all understand that—but it would be hugely appreciated by AJEX if more Members participated. I commend the action taken by AJEX, as well as by other charities such as the Royal British Legion and so forth, which do such wonderful work for servicemen and woman who are veterans. I

look forward to the Minister's response to this debate, and I commend the Bill and look forward to it making its way through the other place and being enacted.

1.16 pm

**Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): I rise in support of the Bill. It was a privilege to serve as a member of the Committee. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar) for the Bill, and for all his tireless work and efforts to ensure that our veterans and their families are supported. It is no surprise that the Bill has received wide support, including from the Government, which reflects the utmost respect that Members across the House have for our veterans, and our subsequent strong desire to ensure that the highest possible standards of support are provided to them.

As Winston Churchill once said:

"Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."—[Official Report, 20 August 1940; Vol. 364, c. 1167.]

I welcome that the Bill reflects that belief, and the Government's drive to make the UK the best place to live for the whole armed forces community—something I wholeheartedly support.

In Bexley, where I am proud to serve, there are 4,958 veterans, which is approximately 2.5% of the population. I welcome that for the first time that data has been made available through the 2021 census, which also highlighted the difficulties that veterans sometimes face. For example, in London, 12% of veterans self-reported their general health as "very bad" or "bad". That is more than three times the level in the general London population, with only 4% self-reporting in those categories. The difficulties that veterans face are not only in the area of physical and mental health but also, as we have heard, with housing, employment and welfare, which is a direct consequence and reflection of the sacrifices they have made for our country. We therefore owe it to them to ensure they are appropriately supported in those areas, and to help them live secure and healthy lives with a purpose. I welcome that the Bill achieves that.

The veterans advisory and pensions committees have played an important role by providing vital advice and support at a local level for veterans, including the 4,958 veterans who live in Bexley. However, VAPCs are limited in the scope of the advice they can provide, and in which veterans can access them. The Bill therefore seeks to address the need for reform to create more robust and broader services for all veterans and their families, as well as to adapt to the new need for veterans to access advice on how the armed forces covenant affects them being put on a statutory footing. I thank all those businesses that have looked to increase their support for veteran communities across the UK. Through the Bill, the scope of the VAPCs' advisory powers would go beyond compensation schemes to modernising the VAPCs to take account of the changing social and legal framework, which is so important to offering holistic and consistent support to our veterans.

Furthermore, it is clear that serving in the armed forces means that extra support may be needed not only for wounded, sick or injured veterans, particularly as they transition to civilian life, but for veterans and their



families. I welcome the fact that this Bill recognises the need to extend the statutory scope of VAPCs' functions to include all veterans and their families. The landscape in which VAPCs operate has changed considerably over the past 10 years, so I also welcome the fact that this Bill not only adapts to that landscape, but enables the Government to make changes to the VAPCs' statutory functions more easily in the future. That will allow us to meet the needs of veterans more readily for years to come, something that is crucial in ensuring that veterans receive the highest possible standard of support, as they deserve.

In conclusion, our veterans have played a vital role in keeping this country safe and it is our duty to ensure that those who have served our country receive the best possible care. I welcome the fact that, at its heart, this Bill helps to deliver on that duty, as reflected in the support it has received from brilliant veterans' charities, including the Royal British Legion, SSAFA—the Armed Forces Charity, Help for Heroes and, in my local community, East Wickham & Welling War Memorial Trust, which does wonderful work each year to support local causes and local veterans. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy again for his clear passion to ensure that all veterans receive the support they deserve after they have made such honourable sacrifices for our country and our safety.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** I call the shadow Minister.

1.21 pm

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar) for introducing this Bill. It is a Bill he can be proud of; I suspect it may have been a Bill he was given by Ministers to introduce, but none the less he has done so very well.

I have enjoyed the speeches from Conservative Members, who have raised some important issues relating to veterans. Across this House, we thank all those people who have served in our armed forces. As a member of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I add my praise to the love-in towards the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray) and his team and all the SO1s from the Ministry of Defence who do such a good job supporting us in that endeavour.

This Bill is an important update to the piping, as the hon. Member for Aberconwy described it, for veterans advisory and pensions committees, which play a key role in supporting our veteran communities on a regional basis right across the United Kingdom. They are a vital method of engagement with war pensioners, armed forces compensation scheme recipients, the armed forces welfare services and the Veterans Welfare Service at a local level. I thank all those who volunteer on the committees—it is a job that until very recently has not received much attention in this place, but it is important that we thank them for the work they have been doing.

However, it also true that, as the hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French) mentioned, veterans advisory and pensions committees now operate in a fundamentally different environment from what their remit, as previously laid out in statute, has been. For that reason, Labour welcomes this update to the legislation to ensure that the committees are able to play a more

extensive role in raising awareness of other initiatives that affect veterans and, importantly, their families—because not only those people who serve in uniform, but their families form part of the greater armed forces family and should have support.

On Second Reading last month, our shadow Minister for veterans, my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) correctly made the point that, “local authorities, health bodies and other organisations must understand their obligations to veterans”,—[*Official Report*, 24 February 2023; Vol. 728, c. 480.]

and those that extend to their families, under the armed forces covenant. This Bill makes reference to that. I know that Members on both sides of the House have tried their best to make the case that the armed forces covenant needs to be more clearly explained. Now, thanks to the census, we understand where veterans are—the answer is “everywhere”—and it is for every single local authority and public body to implement the armed forces covenant correctly, ensuring that the best practice already established by councils in Portsmouth, and Plymouth, which I am proud to represent, extends to every community.

In the Bill Committee, which I note some of the Conservative Members present served on, I raised a number of points. The Minister for Veterans' Affairs responded to them, but I want to press a couple with this Minister if I can. The work of the veterans advisory and pensions committees is very important, but they are not prominent on the Ministry of Defence website and the VAPC section on the MOD part of gov.uk could do with a wee bit of updating—in particular, ensuring that the annual report consolidating the work of all the VAPCs across the country can be more clearly understood, to enable parliamentary scrutiny.

Regarding the VAPCs, I acknowledge that the Government established non-statutory supplementary terms of reference for a period of 12 months in 2021, which provided the committees with a more comprehensive and distinct role in supporting all veterans and their families. That guidance now moves to the Ministry of Defence from the Office for Veterans' Affairs. That is a welcome move and ensures that the work of VAPCs can be more properly aligned to other parts of veterans' communities and public services that now interact with our veterans and their families.

I would be grateful if the Minister set out how the Secretary of State will use the powers in the Bill to appoint members of VAPCs. How do we ensure that membership of the committees reflects veterans' communities? Two groups of veterans' communities are often poorly served by veterans' activities: national service veterans, who were mentioned by the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar), and recent veterans. Making sure that someone is able to understand the services available to them and their pension arrangements, especially in the event of medical discharge at an earlier rate, is really important. In some cases, people who leave military service at an earlier age may not always regard themselves as veterans, so it is important that there is a representative body on the VAPCs that understands how to engage with all the appropriate groups.

Finally, many Members have discussed the superb work being done by veterans' groups in their communities. I thank all those in Plymouth undertaking that work.

[Luke Pollard]

On Wednesday, I visited the Southampton Veterans Drop-In Centre, with Councillor Darren Paffey from Southampton City Council. The centre does vital work, and I put on record my thanks to Colin and Tracey Gaylor for the work they are doing, providing first-class support for veterans' communities in that city. I wish the Bill a speedy passage through the rest of its stages.

1.26 pm

**The Minister for Armed Forces (James Heappey):** I am delighted to be here to support this important Bill, but I apologise that it is me rather than my right hon. Friend the Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families, who would have preferred to have been in my place. He has been working on the Bill with my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar) throughout the Bill's progress, but unfortunately events elsewhere have detained him.

This is a great Bill that has been expertly steered through by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy. It has been a pleasure to take part in the debate and fantastic to hear the cross-party support for the Bill, exemplified by the contribution made by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson).

My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) offered a ministerial visit to Plane Sailing in Darlington. If I find myself in that neck of the woods on my search for ammunition for our Ukrainian friends, I will certainly swing by. Otherwise, I will suggest to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families that he visits.

**Peter Gibson:** Plane Sailing is a wonderful charity. It is manufacturing a Viking longboat, although I think it would take him a very long time to get to Ukraine in that.

**James Heappey:** Invariably, in helping the Ukrainians with their maritime attack capability, something faster and stealthier than longboats has been needed, but I will bear the offer in mind nonetheless.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger)—more accurately, my hon. Friend for the British Army—did as he does. He supports the Army magnificently and did not miss an opportunity to list a number of fine regiments, none finer than The Rifles.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis)—[*Interruption.*] It is only a matter of time. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North got the final laugh on his grandfather by making sure that his grandfather's sunbathing habits in Egypt are now immortalised in *Hansard*. He went on to mention the Hearts & Minds charity, Operation R&R, Walk Talk Action and the Veterans Breakfast Club. There is a Veterans Breakfast Club in my own constituency and I know how important that is. He rightly mentioned the work of Councillor Candi Chetwynd in securing the memorial to Corporal Stephen Allbutt, who was killed in action in Iraq. That is a timely memorial to be unveiling.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) rightly drew attention to the number of veterans who still struggle to find housing or who commit suicide.

There is a good story to tell from a Government policy perspective, inasmuch as interventions are starting to bring results, but he knows as well as I do that the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, works tirelessly on those issues, which are a great mission for him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East also mentioned the Association of Ex-Jewish Servicemen and Women, and it was great to hear that great organisation placed on the record. I hope that I and other colleagues are able to find the time to come to join the parade that he invited us to.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French) established himself as a keen supporter of veterans in his community. He mentioned the national charities of the Royal British Legion, SSAFA and Help for Heroes, as well as mentioning the East Wickham and Welling War Memorial Trust in his constituency. It is great that its work has been put on the record today, too.

The shadow Minister for Armed Forces, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) asked that we look at updating the veterans advisory and pensions committees website, the terms of reference and also how the Secretary of State intends to appoint people to ensure that there is true representation and that veterans can have confidence in that. I will make sure that all that is reflected back to both the Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) and the Secretary of State. The shadow Minister's recommendations are well made.

**Bob Blackman:** My right hon. Friend kindly raises the AJEX parade that I mentioned. I am pleased to report that the Minister for Defence Procurement, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) last November became the first Minister to attend the parade. I put on record our thanks for that. I am sure that that will become a tradition every year.

**James Heappey:** Indeed. I am glad that that attendance was possible, and I am sure it will become a tradition.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy has brought this wonderful Bill through the House brilliantly. I know that it will pass seamlessly through the other place, but the Ministry of Defence will of course continue to work hard to make sure that that is the case.

While I know that my friends in the Whips Office are keen to get on to other business, I might just mention in this week that it is the 20th anniversary of the Iraq war. As an Iraq veteran, I want to say two things. First, I say to all Iraq veterans that their service in that theatre will never be forgotten. It is one of the more politically contentious interventions that this country has made, but that contention never reflects on our service. Secondly, for those of us who, like me, are deeply conflicted about why we were there when, on later iterations of Operation Telic, we were effectively fighting an insurgency that existed because we were there, I take huge heart from the job that I now do, where I can see how the Chilcot principles are applied every day to how we decide what to do in the world with our military. If nothing else, that is a great legacy of that war, because we now use our military, I think, in a more precise and considered way.

1.33 pm

**Robin Millar:** With the leave of the House, I will just say that one point that has emerged for me is the number of individuals who have been named. On that basis, I must thank Lord Lancaster for his foresight in seeing this as an amendment to the Armed Forces Act some time ago. I also thank Lieutenant Colonel John Lighten, the national chair of the VAPC, for his guidance in helping my understanding throughout this process. I must also mention Adrian Hughes of the Home Front Museum in Llandudno, who showed me the importance of this and how it affects every life in a community over the decades. On that, I must mention my own father, who modelled for me the best of what veterans bring to their families and in service to society. He also taught me how many carry quietly these hidden burdens on our behalf throughout their lives. I commend this Bill to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

## **Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) (No. 2) Bill**

*Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee, considered.  
Third Reading*

1.34 pm

**Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): The Bill before us today provides the legislative powers to implement the 2017 automatic enrolment review recommendations to extend automatic enrolment to young adults aged 18 to 21, by introducing powers to lower the age criteria for enrolment and remove the lower earnings limit, which would improve saving levels among low and moderate earners. Taken together, these changes would help improve financial resilience for retirement among young people, women and lower earners. Extending the eligibility age to 18 will support younger workers and provide them with the opportunity to begin saving from the start of their working lives for a more secure retirement.

Removing the lower earnings limit will proportionately benefit the lowest earners the most. Research from Onward shows that roughly 25% of people from Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke are not yet auto-enrolled into pension schemes. The Bill tackles that, creating more stability in the long term. For the first time, everyone will get an employer contribution from the very first pound of their earnings if they are enrolled or opt in. That will help to improve the incentive to save, especially for women and those individuals working part time or in multiple jobs.

Automatic enrolment has been and remains a long-term project. It has been successful through the adoption of a carefully staged, systematic and evidence-based approach, which has been supported by the consensus, including cross-party support, in this place. That is the approach on which successful expansion must be based and why the Bill works in the way that it does—to require Ministers to consult before implementing these changes, for example, on the best way and the optimum timetable for doing so. That gives Parliament, employers, workers and other stakeholders a key role in determining how best to implement the expansion of workplace pensions.

People who earn £9,000 from two separate jobs, and who may be working 12 to 18 hours a week, juggling their jobs around childcare or caring responsibilities, do not currently get the benefits of auto-enrolment at all. For part-time workers, auto-enrolment stands at around 60%, compared with almost 90% of workers in full-time jobs. The Bill will see roughly an extra third of the part-time workforce auto-enrolled, which is an increase on the percentage based in Onward's research.

Further research from Onward suggests that, when this change comes through, it will bring almost £3.5 billion to people in our area for their total life savings. This will be transformative for the lives of everyone not just across our great country but, most importantly, across Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke.

The Bill will help to put cash into communities, help people to help themselves, and provide the extra private sector money to deliver the levelling up that we so desperately need. Automatic enrolment is widely and rightly recognised as a success. It has transformed workplace pension saving for millions of workers and is enabling them to save towards greater security in retirement.



[Jonathan Gullis]

What this Bill makes certain is that, in areas such as Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke, North West Durham and Consett, where nearly one in four people are not yet auto-enrolled onto a pension scheme, people will have more financial security in the long term. It simplifies the process, and for just a few pounds a week, through the power of compound interest, people could be £30,000 better off in retirement. That is absolutely transformative, which is why the Bill is so critical.

I know that the whole House is proud to support the Bill at this current stage and is committed to this expansion of auto-enrolment to build a more inclusive and stronger savings culture for future generations.

1.38 pm

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) on securing this Bill's passage through the House.

I wish to highlight the importance of this issue to the whole country in the long term. The UK, like most of the rest of the world, has an ageing population. In the next 25 years, the number of people older than 85 will double to 2.6 million—it is often described as the demographic time bomb. Pension saving is one way to tackle the strain that that will place on the public finances. As we know already, when people's pensions savings are not sufficient, the Government have to step in and provide that minimum floor and safety net.

Therefore, the more that we can encourage individuals privately to save to support themselves in retirement the less the state will have to do through taxation. That is why businesses can and have embraced these changes. Although they are making a contribution in the short term to pension savings, they will see a lower tax burden placed on them as employers in the long term as we seek to meet any gap that might exist later on in people's lives when they retire. The policy has already been a fantastic success, as my hon. Friend outlined. This change is an important step forward, which I support.

1.39 pm

**Peter Gibson** (Darlington) (Con): It is a real pleasure to see the Bill reach Third Reading. I am very grateful to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and to Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak for the fourth time today.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) for guiding the Bill through its legislative journey, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Gareth Davies) for raising this issue in Westminster Hall last year, and my very good and hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) for laying the groundwork for the Bill before he was elevated to high office. It is great to see him in his place today.

When auto-enrolment was introduced, as an employer I was fearful of the impact it might have on my business and fearful of the costs it would burden me with, but auto-enrolment has proved to be hugely successful, reversing the decline in workplace pension saving and ensuring that millions more people are now saving for their future. I saw at first hand the benefits the scheme has had on the lives and futures of my employees.

Employees who would never have considered being part of a pension scheme were put in a position where it became a simple and easy process. For the first time, they were ensuring that they did not fall into the trap of under-saving for retirement.

We have to recognise that for those under the age of 22 the number of people enrolled in a pension is woefully low. Among those in part-time employment, although some will earn more than the current £10,000 threshold, the number of those auto-enrolled is still significantly lower than among those who are in full-time employment. The 22-year-old minimum age simply does not work. Why should someone who chooses to start working before they are 22 not be paying into a pension from that age, the same way as someone who is 22? They would have much to gain from auto-enrolment being extended to them. Moreover, we must recognise that the current system also disproportionately impacts women and those on the lowest earnings in our society, who are more likely to be in part-time work and have multiple part-time jobs, like many of my constituents in Darlington.

In 2019, I stood on a manifesto to level up communities across the United Kingdom, and the extension of auto-enrolment is a policy that has the potential to have a real positive impact on people's futures. It would be a commitment to level up for the long-term. The Bill is levelling up in action.

Extending auto-enrolment could potentially add trillions of pounds to the nation's pension pot. It is a chance to ensure that people are saving for their future from a young age. It allows us to ensure that the poorest in society have a more secure future and takes steps towards closing the gap between men and women's pension savings.

**Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): Alongside this positive Bill, which builds on the success of auto-enrolment, which the Conservative Government adopted, does my hon. Friend agree that it is important we also support the Government's initiatives to roll out pensions advice more widely, so that people have a better understanding of their own financial situation and pensions saving, particularly for men, women and younger people?

**Peter Gibson:** My hon. Friend makes a really important point. I know only too well, from conversations I had with family members encouraging me to take up a pension when I was in my early 20s, it seemed an awfully long way off. I can tell the House, some 30 years later, that it comes around very, very quickly. The earlier we all start saving, the better.

In conclusion, the extension of auto-enrolment would have huge benefits for many people in Darlington and right across the country. I am delighted to support the Bill and look forward to it completing its legislative journey.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** I call the shadow Minister.

1.43 pm

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak on the Bill. I am sure the House will be relieved to know that I do not intend to speak for long, because

the Bill has cross-party support. Improving pensions legislation has a long history of cross-party support, beginning with the legacy of the pensions commission, which reported 21 years ago. The Bill is a part of that ongoing legacy. Saving for our future is very important for us all. The thing that this House can do to help people save for their future is offer a consistent policy approach, and that is what the Bill does. We have made progress on auto-enrolment, but we can go further. It is a pleasure to support the Bill.

I will ask a small number of questions, which I will be grateful if the Minister could answer. The Opposition wholly supports this Bill. It would be helpful to know when in the autumn the consultation will take place. What will the Government strategy be for communicating with young people in particular? I note comments from Members about the power of good that it can do for young people. There have been few positive policy areas for young people over the past years. I would be grateful if the Minister could talk about what the Department for Work and Pensions will do in the area. Could she say what feedback it has had from employers so far, and from trade unions? What is the Department's plan for working with both those groups and with wider civil society and business communities, to make sure that this is a success? What is the timetable for bringing this legislation into force? What can we expect from this point? If the Minister could talk us through the timetable, I would be most grateful. I wish the Department the very best in making this legislation a reality.

1.45 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Laura Trott):** I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis), and my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) before him, on successfully piloting this Bill through all its stages in this House. Their efforts will improve the retirement aspirations for millions in the UK, from young people starting work at 18 with a pension for the first time, to those already in a workplace pension who will now build pension savings from the first pound of their earnings.

I acknowledge the support of Members across the House in progressing this legislation. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), is right that there has been broad consensus on workplace pensions since the pensions commission. It is a testament to the importance that we all place on delivering improved retirement outcomes for our fellow citizens.

A lot has been achieved in the last decade of the reforms, as has been mentioned numerous times. More than 10 million people have been automatically enrolled into a workplace pension. More than 2 million employers are paying into employees' pensions for the first time. My hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) are right that it has been embraced by employers, and we should celebrate that. An additional £33 billion in real terms was saved into workplace pensions in 2021 compared with 2012. As has been mentioned, it has been especially transformative for women, low earners and young people, who historically have been poorly served by, or excluded from, workplace pensions. The Bill sets us on a path to

do more for all those groups, who will benefit from increased saving in retirement, with many gaining access for the first time to employer contributions.

In Committee I spoke about the legislative powers in the Bill, and the duty placed on Government to consult on how we make the changes through regulations—both the approach to implementation and the timetable for doing so. We will report to Parliament on the outcome of that consultation before bringing forward the necessary secondary legislation, which will also be debated in this House. I look forward to engaging with hon. Members on those details, to ensure that the expansion of automatic enrolment is done in the right way for employers, workers and taxpayers.

To answer some of the shadow Minister's questions directly, we will work closely with employers and trade unions throughout the consultation process. I have committed previously to launching the consultation in the autumn. I am not in a position to give an exact date, but I assure the hon. Member that I will push as hard as I can to get that as early as possible. Communicating to young people is incredibly important. Once we are through the consultation stage and we have a timeline for when we can make progress, we will work up a plan, and I will return to the House on that. On a timetable for the legislation to come into force, the commitment has previously been the mid-2020s, and that is what we will continue to say. We will have more of an idea once we have done the consultation process. I hope that answers all her questions.

In conclusion, it is to the huge credit of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North that he successfully introduced the Bill on a cross-party basis and navigated its passage—*[Interruption.]* There is a first time for everything. I am delighted to say that the Government support the Bill and will continue to support it as it moves through Parliament. I wish it every success.

1.49 pm

**Jonathan Gullis:** With the leave of the House, I wish quickly to place a few thank-yous on the record. First, let me thank the fantastic civil servants in the Department for Work and Pensions, many of whom are sitting in the Box today. They have been tremendously helpful to both me and my team in getting the Bill to where we are today. I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott), for her fantastic work in unblocking the blockages that had previously existed to bringing this legislation forward.

I thank the Opposition Front Benchers, including the hon. Members for Reading East (Matt Rodda) and for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), for all their support, kind words and guidance. I thank the Scottish national party spokesman, the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden), who has championed this measure and is very excited by it. I also wish to thank the Association of British Insurers, the Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association and the TUC for all their fine work, as well as Onward, that fantastic think tank, for the incredible work it is doing, now led by Sebastian Payne.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), who does not get enough praise in this House. Without her guidance and stern tongue, I might not sometimes be able to be kept in line enough

[Jonathan Gullis]

to make sure that we move things smoothly along. So I am grateful to her for the advice she has provided to get us to this place. I also place on record my thanks to Baroness Altmann, who is going to be taking this Bill on in the other place and guiding it safely through to Royal Assent.

The final big shout-out needs to go to my office buddy, my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden), who did all the donkey work, the leg work, for this Bill. I have shamelessly come in and picked it up after he was sent to such high office that I see him only once a week, rather than three or four times a week. I also thank his incredible staff members, Gabriel Millard-Clothier and Robbie Lammas, as well as my own parliamentary researcher, Harry Mahoney-Roberts, and Nathan Purchase in my constituency office, who have suffered with me to get to where we are today. This is a fantastic piece of legislation and it will make a change to many lives in the future.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

## Firearms Bill

*Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee, considered.*

*Third Reading*

1.51 pm

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It is a privilege for me to move the Bill's Third Reading, on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey), following its recent consideration in Committee.

The UK has some of the toughest gun controls in the world, and robust licensing controls are key to keeping the public safe. Firearms deaths or serious injuries are relatively rare, but the consequences of firearms in the wrong hands can be devastating. That is why we keep our controls under constant review to safeguard against firearms falling into the hands of criminals, terrorists and other individuals who might put public safety at risk, while ensuring that legitimate firearms users can participate in shooting safely, through an effective licensing system.

The Bill will help to further strengthen the controls by addressing two vulnerabilities that could be exploited by criminals, terrorists and others with a malicious intent. Clause 1 deals with controls on miniature rifle ranges. It would be fair to say that the current exemption in law for miniature rifle ranges is a lesser-known area of firearms law, but it is none the less extremely important that we improve the legislative regulation relating to them. Section 11(4) of the Firearms Act 1968 at present allows a person conducting or carrying on a miniature rifle range or shooting gallery at which only miniature rifles and ammunition not exceeding .23-inch calibre or air weapons are used to purchase, acquire or possess miniature rifles or ammunition without a firearm certificate. Additionally, a person can use these rifles and ammunition at such a range without a certificate. Although the term "miniature rifle" is used in the legislation, the firearms this applies to are lethal guns that are otherwise subject to the requirement for the holder to apply for a certificate in order to possess them.

The existing exemption in section 11(4) of the 1968 Act means that a person can purchase firearms and operate a miniature rifle range, at which others can shoot, without a certificate and therefore without having undergone the usual stringent police checks on a person's suitability and assessment of how they will store and use the firearms safely. The police and others have raised concerns that the exemption is a loophole in firearms law that is vulnerable to abuse by criminals or terrorists seeking to access firearms and sidestep the usual robust checks carried out by the police.

**Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a compelling case, and I entirely support the Bill's aim in tackling crime, closing those loopholes and increasing public safety. However, will he give further reassurance that this Bill, through targeting these loopholes, will not have an undue impact on those who collect such rifles for historical and ornamental purposes, not for shooting? Will he confirm that it will not put too much of a burden on such people, who already go through checks? This issue has been raised by a constituent who is a collector of such weapons.



**Dr Mullan:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that question. His remarks are particularly pertinent to clause 2, on ammunition components and parts of guns that people might own, whether they are miniature rifles or not. I assure him that that element of the law focuses on the person's intent, as I will come on to describe. If a person has reasonable grounds for having the components of ammunition, and it is clear to the police that they have no malicious or untoward intent, they will be okay.

As I say, the miniature rifle range exemption has been in existence for many years, and is used extensively by small-bore rifle clubs to introduce newcomers to sport shooting. It is used by some schools and colleges, activity centres offering targeted shooting, at game fairs, and in a number of other legitimate environments. Many of those would be severely affected if the exemption were removed entirely, which was never the intention. If it were removed, clubs could no longer enable newcomers to try out target shooting in a safe, controlled way. In recognition of this, the Bill preserves the benefits of the miniature rifle range exemption, while bringing in appropriate controls by making it a requirement that the rifle range operator be granted a firearm certificate by the police, having undergone all the necessary checks as to suitability, security and good reason.

The Bill also more tightly defines what may be considered a miniature rifle. It restricts the definition to .22-inch rimfire guns, which are lower-powered rifles. There is concern that the definition in current legislation—

“not exceeding .23 inch calibre”—

could allow the use of more powerful firearms that would not be suitable for use on a miniature rifle range by an uncertified person, even when the necessary supervision and safety measures are in place.

The second firearms measure in the Bill is the measure on ammunition, which will help the police to tackle unlawful manufacture of ammunition by introducing a new offence of possessing its component parts with an intent to assemble unauthorised quantities of complete ammunition. The police have raised concerns that the component parts of ammunition are too easy to obtain, and are being used by criminals to manufacture whole rounds of ammunition.

**Mr French:** My hon. Friend is making a really passionate speech. He has picked up on some interesting distinctions between what will be in the Bill and what will not. Could he please outline what guidance there will be for the police, who will have to enforce the measures, on these clear distinctions in the law?

**Dr Mullan:** Again, my hon. Friend makes an important point. I welcome the opportunity to clarify that, as he says, the police will have to make new and different decisions in enforcing this legislation. I am pleased to say that a new training and quality assurance package for police firearm licensing teams is being developed, which will contribute to their being able to make those decisions in a reliable and effective way.

It might be helpful if I briefly explained what the components of ammunition are, and how they go together to make a round of ammunition. The components are the gunpowder, used to propel a projectile from a firearm; the primer, which is an explosive compound that ignites the gunpowder, projectile or bullet; and the cartridge case. There are already controls on primers in

the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006. Section 35 of that Act makes it an offence to sell or purchase primers unless the purchaser is authorised to possess them—for example, by being a registered firearms dealer, or by holding a firearm certificate authorising them to possess ammunition for a firearm.

Controls on the possession of gunpowder are set out in the Explosives Regulations 2014, which state that with certain exceptions, anyone wanting to acquire or keep explosives must hold an explosives certificate issued by the police. The projectiles or bullets and the cartridge case are constructed of inert material, and are not controlled. Frankly, given the nature of those two components and the quantities in which they are made, it would be difficult to control their possession, and there is no wish to do so.

The present situation can make the prosecution of certain cases by the police difficult. Where there is intent to produce ammunition unlawfully, the police may be unable to progress with certain criminal cases if the materials found are not controlled. In view of those concerns, the firearms safety consultation sought views on whether controls on component parts of ammunition remained sufficient, or whether they should be strengthened by making it an offence to possess component parts with intent to assemble unauthorised quantities of ammunition. As I say, intent is vital. A majority of respondents—62%—agreed or strongly agreed that possession of component parts of ammunition with intent to manufacture unauthorised quantities of complete rounds of ammunition should be made an offence.

Assembly of ammunition requires use of the various component parts, including the restricted and unrestricted components. The new offence will better enable the police to prosecute criminals who are manufacturing ammunition, including in cases in which only some of the component parts are present, provided that intent is shown. It will be a significant step forward in helping the police to tackle gun crime.

This is a small but important Bill. Events such as those in Keyham in August 2021, on Skye in August 2022 and more recently at Epsom College are clear reminders that we cannot afford to be complacent about the risks that firearms present. The Bill will address two identified vulnerabilities in this country's firearms controls, and it is right that we take action to address them. I very much appreciate the support that it has so far received; I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West feels the same. I commend the Bill to the House.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** I call the shadow Minister.

2 pm

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) for moving the Bill's Third Reading today, and the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes) for taking it through Committee.

I rise to speak in support of the Bill, which will make small but important changes to our gun laws. As the MP for the constituency that suffered the tragedy of losing five people in the mass shooting in Keyham of August 2021, I am very mindful that in approaching gun legislation

[*Luke Pollard*]

we should all do our best to prevent future tragedies, close loopholes and ensure that the pain and suffering that my community has felt is not felt by others. The Bill will make small but important changes in that direction.

In Committee, Opposition Members made the case that although closing these two loopholes is welcome, it shows that yet again we are making ad hoc changes to gun legislation. There may be a stronger case for a broader review of gun laws, in particular to look at updating the Firearms Act 1968 to ensure that our gun legislation takes 21st-century conditions into account and keeps people safe based on modern rather than historic practices and uses.

The Bill is narrow and I will constrain my remarks to its provisions. It will clamp down on existing loopholes related to miniature rifles. As the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich said, the word “miniature” might misleadingly suggest that they are somehow toys or that they are less serious, but .22 rifles are still weapons and should be controlled with appropriate scrutiny of those who apply for a certificate, as well as those without a certificate, as the Bill seeks to address.

Clause 1 will make limited changes to the 1968 Act by introducing a requirement for operators of miniature rifle ranges to obtain a firearm certificate and by restricting such ranges to .22 weapons only—a welcome change that the Opposition think is a good idea. Clause 2 will introduce a new offence of possessing component parts of ammunition with intent to manufacture. The Bill follows the publication of the firearms safety consultation, which sought views on improving the controls on miniature rifle ranges. 73% of those who responded to the survey agreed or strongly agreed

“that the operator of a miniature rifle range should be required to hold a firearms certificate”.

Labour broadly supports the Bill, but we stress that the legislation should go further. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) spoke of her conversations with police officers, who told her that miniature rifles have been adapted into more dangerous weapons and used to facilitate criminality. It was felt that the requirement for someone operating a miniature rifle range to apply for a firearms certificate should be accompanied by further conditions in recognition of the fact that they are running such an establishment rather than simply possessing a firearm. It was also felt that the running of the range should be subject to routine checks on compliance, but that is missing from clauses 1 and 2.

We need our gun laws to be fit for the 21st century. That means recognising that the 1968 Act is out of date and that the body of assembled gun law changes since the Act could be consolidated to ensure that they are fit for modern challenges. An example relevant to clause 2 is the 3D printing of ammunition and firearms, which was briefly mentioned in Committee. At the moment, 3D printing is used mainly for handguns. Designs can be downloaded freely from the internet, so someone with a 3D printer can print a handgun and other kinds of weaponry. That fundamentally changes criminals’ ability to get their hands on firearms and evade the licensing system. It is also possible for them to print elements of ammunition that fit the gun. The casing is

explicitly identified as a component part of ammunition in proposed new section 3A(2)(b) of the 1968 Act, which is set out in clause 2.

It does not appear to me that clause 2 explicitly covers 3D printing. When pressed on this in Committee, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Miss Dines), was not able to provide an answer. I realise the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), who is at the Dispatch Box today, is not responsible for the day-to-day handling of the Bill, but I would be grateful if he could pass my concerns to his officials. If we face a growth in the 3D printing of weapons, which is a genuine risk both in the future and now, we must make sure that the provision of a 3D printer could fall under the same type of offence as suggested in clause 2.

Last week I met Emma Ambler, who lost her twin sister Kelly Fitzgibbons, and Kelly’s two children, to a gun incident. I often speak about Keyham in this place, but it is important to recognise that, around the country, we are seeing people lose loved ones in a variety of circumstances due to firearms, but also due to failures in how firearms certificates and firearms licensing are delivered.

I share the concern of the hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French) to ensure that responsible gun owners are able to possess a weapon. Making sure that only appropriate individuals have access to a weapon must be at the heart of our approach to gun laws. Sadly, we have seen police forces, including Devon and Cornwall police in my area, fail catastrophically to ensure that only those who should have a gun certificate have one. It is welcome that the Bill extends the provisions to .22 rifles, but wherever a police force is investigating an individual’s suitability, we must make sure that not only are the proper procedures followed but that the same procedures are followed across the nation.

After the Plymouth inquest, the coroner made a number of remarks in this direction. One recommendation was for the introduction of national training for all police officers involved with firearms licensing, to ensure that the regulation of firearms is the same in every part of the country. That is important when looking to extend the provision of firearms licensing, as we are with this Bill, to make sure that, whether it is Devon and Cornwall police, the Metropolitan police or any other police force in England and Wales, the provisions are the same so that we avoid the loss of life we saw in Plymouth and in relation to Kelly Fitzgibbons and her family.

We accept that, due to the nature of this Bill, the Government are not minded to make broader changes at this time, but we are encouraged that there is an appetite to close the loopholes, as identified with .22 rifles in this private Member’s Bill. I encourage the Government to go further. I look forward to meeting the Policing Minister next week with the families of those we sadly lost in the Keyham tragedy in 2021, to make the case for closing further loopholes on a comprehensive basis to ensure that our gun laws in the 21st century keep all our communities safe.

Labour will back this Bill today, and we hope it further reinforces the need to go further to ensure that all our communities remain safe from gun violence.

2.8 pm

**The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Edward Argar):** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) for so ably stepping in for my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey), who has done so much work to bring forward this private Member's Bill and to see it progress through the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich did an admirable job of picking up the reins and deftly steering the Bill through Third Reading. This important and proportionate measure will help to advance safety while allowing legitimate activities to continue.

As always, the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), approaches the Bill in a pragmatic and sensible way. He highlighted the horrendous events in 2021 that saw the killing of five people in his constituency, and I pay tribute to him for the phenomenal support he gave to his affected constituents and to his community in the light of those horrific events.

As the hon. Gentleman said, he will shortly be seeing the Policing Minister, on whose behalf I am responding today. In respect of the inquest findings following the horrific events in his constituency, I believe that the Policing Minister is committed to respond within 60 days, which according to my calculation brings us to mid-May. It is right for those findings to be considered carefully and properly, and, while I do not wish to pre-empt what the Minister will say, I know that he will indeed be considering them very carefully.

I am happy to confirm that the Government support the Bill, which has been the subject of consensus across the House. It aims to address two vulnerabilities in the existing licensing controls, which have been debated in a commendably constructive way during its passage so far, here and in Committee. We committed ourselves to taking action following a public consultation on specific firearms safety issues that took place between 24 November 2020 and 16 February 2021.

Clause 1 tightens the law relating to miniature rifle ranges by removing the exemption, provided by the Firearms Act 1968, that has allowed those operating such ranges to do so without the necessity of first obtaining a firearm certificate. Removing that exemption will mean that the operators will be subject to police checks ensuring that the ranges operate within a secure and safe framework, and that the firearms used there are stored securely. The Home Office will amend its guidance to reflect the fact that the operation of a miniature rifle range constitutes a good reason for possessing suitable firearms and ammunition, which I hope provides the reassurance sought by some Members on this point during earlier debates. The clause also means that the .22 rim-fire rifles used on miniature rifle ranges—a type of firearm that is already subject to licensing by police in other circumstances—will rightly be brought within the licensing regime for miniature rifle ranges. Furthermore, the term “miniature rifles” will be more tightly defined so that only the less powerful .22 rim-fire firearms may be used on miniature rifle ranges.

Clause 2 tackles the unlawful manufacture of ammunition by introducing a new offence of possessing component parts with the intent to assemble unauthorised

quantities of complete ammunition. The police had raised concerns that the component parts of ammunition were too easy to obtain, and were being used by criminals to manufacture whole rounds. I know there has been concern about the possibility that this is a back-door way of introducing controls on component parts, or that it will somehow prevent people from home loading their own ammunition. I hope it has been made sufficiently clear in our previous debates that someone with a valid certificate covering the complete rounds they possess will have nothing to fear, and that the measure is aimed at the criminals who seek to manufacture ammunition illegally. Concerns have also been raised—and were touched on by the shadow Minister—about clause 2 not extending to 3D printed ammunition. I hope it will reassure Members to know that such 3D printed items are subject to the law in the same way as any other firearm or ammunition. The fact that a 3D printer may have been used to make ammunition illegally could also be used in proving intent to a court.

Both those measures received support in the public consultation that I mentioned earlier. It was widely acknowledged, by those representing shooting interests as well as those who wish to see tighter firearms controls more generally, that these changes would help to strengthen our firearms controls. The Bill will make a valuable contribution to firearms legislation while also ensuring that those who wish to continue to engage in firearms activities legitimately—whether that involves target shooting at clubs or activity centres, the legitimate home loading of ammunition, or other lawful activities—can continue to do so.

Law enforcement agencies called on the Government to tighten the regulation in these areas and we have responded, but our work in keeping firearms law under review—another issue on which the shadow Minister sought assurances—and continuing to ensure that there are strong gun controls in this country does not stop here. A number of other issues that have rightly been raised during the Bill's passage are out of scope, but the Government will continue to consider them closely in the context of the reports that have been received about the tragic shootings in various parts of the UK in recent months.

Let me end by thanking, in absentia, my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West for bringing the Bill to the House, and my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich and the shadow Minister for the tone in which, as ever, they have approached this issue. I also put on record my thanks to the Home Office officials who have worked with Ministers in responding to and working on this piece of legislation, and to officials in my own private office in the Ministry of Justice—one of my private secretaries is sitting in the box as we speak—for the speed with which, in recent hours, they have made sure I am fully briefed for this debate. I hope to see the Bill continue to progress through Parliament apace; I look forward to its having a smooth and swift passage through the other place and into law and I fully support what is proposed.

2.15 pm

**Dr Mullan:** With the leave of the House, on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey), I would like to thank the Clerks, the members of the Bill Committee, House staff and all of



[Dr Mullan]

those who have contributed to the Bill. My hon. Friend wanted me to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes), and I want to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French) for his considered questions today. It has been a privilege to play a small role on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West to bring this legislation through this stage in the House. I thank the whole House for its support.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

## Minimum Energy Performance of Buildings Bill

*Second Reading*

2.15 pm

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The UK has the least energy-efficient buildings in western Europe. Millions of families are living in cold, damp homes, homes that are crying out for better insulation and for cheaper and cleaner ways of generating and retaining heat. The Government policy to upgrade our housing stock is failing badly. Homes across the UK account for 15% of greenhouse gas emissions, much of which is down to poor insulation standards and heat being paid for and then lost unnecessarily.

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero said last week that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy had established 22 separate schemes to improve energy efficiency by the time he came to office. The majority of them have fallen far short of what is needed, wasting not only money, but precious time in the race against climate change.

While the Government have failed to improve our draughty houses, many have stepped up; I would like to pay brief tribute to the many non-governmental organisations tirelessly researching this area and lobbying the Government for change. I also thank Lord Foster of Bath and the right hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) for tabling a prior version of this Bill in last year's Session and Ron Bailey for his time and commitment to this cause. I thank Citizens Advice Richmond for inviting me into its office yesterday for a discussion about how this is one of the biggest issues facing tenants in my Richmond Park constituency.

This Bill would set out a legislative roadmap to upgrade homes to energy performance certificate band C by 2033—the minimum standard of energy efficiency that the Government's own heat and buildings strategy has said is required. Currently, less than half of the buildings in this country meet that standard. How much longer can we kick this can down the road?

The last year has shown us all just how volatile global energy markets are. Soaring energy bills have left vulnerable households paying the price for the Government's failure to invest in vital home improvements to reduce energy usage. A recent report by Citizens Advice found that the average tenant in a property rated D or below will pay around £350 more for their annual energy bill than someone in a better-insulated property rated C or above. For those in the least efficient homes, that increases to £950 each year.

The economic benefit of higher ratings does not stop solely with households: it is estimated that an EPC C rating could drive £12 billion of investment and save £1.75 billion annually. Not only will householders feel the benefit of improved energy efficiency in their monthly bills, but improved energy efficiency will significantly reduce damp, mould and excessive cold, all of which are detrimental to people's health and mental wellbeing.

When I spoke to Citizens Advice Richmond yesterday I heard many examples of parents living in damp and mouldy houses and the impact that that is having on their children's health. I heard of many cases where

children are now in and out of hospital with respiratory diseases that can be directly related to the quality of the housing they are living in.

Research shows that homes in EPC bands D to G are 73% more likely to be mouldy or excessively cold than those in bands C or above. Tragically, research also shows that thousands of excess deaths each winter are directly attributable to cold and damp conditions. We must remember that those on the lowest incomes suffer most from the dangerous combination of draughty housing and soaring energy prices. That is why the Bill would put the Government's target to upgrade all fuel-poor households to EPC rating C by 2030 on a statutory footing, placing a legal obligation on the Government to ensure that action is targeted at those who need it most.

One of the most ludicrous examples of policy failure on energy efficiency was the decision taken by the Government in 2016 to scrap the zero carbon standard for new dwellings. This means that new homes are now being built, eight years later, which will have to be upgraded again in just a few years' time to meet EPC band C targets. A green home building programme would create thousands of new green jobs, enabling economic growth and adapting our economy to meet future challenges.

The Bill is just one step in the right direction. It would tie the Government to legally binding targets to decarbonise homes and buildings across the country. I accept that there is lots of work to be done to make those targets realistic: on developing green finance solutions, on training for suppliers, on supporting local authorities and on increasing public awareness. However, within those challenges are huge opportunities for cleaner, healthier and cheaper homes fit for the future, homes that benefit both households and the planet. I urge the Government to support the Bill today and to finally take the action that is needed.

**Peter Gibson** (Darlington) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a very important speech about an issue that is very, very close to my heart. It is an issue on which I have held Westminster Hall debates, written newspaper articles and engaged with my social housing sector. Does she welcome the Government's announcement this week of additional funding for decarbonisation in social housing? And I have a specific question for her. Where does she expect the cost of decarbonisation in private-owned non-mortgaged properties to fall?

**Sarah Olney:** The hon. Member makes an excellent point. The division between social and private is in many ways an obstacle to achieving our goals on this issue. In social and regulated housing, where there are opportunities perhaps to achieve economies of scale, certainly in whole blocks or whole estates of housing, a lot can be done, but obviously those opportunities are more challenging where private property is concerned. What we need is a range of innovative solutions in the private sector.

**Robin Millar** (Aberconwy) (Con): This is a fascinating debate, which I have followed. It has been brought to my attention by land and property holders in my constituency who have a large portfolio of listed and conservation buildings. The Bill drives them into a

difficult place. On the one hand, there is a drive to increase efficiency. On the other hand, they are confronted by planning rules which prevent easy modification and adaptation of the structure to, for example, accommodate solar panels. Is the hon. Lady arguing that we should move to an easing of planning regulation to allow efficiency improvements in listed and conservation building stock?

**Sarah Olney:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. It is a live issue in my own constituency, he will be pleased to hear. We have conservation areas where people are keen to put solar panels on their roofs and it is possible on one side of the street but not on the other because of the impact on the streetscape. I very much urge local authorities—or whatever the planning authority is; it will be different in different parts—to look at that particular issue. We need to explore and weigh up the gain both for society at large and for individual householders. It will be different in different places. In some cases, it is about how the street looks, what people want to preserve and whether adjustments can be made. In other examples, the fabric of the building itself will need to be preserved.

Before I came into this place in 2019, I was the financial accountant for Historic Royal Palaces. My old office was right in the middle of Hampton Court Palace, so a lot of these issues around fabric of the building are very close to my heart. Interestingly, there is no better place to be on a very, very hot summer's day than right in the middle of a Tudor palace, with six-foot thick stone walls. I can confirm that it is just about the best possible natural cooling one can have.

**Robin Millar:** The hon. Lady is being generous with her time. We have much in common in our interest in and passion for old buildings. In fact, I came across the statistic that some 95% of conservation and listed buildings are still expected to be in use in 100 years' time. That creates incredible economic pressure on the market to ensure that efficiencies are delivered, at incredible cost. I ask again, where do we think that cost might be addressed? Is she arguing for an easing of those conservation rules to reduce the cost on that particular sector of conservation and listed buildings?

**Sarah Olney:** I was coming to the point about the cost, which was raised by the hon. Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson). We need to rebalance and grasp the importance of energy efficiency right now. It is not just about climate change or fuel bills; it is about health and wellbeing, often of the very poorest in our society—if the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar) will forgive me, they are probably less concerned about historic buildings. I mentioned Citizens Advice Richmond; one of its observations is that it is frequently the buildings built in the 1960s and 1970s where they find the most problems with damp and mould.

I fear that we are getting distracted by some of the more minor concerns, when the issue is about the bulk of our housing stock—particularly the housing stock that our most vulnerable and low-income citizens live in—and what we can do. I want to pick up the point about where the cost will come from. Where it is an individual household and it is their responsibility, I want the Government to produce some clearer strategies

[Sarah Olney]

about how the problem will be tackled. The private sector will then have more incentive to offer competitive options on things such as heat pumps, roof insulation and cavity wall insulation. We need a bigger take-up of those things to create a competitive market, but some of that has to come from the Government taking a lead in the sorts of strategies and products that householders might be tempted to take up.

**Peter Gibson:** The hon. Lady has been gracious in giving way once again, given the shortage of time. This issue is serious one for property owners. Having had a solid-wall property dry lined and insulated against a solid wall, I have seen the costs myself. Does she agree that it is incumbent on mortgage companies to develop a range of products that would help new homebuyers buying second-hand, older properties, to build in some sort of loan facility to enable such works to be undertaken?

**Sarah Olney:** The hon. Member is right. The sort of innovative products we are looking for are not just construction products, but financial products. Again, it is about opening up a private sector, competitive and well-regulated market that will enable homeowners to make the kind of investments that they will need to make in their own homes. The hon. Member is absolutely right at this time of heightened property values—again, a live issue in my constituency. I saw a league table recently in which Richmond Park is No. 6 for average property prices out of all the constituencies in the country. It costs a great deal already to live in Richmond Park. He is absolutely right that if we want to put an onus on homeowners to upgrade the quality of the properties that they are living in or renting out to other people, we need to offer them options for how they might finance that.

**Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): As a fellow London MP, the hon. Lady will recognise the pressures that have been highlighted. But there are parts of the market that are doing that organically already and have not required state intervention. Where there is state intervention, whether national or local, does she agree that it is important that trust is ensured? She may be aware of cases in her constituency of major doubts about the effectiveness of the Mayor of London's solar scheme. People have signed up for the rollout of solar panels and have paid thousands of pounds, and that has not been delivered.

**Sarah Olney:** I confess I have not had a huge amount of casework on the solar panel issue. One case was raised with me but specifically on my earlier point about the conservation area. The hon. Member raises a good point about solar panels. I do not know why—a lot of people are asking this—we have not had a more extensive rollout of solar panels already, regardless of whether they are funded by the Mayor of London or anyone else. It is of huge benefit to homeowners to be able to install solar panels and participate in generating their own power and electricity. We really need to look at which policies are stopping people investing in solar panels, and what financial obstacles we may be able to overcome. This is not just about energy efficiency in insulating our homes, but about what more can be done

to help people with the cost of fuel bills and keeping their homes warm, and about the health and wellbeing of the nation as a whole.

*The Deputy Speaker interrupted the business (Standing Order No. 11(2)).*

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

## Business without Debate

### PUBLIC BODIES (REPRESENTATION FROM DEVOLVED NATIONS) BILL

*Motion made,* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

### REGULATORY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS BILL

*Motion made,* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 9 June.*

### COUNTRYSIDE AND RIGHTS OF WAY ACT 2000 (AMENDMENT) BILL

*Resumption of adjourned debate on Question (28 October),* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Debate to be resumed on Friday 1 December.*

### DECARBONISATION AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY BILL

*Motion made,* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

### PLANNING APPLICATION FEES BILL

*Motion made,* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

### MISCARRIAGE LEAVE BILL

*Motion made,* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

### SHORT-TERM AND HOLIDAY-LET ACCOMMODATION (LICENSING) BILL

*Resumption of adjourned debate on Question (9 December),* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Debate to be resumed on Friday 24 November.*



**REMOVAL OF TITLES BILL**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

**FORMER MINISTERS AND PRIME MINISTERS (ABOLITION OF PAYMENTS) BILL**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

**HEREDITARY TITLES (FEMALE SUCCESSION) BILL**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

**PLASTICS (WET WIPES) BILL**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 May.*

**TEENAGERS (SAFETY AND WELLBEING) BILL**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

**FREE SCHOOL MEALS (PRIMARY SCHOOLS) BILL**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 30 June.*

**ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES (CODES OF CONDUCT) BILL**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 May.*

**FIREARMS AND HATE CRIME BILL**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

**SALE OF TOBACCO (LICENSING) BILL**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

**CLEAN AIR (HUMAN RIGHTS) BILL [LORDS]**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 15 December.*

**DYSLEXIA SCREENING AND TEACHER TRAINING BILL**

*Resumption of adjourned debate on Question (2 December 2022), That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Debate to be resumed on Friday 24 November.*

**CARAVAN SITES BILL**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 9 June.*

**KINSHIP CARE BILL**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 8 September.*

**WORKING TIME REGULATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 May.*

**MULTI-STOREY CAR PARKS (SAFETY) BILL**

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

### PUBLIC ADVOCATE (NO. 2) BILL

*Resumption of adjourned debate on Question (15 July 2022), That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Debate to be resumed on Friday 12 May.*

### BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION (PRIVATISATION) BILL

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 9 June.*

### SEIZURE OF RUSSIAN STATE ASSETS AND SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE BILL

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

### ELECTIONS BILL

*Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November.*

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Ind): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Yesterday, during business questions, I asked the Leader of the House to bring forward a debate on the Government's plans for the introduction of digital IDs. In her response, the right hon. Lady stated that the Government have "no such plans to introduce the measures"—[*Official Report*, 23 March 2023; Vol. 730, c. 457.]

that I alluded to. On 4 January 2023, the Cabinet Office published a consultation titled "Consultation on draft legislation to support identity verification". The ministerial foreword to that consultation states:

"This Government has made a commitment to improve the way that data and information is shared and used across the public sector to deliver better, joined up services and exceptional outcomes for our citizens... the government is committed to realising the benefits of digital identity technologies without creating ID cards."

My question yesterday was substantively about digital ID. The Leader of the House's answer was demonstrably factually incorrect. I would welcome your advice as to how the Leader of the House may set the record straight, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** First, I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving notice of his intention to raise this point of order. He is aware that the contents of answers to parliamentary questions and contributions is not a matter for the Chair. However, I must remind the House that the Government's own ministerial code requires Ministers to correct any inadvertent errors in answers to parliamentary questions at the earliest opportunity. If an error has been made in this instance, I am sure that the Government will seek to correct it as quickly as possible. Of course, the Leader of the House may take the view that there is no inaccuracy.

### Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Rebecca Harris.)*

2.38 pm

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): I welcome to the Front Bench the Minister who will respond to the debate, with whom I had a meeting earlier today. During the course of that meeting, she kindly agreed to come to an early meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on covid-19 vaccine damage, which I have the privilege of chairing. At that meeting we will have representatives of victims of vaccine damage. However, as I emphasised to my hon. Friend, we will not have people there who are actively engaged in litigation, because that would be inappropriate.

This debate is about the application of the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979 to those who have been bereaved or suffered adverse reactions to covid-19 vaccines. The Act was extended to apply to such vaccines before they were rolled out, but it is now abundantly clear that the Act is totally inadequate for addressing the needs of most of those who have been adversely affected.

On Wednesday this week, the Prime Minister told my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright):

"We are taking steps to reform vaccine damage payment schemes, by modernising the operations and providing more timely outcomes".—[*Official Report*, 22 March 2023; Vol. 730, c. 330.]

The Prime Minister did not answer or even refer to my right hon. and learned Friend's requests that the Government should change the £120,000 maximum payment for those seriously injured and end the denial of any payment to those disabled by less than 60%. That was despite the Prime Minister having received notice of my right hon. and learned Friend's question, and the fact that both he and I had raised the same points with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care weeks ago.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Ind): I commend my hon. Friend for his work on this issue. Has he had time to consider the paper produced this week by the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, which found a strongly significant correlation between covid-19 vaccine uptake in 2021 and excess deaths in the first nine months of 2022 across the European Union and the European economic area? In fact, the correlation was so strong that it could be stated that for every 1% increase in vaccination rates in 2021, there was a 0.1% increase in mortality in 2022.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** I did notice that document, because it was drawn to my attention by my hon. Friend. May I suggest to him that he tries to engage the good offices of our right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), who is the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee? I am delighted to see him in his place this afternoon, because I know that this issue is close to his heart as well.

The Minister confirmed to me earlier that the Government's answer to both those questions that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam put to the Prime Minister is no. It is rather sad that that is so, and it is regrettable that the Prime Minister did not put that on the record himself.

This month, we have already discussed in this House the scandal surrounding the supply of contaminated blood and the false imprisonment of postmasters as a result of the Horizon system. In both cases, after long resistance, the Government were eventually forced into accepting compensation schemes. If they are interested in tackling the developing scandal over covid-19 vaccine damage victims, they can and must act now.

I fear, however, that the Government have no will so to do, because they are still in denial about the whole issue. Why do I use that expression? I do so because at a meeting on 21 April last year, I asked the then vaccines Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup), whether she accepted that some people had died as a direct result of having received the covid-19 vaccination. She declined to answer the question at the meeting and said that she would write to me. She did not do so, so I then had to put down a parliamentary written question—UIN 2325. She ducked that question.

I will therefore ask the same question again to the Minister today, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), bearing in mind that we now know that more than 50 coroners' verdicts have confirmed that people have died as a direct result of covid-19 vaccines, and that her Department has been making awards under the 1979 Act to families who have been bereaved on the basis that their loved ones died as a direct result. Will the Government therefore unequivocally say today that they do accept that some people have died as a direct result of having received a covid-19 vaccination?

Was it not bizarre that all the Prime Minister could say on Wednesday, when told about Jamie Scott spending four weeks in a coma and remaining seriously disabled as a result of a covid vaccine, was:

"I am very sorry to hear about the case"?

Then, in an extraordinary non sequitur, the Prime Minister added:

"In the extremely rare case of a potential injury from a vaccine covered by the scheme, a one-off payment can be awarded."—[*Official Report*, 22 March 2023; Vol. 730, c. 330.]

However, Jamie Scott's injury is not a potential injury, but a real and substantial one. Nor was it caused by any old vaccine; it was caused by a new experimental covid vaccine.

Sadly, Jamie Scott's case is not unique. I have received hundreds of distressing letters and emails from both victims and bereaved relatives, who are desperate for the Government and the NHS to listen. Several are from my own constituency. I will quote briefly from one letter, received on 18 March, from a 24-year-old, previously employed in a good job in financial services. He had a Pfizer vaccine booster in February 2022 and says:

"Within days of the dose, I started experiencing nasty symptoms that resembled those of an autoimmune disease. The symptoms include nausea, headaches, skin rashes and other immune issues. Despite numerous Doctors visits, blood tests, X-rays and medicinal prescriptions, Doctors have been unable to help ease symptoms at all. Symptoms have worsened with time and I have been unable to work over the past seven months or so. I have been unable to receive any disability benefits and have been left to use my entire life savings to fund my food and bills."

An expert rheumatologist has now confirmed the link between my constituent's symptoms and the Pfizer vaccine. My constituent asks me—and I, in turn, ask

the Minister—will the Government admit that there are cases where these vaccines have caused reactions in people? Will they promise to provide further support and research funding for how these conditions can be managed and, hopefully, resolved?

My constituent is but one of so many who have suffered, and continue to suffer, because they did the right thing, on the advice of the Government, and received their jabs. The *Express*, the first mainstream newspaper to start giving the issue some publicity, began its crusade for justice for jab victims with four pages in one of its editions last week. On 15 March, its leading article, entitled "Injection of faith needed", spoke for many when it said: "We must take care of the small number of people who suffered side effects as a result of their jabs. Innocent people who have suffered terribly must not be denied the damages they deserve. This is a matter of justice."

The current situation is that over 4,000 claims have been made under the 1979 Act. Over the past five months, new claims have been running at the rate of 250 per month. Some 2,800 claims remain outstanding, and only a surprisingly and disturbingly small number have so far been successful. I shall now try to shame the Government into action by contrasting their head-in-the-sand approach to vaccine damage victims with what is happening in Germany.

On 12 March, Professor Dr Karl Lauterbach, Germany's Federal Minister for Health, gave a disarmingly candid interview to the Germany TV news channel ZDF. The Minister is a scientist and physician of note, and had previously been professor of health economics and epidemiology at the University of Cologne and at Harvard. As the adviser to then Chancellor Angela Merkel at the beginning of the covid pandemic, he took a very hard line and publicly said on numerous occasions that the vaccines must be taken and that they were "without side effects". He has now admitted in that interview that what he said about them being "without side effects" was a gross exaggeration. That is disarmingly frank, is it not?

He conceded that one in 10,000 of those vaccinated against covid-19 in Germany had experienced severe adverse effects. He described these "unfortunate cases" as heartbreaking, confirming that some of the severe disablements will be permanent. He added, "It's really tragic". The Minister said that Germany does not yet have drugs for treatment and that care entitlements are defined very narrowly, but he recognised the need to get faster at recognising vaccine injuries as the understanding of adverse events increases. He promised significant extra resources and said that he was in discussions with German Treasury Ministers to address issues around post-vaccine syndrome.

Sadly, our own Government do not even recognise post-vaccine syndrome. I have asked them whether they would report on what has been happening in University Hospital Marburg in Germany, where much work is being done on the diagnosis and treatment of post-vaccination syndrome. I suggested that it might be useful for them to have some discussions with the hospital. In answer to a parliamentary written question on 16 November—UIN 88798—I was told that there are

"no current plans to do so."



[Sir Christopher Chope]

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to reconsider that position, because it is important that we should get into alignment with Germany, whose health system is much more successful than our own. Germany has moved from wanting to get everybody vaccinated, although that was all done “voluntarily”, to recognising now that it must do its best to look after those for whom the vaccine was bad news.

What has happened over the past two years in Germany is that more than 300,000 cases of vaccine side-effects have accumulated in the Ministry’s own system, and more and more people are lodging compensation claims against the state, which, based on the contracts that Germany signed with the EU manufacturers, is liable for any vaccine-related damage. Meanwhile, the subject of vaccine injuries has begun to be openly discussed in the German mainstream media. Let us hope that we will see a bit of that developing in our own country, because one of the frustrations of the victims of these vaccines is that there seems to be much reluctance in the mainstream media to engage on this issue.

Now we have a situation in which the German Federal Minister of Health is saying, “let’s see if we can get some help from the pharmaceutical companies to voluntarily help compensate those harmed by the vaccines.” He then goes on to say that that is because the profits have been “exorbitant”. Just a year ago, he had said that the pharmaceutical companies would not get rich on the vaccines, but it is one of the privileges of Ministers across the world to be able to eat their words when the facts change.

In my submission, the Government here need to completely change their approach and become much more realistic, accommodating and, dare one say it, compassionate towards those who did the right thing by the public interest and accepted the vaccines.

May I ask my hon. Friend a whole series of questions? It will not be possible for people to follow all of the questions I want to ask, because I do not have time to read out all of them. Are the Government aware of the 2017 case in the Court of Appeal where the Court said that, for VDPS purposes, loss of faculties had no real relationship to the kind of injuries set out in schedule 2 of the relevant statute relating to calculating the percentage of disablement? Schedule 2 calculates physical disability—for example, an amputation below the knee could be calculated at 60%. The Court decision was that that should not be some kind of straitjacket, but it seems that it is being used as a kind of straitjacket in the assessment of covid vaccine claims.

Will the Minister confirm that the Government are following the decision made by the Court of Appeal? Will she also reconsider the amount of the £120,000 payment? Its value has been eroded by inflation since 2007. Can she explain why there are still no plans to align the disablement threshold for the VDPS with that in the England infected blood support scheme, under which it is possible to get £100,000 without any evidence of disability? There does not seem to be any alignment between that scheme and the VDPS.

The Government said that within 56 days of receiving any prevention of future deaths report from a coroner, they would report back on it. The only such report made to the Government relating to this issue was

delivered on 13 October. Will my hon. Friend explain why there has still not been a response? In the light of what is happening in Germany, will she agree to set up specialist clinics to look at post-vaccine situations? How many people are now working on vaccine claims, and does she see any prospect of the enormous backlog being reduced quickly?

There are lots of questions there, but they are only a small sample of those that I have. I look forward to members of the APPG raising further questions with the Minister when she comes to our meeting.

2.56 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) for securing this important debate. I met him earlier to listen to many of his concerns on the issue. We know that, unfortunately, there have been some rare instances in which individuals have suffered possible harm following a covid-19 vaccination. Of course, my sympathy goes out to them and their families. The Government are keen to help those who feel that they have been affected by this issue; that is why I have agreed to meet the all-party parliamentary group and Members from across the House who have concerns on the issue.

The vaccine damage payment is a one-off, tax-free payment to individuals who have been found, on the balance of probabilities, to have been harmed by any vaccine, including covid vaccines. It was established over 40 years ago, and provides support to those who have experienced severe disablement that could have been, on the balance of probabilities, caused by a vaccine against one of the conditions listed in the legislation. The NHS Business Services Authority took over the scheme in November 2021 to try to improve the process, and speed up the response to and assessment of applicants. Assessments are done on a case-by-case basis by experienced, independent medical assessors, who have undertaken specialised training in vaccine damage and disability assessment. That is partly why the process can take so long. I will touch on the other reasons.

My hon. Friend raised concern about the payment of £120,000. I have listened to his point; indeed, it was raised at Prime Minister’s questions this week. It is important to note that the amount is a one-off, lump-sum payment. It is not designed to cover lifetime costs for those impacted. It is in addition to other support packages, such as statutory sick pay, universal credit, employment and support allowance, attendance allowance and personal independence payments. Also, it has increased since the scheme was put in place; it was just £10,000 in 1979. The amount has been raised several times, the current level having been set in 2007. The amount will be kept under review. I will take away the points that my hon. Friend made in this debate and in our meeting beforehand. As he is aware, a successful claim under the scheme does not preclude individuals from bringing a claim for damages through the courts. There are a number of claims under way, and I cannot comment on those specifically.

My hon. Friend also touched on the 60% disability threshold, which was lowered from the initial 80% threshold in 2002, to remain aligned with the definition of severe disablement set out by the industrial injuries

disablement benefit, so that there is consistency across the board. Only 67 of more than 4,000 rejected claims were rejected as not being eligible for the scheme, on the basis of not meeting the 60% disability threshold. Claims are usually rejected for other reasons, so the threshold is not affecting a significant number of claims. We do not see the threshold as a big barrier to those who want to make a claim but, of course, we will keep it under review as the scheme progresses.

The BSA took over the scheme in November 2021, because we found that claims were taking a while. A key issue was getting access to patient records. NHS BSA has done a huge amount of work in that short space of time. On average, it is now taking around six months to process a claim, whereas it was previously taking significantly longer. The BSA has put in place digital modernisation processes that allow for a quicker, easier and faster application process. It has also put in place a strategic research agreement so that patients who make a claim can give consent on application, which enables the team to request the patient's records from hospitals, GPs and other organisations to be able to determine the claim.

While the new process has bedded in, NHS BSA has introduced quality standards. Although everyone has the right of appeal if their claim is rejected, we want to get it right first time. Making sure those quality assurance processes are in place means that we determine eligible claims first time. The last thing we want is for people to have to appeal because the initial assessment was not correct.

We have also increased staff numbers. The scheme had four members of staff when it sat with the Department for Work and Pensions but, because of the sheer number of claims, more than 80 people are now taking part in the process to assess claims quicker.

I hope I have been able to reassure my hon. Friend, but I will touch on some of the issues around vaccine safety in my remaining couple of minutes. I recognise that he has concerns about the vaccine, and that is why we have instigated further research. There is £110 million going into the National Institute for Health and Care Research to fund covid vaccine research, and that includes vaccine safety and the robust monitoring of adverse events. We have also allocated £1.6 million to researchers at the University of Liverpool, to understand the rare condition of blood clotting with low platelets following vaccination.

**Andrew Bridgen:** Will the Minister answer the question I asked in the Chamber last week? Why has the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency decided to stop publishing updates to the yellow card scheme relating to covid-19 injuries?

**Maria Caulfield:** I am happy to write to the MHRA to get a response for the hon. Gentleman on that point, but I hope he will be reassured that the Government are investing in research on vaccine safety both at the University of Liverpool and at the National Institute for Health and Care Research, because we want to reassure people about the safety of vaccines.

On the VDPS, I want to reassure those making claims that the Government want to support them through the process. I have not touched on it much in

my response, but I am keen to reassure those who feel they have suffered and who are struggling to get healthcare for their symptoms that we are looking at this.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** As I understand it, the Minister's time will be up at eight minutes past 3, so can she now explain whether the Government will accept that post-vaccine syndrome is clinically recognised? Will she divert resources specifically to that issue?

**Maria Caulfield:** I am not going to commit to that specific point on the Floor of the House, but I will commit to this: if people who feel that they have symptoms from the vaccine—that includes a range of symptoms—are struggling to get the healthcare they need, when I come to the APPG I will want to look at the sort of symptoms they are experiencing and help them to get the care and support that they are struggling to get at the moment. It is the same with long covid: there is such a range of symptoms. What we have found in setting up specific long covid clinics is that they have not always been able to cover the wide range of symptoms that people have had. I am very happy to discuss that further with my hon. Friend at the APPG.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** My hon. Friend refers to long covid clinics, but people who are suffering from the consequences of vaccine damage feel that they are being treated differentially and in an inferior way. If we have clinics for long covid, why do we not have clinics for post-vaccine syndrome?

**Maria Caulfield:** I thank my hon. Friend. The point I was trying to make is that we have set up long covid clinics, but they have not always addressed the needs of those who are suffering long covid, because they have such a wide variety of symptoms. What I can say to those who feel that they have experienced side effects from the vaccine is that I am very happy to meet them, hear about those symptoms and see what more we can do to support them in getting the care and services that they find they are struggling to access at the moment. I just want to reassure my hon. Friend that I have taken his points seriously—we do not have our head in the sand. I am very happy to meet the all-party parliamentary group and those who are concerned about their experience.

We will continue to prioritise improving the operations of the VDPS: six months is the average time taken, but ideally we want to make it quicker and more efficient for those who put in a claim. We are working alongside the BSA team, who are doing an amazing job to turn around so many claims as quickly as possible within the limits of getting notes and access to information from a variety of sources. That is often challenging, particularly when there are different computer systems and some paper notes are still in operation across healthcare settings. They have a very tough job, but they are trying to do it as speedily as possible by modernising and scaling up operations to improve the experience for those who are claiming, as well as helping those who want to make a claim.

*Question put and agreed to.*

3.7 pm

*House adjourned.*





# Written Statements

Friday 24 March 2023

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

### Energy Efficiency of Buildings: Funding

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Andrew Bowie):** My noble friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Lord Callanan) made the following statement on 22 March:

Today the Government are announcing £1.8 billion of funding to cut the emissions and boost the energy efficiency of homes and public buildings across England.

The investment will further reduce energy bills for householders and businesses, as part of the Prime Minister's pledge to halve inflation and ease the cost of living. Altogether, 115,000 homes will benefit from energy efficiency and low carbon heating upgrades, along with 144 public sector organisations responsible for hospitals, schools, leisure centres, museums, universities and other buildings.

It is being delivered through the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG), Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) and Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS).

In 2019, the UK became the first major economy in the world to legally commit to end our contribution to global warming by 2050. This is a huge challenge. But it is also an unprecedented opportunity.

The UK has already shown that environmental action can go hand-in-hand with economic success, having grown our economy by more than three-quarters while cutting emissions by over 40% since 1990.

The effort will be shared across many sectors, and decarbonising the energy used in buildings, and increasing energy efficiency will be a vital component.

The UK is home to around 30 million buildings which are responsible for 31% of UK emissions. We have some of the oldest housing stock in Europe, over 80% of buildings still rely on high carbon fossil fuels for heating and have low levels of thermal efficiency.

To reach our net zero target by 2050 we need to decarbonise the way we heat and cool our homes and workplaces, and to ensure that in the near term we meet our fuel poverty targets and emissions reduction targets.

This £1.8 billion investment will be critical in supporting our commitment made in 2022 to reduce the UK's final energy consumption from buildings and industry by 15% by 2030 against 2021 levels.

#### *The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and Home Upgrade Grant*

Through the SHDF Wave 2.1 and HUG 2 the Government are awarding a significant injection of funding worth £1.4 billion to local authorities and providers of social housing.

An additional £1.1 billion in match funding for social housing is being provided by local authorities and providers of social housing, bringing the total investment to £2.5 billion to upgrade social and private homes in England.

The grant funding will be invested from April 2023 to March 2025, although delivery on the SHDF can continue with the use of match funding until September 2025.

The money will go towards improvements to social households and private, low income, off-gas grid households with an EPC rating of D or below and could save homes occupants between £220 and £400 a year on energy bills.

Energy cutting and cost saving measures provided through the schemes include external wall insulation, cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, new windows and doors and draft proofing measures, as well as heat pumps and solar panel installation.

These schemes will also support around 20,000 jobs in the construction and home retrofit sectors, helping to deliver on our promise to grow the economy and create better paid jobs, whilst supporting families across the country.

The funding awarded through these schemes continues the investment through "Help to Heat" Schemes which has already seen:

Over £240 million already awarded to the SHDF Demonstrator and SHFD Wave 1 projects, indicating the Governments continued support to the £3.8 billion manifesto commitment between now and 2030 to deliver energy efficiency improvements in social housing.

Over 37,000 households have seen energy efficiency upgrades as part of the first two phases of the local authority delivery scheme, with a further 20,000-28,000 homes expected as part of the sustainable warmth competition.

In addition to the SHDF and HUG, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero will also use ECO4 and ECO+ to accelerate our efforts to improve homes to meet fuel poverty targets and the Government have committed to a four-year, £4 billion extension and expansion of ECO with ECO4. We have announced a further £1 billion extension of the scheme through ECO+ to start in Spring 2023.

#### *Public sector decarbonisation scheme*

Over £409 million of grant funding has also been awarded through the Government's public sector decarbonisation scheme. This Phase 3b of the scheme will support 144 public sector organisations across 171 projects to undertake low carbon heating and energy efficiency measures across hundreds of buildings.

These projects will not only help reduce the carbon emissions of these public buildings but save them money on their energy bills and ultimately, save the taxpayer hundreds of millions of pounds in the long-term.

Hospitals, schools, leisure centres, universities and other vital public service buildings across England are set to benefit from the scheme.

£2 billion has now been awarded across over 900 projects to decarbonise the public sector across all phases of the scheme to date, and even more funding through Phase 3b is to come as applications are assessed and approved.

Today's £409 million is part of the wider £2.5 billion package that this Government have committed to spending on upgrading public sector buildings between 2020 and 2025, supporting this Government's commitment to reducing carbon emissions from public sector buildings by 75% by 2037.

Funding through the schemes will be allocated across England based on the following allocations:

Region	PSDS	HUG	SHDF
East Midlands	£18,112,366	£3,291,300**	£74,715,671
East of England	£14,677,719	£23,577,300	£83,628,477
London	£44,280,137	£12,006,000	£131,724,938
North East	£7,636,389	£28,576,000	£29,355,551
North West	£44,555,899	£83,885,000	£105,371,309
South East	£108,324,556	£161,237,898	£128,906,218
South West	£33,450,968	£77,514,032	£80,236,981

Region	PSDS	HUG	SHDF
West Midlands	£88,371,731	£152,745,310	£93,593,216
Yorkshire and the Humber	£21,737,561	£41,144,920	£50,053,929
Across regions	£26,688,898	-	-
Scotland*	£1,221,871	-	-

\* The Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme was open to applications from public sector bodies in England and areas of reserved public services across the UK.

\*\* Further funding is available to the region via the Midlands Net Zero Hub which represents £138 million of grant funding across the Midlands

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero has also partnered with the energy systems catapult to launch a freely accessible suite of tools, templates, and guidance to support the public sector in further decarbonising their sites.

This support will help public sector bodies through the entire decarbonisation lifecycle, from the first stages of developing a strategy, through funding, installation, and completion, to help make achieving net zero sites and energy savings simpler.

#### *Energy efficiency taskforce*

The Government have launched an energy efficiency taskforce to support a step change in the reduction of energy demand through accelerated delivery of energy efficiency across the economy. It will help to support the Government's ambition to reduce total UK energy demand by 15% from 2021 levels by 2030 across domestic and commercial buildings and industrial processes.

#### *Future funding*

£6 billion of new Government funding will be made available from 2025 to 2028, in addition to the £6.6 billion allocated in this Parliament. This provides long-term funding certainty, supporting the growth of supply chains, and ensuring we can scale up our delivery over time.

[HCWS669]

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### Trade and Co-operation Agreement Partnership Council

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly):** The Trade and Co-operation Agreement Partnership Council met today, 24 March 2023, in London, with delegates attending in person and by video conference.

The meeting was co-chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and European Commission vice-President Maroš Šefčovič. Representatives from the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive attended, as did representatives from the Crown dependencies of the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey. 27 EU member state representatives also attended. A joint statement was agreed and published on gov.uk.

The Partnership Council discussed implementation of the TCA and cooperation in a range of areas including energy, regulation, security and Union Programmes.

The Partnership Council supervises the operation of the TCA, providing strategic direction to the work of the Trade Partnership Committee and 18 specialised committees.

The UK restated its commitment to co-operating with the EU through the Trade and Co-operation Agreement Partnership Council.

[HCWS670]

### Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly):** The Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee met today, 24 March 2023, in London with delegates attending in person and by video conference. The meeting was co-chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and European Commission vice-president Maroš Šefčovič. A joint statement was agreed and published on gov.uk.

The Committee welcomed the agreement of the Windsor framework and adopted the new arrangements set out within the framework. The adoption of this agreement restores the free flow of trade from Great Britain to Northern Ireland through a new green lane; it gives the elected representatives of Northern Ireland a veto over new laws that apply there; and it protects Northern Ireland's place in our Union through fixing practical problems including on pets, parcels and medicines and ensuring that UK decisions on tax and spend benefit people and businesses in Northern Ireland as they do in Great Britain.

The Committee addressed other important issues including the rights of UK nationals in the EU and EU citizens in the UK. Both sides agreed on the importance of continuing to support these citizens and welcomed the efforts made over the past year to do so, including additional funding provided by both sides to external organisations.

The Committee also received an update on the work of the withdrawal agreement specialised committees since the last meeting on 21 February 2022 and adopted the withdrawal agreement annual report for the year 2021 pursuant to article 164(6) of the withdrawal agreement.

The Committee adopted one decision laying down arrangements relating to the Windsor framework.

The Committee also adopted two recommendations:

- on market surveillance and enforcement,
- on article 13(3a) of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland

Both the UK and EU made five joint declarations relating to the Windsor Framework:

- Joint declaration No 1/2023
- Joint declaration on the application of Article 10(1) of the Windsor framework
- Joint declaration on Article 13(3a) of the Windsor framework
- Joint declaration No 2/2023
- Joint declaration on the VAT regime for goods not being at risk for the Union's internal market and on the VAT arrangements for cross border refunds.

The UK made five unilateral declarations and the EU made unilateral declarations noting these:

Unilateral declaration by the United Kingdom on involvement of the institutions of the 1998 agreement (annex I to the decision No 1/2023 laying down arrangements relating to the Windsor framework)

Unilateral declaration by the United Kingdom on market surveillance and enforcement, noted by the unilateral declaration by the Union

Unilateral declaration by the United Kingdom on export procedures for goods moving from Northern Ireland to other parts of the United Kingdom, noted by the unilateral declaration by the Union

Unilateral declaration by the United Kingdom on the democratic consent mechanism in article 18 of the Windsor framework, noted by the unilateral declaration by the Union.

Unilateral declaration by the United Kingdom on strengthening enforcement action for goods moved in parcels from another part of the United Kingdom to Northern Ireland, noted by the unilateral declaration by the Union.

[HCWS671]

## LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

### Building Safety: Responsible Actors Scheme and Developer Remediation Contract

**The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove):** On 14 March, I announced that 39 developers had signed the developer remediation contract. By signing the contract, they made binding commitments to fix or pay to fix life-critical fire safety defects in all buildings in England over 11 metres that they had a role in developing or refurbishing over the past 30 years. This amounts to an irreversible commitment to making safe at least 1,100 buildings at a cost of over £2 billion.

#### *Update on responsible actors scheme*

Last week, I also told the House that there will be consequences for companies that do not sign the contract. I warned that they will be prohibited from commencing developments in England or gaining building control sign-off on their developments, unless they sign and adhere to the contract. I said that we would lay regulations this spring to establish a responsible actors scheme. The regulations will recognise the positive action of responsible developers and will make sure that eligible developers who do not sign and comply with the contract will be unable to be members of the scheme, and therefore be subject to prohibitions. I will lay regulations that will, with Parliament's consent, bring the scheme into operation before the summer recess.

Today, I am publishing the key features of the responsible actors scheme on gov.uk and placing a copy of the information in the libraries of both Houses. The key features document sets out how the scheme will work, the likely eligibility criteria and membership conditions

for the first phase of the scheme, how developers will apply to join the scheme and the prohibitions that will be imposed on eligible developers that fail to sign the contract and comply with its terms.

Developers who want to be part of the scheme will need to sign the developer remediation contract and comply with its terms. In its first phase, the scheme will focus on larger residential property developers and developers who developed multiple tall residential buildings known to have life-critical fire safety defects. Over time, I intend to expand the scheme to cover even more of those who developed unsafe 11 metre-plus residential buildings and should pay to fix them.

Eligible developers will be invited to join the scheme by a statutory deadline or provide evidence that they do not in fact meet the eligibility criteria. Any eligible developer who chooses not to join the scheme, or who is expelled from the scheme as a result of a material or persistent breach of its conditions, will be added to a list of developers who will not be permitted to carry out major development or secure building control sign-offs.

The message to those developers who have yet to sign the contract, their shareholders and investors could not be clearer. The responsible actors scheme is coming. Only developers who behave responsibly will be trusted to build the homes of the future. Any eligible developers who fail to do the right thing will need to find a new line of work.

#### *Update on signatories to the developer remediation contract*

At the time of my statement of 14 March, 11 developers had yet to sign. I named those companies and called on their directors to reflect on their future and do the right thing. Today, I can confirm that 4 of those 11 companies have since signed the contract: Ballymore, Lendlease, London Square and Telford Homes. The 7 developers who have yet to sign the contract are: Abbey Developments, Avant, Dandara, Emerson Group (Jones Homes), Galliard Homes, Inland Homes and Rydon Homes. Some of those companies have told us that they remain committed to protecting leaseholders and taxpayers from having to pay, and claim that they will sign the contract in coming days.

As I made plain last week, I will write to local authorities and building inspectors to explain the consequences for those companies that remain non-signatories at the point that the regulations creating the responsible actors scheme come into force. I will suggest action that local authorities may want to take to be prepared for implementation of the scheme, to ensure that any companies that do not wish to act responsibly do not profit from that behaviour—and that the public is protected as a result.

Given possible market sensitivities, I notified the London stock exchange about the key features document.

[HCWS668]





# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Friday 24 March 2023

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO .....</b>	<b>25WS</b>	<b>LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND</b>	
Energy Efficiency of Buildings: Funding.....	25WS	<b>COMMUNITIES .....</b>	<b>29WS</b>
<b>FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND</b>		Building Safety: Responsible Actors Scheme and	
<b>DEVELOPMENT OFFICE.....</b>	<b>27WS</b>	Developer Remediation Contract.....	<b>29WS</b>
Trade and Co-operation Agreement Partnership			
Council .....	27WS		
Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee .....	28WS		

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than  
Friday 31 March 2023**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE  
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.



---

## CONTENTS

**Friday 24 March 2023**

**Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Bill [Col. 541]**

*As amended, considered; read the Third time and passed*

**Ballot Secrecy Bill [Lords] [Col. 565]**

*Read the Third time and passed, without amendment*

**Workers (Predicable Terms and Conditions) Bill [Col. 577]**

*Read the Third time and passed*

**Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees Bill [Col. 587]**

*Read the Third time and passed*

**Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) (No. 2) Bill [Col. 606]**

*Read the Third time and passed*

**Firearms Bill [Col. 612]**

*Read the Third time and passed*

**Minimum Energy Performance of Buildings Bill [Col. 620]**

*Motion for Second Reading—(Sarah Olney)—proceedings interrupted*

**Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979 [Col. 628]**

*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Written Statements [Col. 25WS]**

---