

Thursday
24 October 2024

Volume 755
No. 34



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Thursday 24 October 2024

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

Companies in Distress

1. **Jodie Gosling** (Nuneaton) (Lab): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to increase the Government's ability to respond to companies in distress. [900832]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Georgia Gould): The Government take very seriously our role to ensure the resilience of Government suppliers. The Cabinet Office takes an active role in monitoring the Government's strategic suppliers and putting in place contingency plans where there is risk of distress. More broadly, the Cabinet Office works alongside other Departments, from the Department for Business and Trade and the Insolvency Service to the Treasury. We are supported by UK Government Investments, which is the Government's centre of excellence in corporate finance, with experience of corporate finance, restructuring and insolvency in the private sector. Any taxpayer support must be used wisely, balancing the need to ensure value for money and support jobs and the economy.

Jodie Gosling: Following the collapse of five companies of the SK:N group, a large employer in Nuneaton, the health services that the companies offered have been impacted. Will the Minister please explain what steps the Government are taking to ensure that Departments have contingency plans to sustain the work of those companies to private healthcare patients?

Georgia Gould: I hope that my hon. Friend will appreciate that I cannot comment on the specifics of the case that she mentioned, but when any business collapses it causes huge distress to the customers and people who work there, including those in her constituency. In general, independent providers of NHS services must hold an NHS provider licence unless exempt. Licensed providers of services that are hard to replace are subject to financial and risk-based quality governance oversight to safeguard the continuity of services for patients. If my hon. Friend wishes to write to me with further details, I will ensure that the relevant Minister gets back to her.

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): Almost 48,000 companies in the south-west are now classed as in significant economic distress, according to the latest Begbies Traynor's "Red Flag Alert" report. That is visible in market towns in Glastonbury and Somerton such as Wincanton and Street, which are losing high street stores. What steps is the Minister taking with her Cabinet colleagues to support businesses in the south-west?

Georgia Gould: This Government are determined to support growth in this country, as one of their driving missions. Work is going on across Government to support economic growth and investment and to ensure that high streets thrive again.

Public Procurement

2. **Dr Scott Arthur** (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): What steps he is taking to reform public procurement. [900834]

14. **Jo Platt** (Leigh and Atherton) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to reform public procurement. [900851]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Georgia Gould): We will end the waste, inefficiency and cronyism that set in under the previous Government. Under this Government, procurement will deliver value for money, better public services and our national missions. As a first step, we are bringing forward a new national procurement policy statement under the Procurement Act 2023, which will deliver a mission-led procurement regime. It will drive value for money, economic growth and social value. We have also taken steps to cut down on wasteful consultancy spending, and have worked to set up a new covid counter-fraud commissioner. As set out in our plan to make work pay, we will also take further reforms set out in our manifesto.

Dr Arthur: I thank the Minister for mentioning cronyism in her answer. The biggest procurement scandal I have seen in my lifetime was under the last Conservative Government, when Ministers gave dodgy contracts to their mates and donors. They took our country's reputation for honesty and integrity and trashed it. Residents in my constituency are not only angry but disgusted and ashamed. Will the Minister update the House on the steps the Government are taking to ensure that there will never be a repeat of this episode?

Georgia Gould rose—

Dr Arthur: That was a dramatic pause—apologies. Where the public has been defrauded, will we get our money back for public services?

Georgia Gould: My hon. Friend can see just how keen I am to act on this issue. He is right that taxpayers are paying the price for the Conservative Government allowing waste and fraud to spiral out of control. The Chancellor of the Exchequer recently took decisive action by appointing a new covid counter-fraud commissioner to help us recover public money and ensure that this never happens again.¹ I am working closely with the Public Sector Fraud Authority to push every avenue to detect fraud, from advanced artificial intelligence and analytics through to strengthening our enforcement powers.

1. [Official Report, 11 November 2024; Vol. 756, c. 5WC.] (Correction)

Jo Platt: Does the Minister agree that, when done right, public procurement can deliver positive change in our communities, especially given the poor state in which the previous Government left the public finances? What steps will she take to ensure that social value is properly embedded in our procurement frameworks, while delivering value for taxpayers and contributing to growth in our local economies?

Georgia Gould: I agree that procurement can be a powerful tool for delivering change in our society. Public sector procurement can help to drive our ambitions around growth, opening up opportunities for communities across the UK. The Government are currently consulting on a new national procurement policy statement that will set out our expectations around mission delivery and social value.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her very helpful answers. What steps have been taken to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises in Northern Ireland, and further afield in the United Kingdom, have readily available access to the public procurement system, to ensure that they can secure the best goods for their business and thereby help our economy in Northern Ireland to grow?

Georgia Gould: Supporting SMEs through procurement is a huge priority for the Government. It is one of the things that we are consulting on as part of the new national procurement policy statement that I talked about. We are looking across our work in government to ensure that SMEs are part of the procurement process. This is a subject on which we will come back to the House.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary: Pay Awards

3. **Mike Amesbury** (Runcorn and Helsby) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence on pay awards for employees of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. [900835]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Pat McFadden): The Royal Fleet Auxiliary staff do excellent work on behalf of the Royal Navy and for our national security, and I pay tribute to them for that work. I have been in contact with the Secretary of State for Defence on this issue. I am hopeful that a resolution can be found on the pay matters currently under discussion between Nautilus, the RMT and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, and that the current dispute can be resolved.

Mike Amesbury: I welcome the efforts of the Cabinet Office and other Government Departments—unlike the previous Government, who sat on their hands—to resolve this dispute in the not-too-distant future. I urge Ministers to double their efforts with colleagues in the Ministry of Defence and the Treasury.

Pat McFadden: Government officials are in negotiations with the trade unions. We want to see an end to the dispute that results in a fair pay offer for the workers involved and delivers value for money for the taxpayer. That is what we will try to achieve.

Trade Barriers with the EU

4. **Clive Jones** (Wokingham) (LD): What steps his Department is taking to help reduce trade barriers with the EU. [900836]

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): The Prime Minister and President von der Leyen have agreed to strengthen the relationship between the UK and the EU. Vice-President Šefčovič, whom I met in Strasbourg on Tuesday, and I will be getting the reset moving this autumn. As part of this, the Government will seek to negotiate a sanitary and phytosanitary agreement and remove other barriers to trade.

Clive Jones: The British Poultry Council has recorded a 50% drop in poultry-linked exports since 2020. Between 2019 and 2022, UK agrifood exports to the EU contracted by 5% and have struggled to recover to 2019 levels. Rural businesses are being held back from exporting to the EU due to costly border charges and administrative hurdles. Has the Minister's Department assessed the impact on food prices if a veterinary and plant agreement with the EU is not reached before Christmas?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The hon. Gentleman's question sets out exactly why negotiating an SPS agreement is so important. The Government have set out that there will be a UK-EU summit in the first half of next year, and it has been made clear to me, and indeed to Vice-President Šefčovič, that there should be progress by then.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): I offer the congratulations of Liberal Democrat Members to our hon. Friend the Member for Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe (David Chadwick) on the safe arrival of his baby son yesterday. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] I offer our very best wishes to David, Gemma and all the family.

I am sure the Government agree that support to provide opportunities for young people should be central to the policy of any Government. We are glad to see the new Government working to build closer economic and cultural ties with Europe. We want to forge a new partnership with our European neighbours, built on co-operation, not confrontation, and move to a new comprehensive agreement. We must rebuild confidence by agreeing partnerships or associations, helping to restore prosperity and opportunities for British people. Will the Minister consider the extension of the youth mobility scheme and acknowledge the breadth of ways in which it could strengthen our cultural, educational and economic links with Europe?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: First, I add our congratulations to the hon. Member for Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe (David Chadwick) on the safe arrival of his new baby.

On the specific point that the hon. Lady makes, we will not give a running commentary on the negotiations. We will obviously consider EU proposals on a range of issues, but we are clear that we will not return to freedom of movement.

Mr Speaker: I remind the Front Benchers to look towards the Chair now and again, because sometimes I cannot hear what is being said, so that would help me, since Members are speaking through me in the third person. I am trying to get the House to work how it should.

Government's Five Missions

5. **Alan Gemmell** (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to implement the Government's five missions. [900837]

9. **Mr Luke Charters** (York Outer) (Lab): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to implement the Government's five missions. [900845]

15. **Emily Darlington** (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to implement the Government's five missions. [900852]

The Minister without Portfolio (Ellie Reeves): We were elected on a manifesto with five missions to rebuild Britain and turn the page on 14 years of decline under the Conservative party. Those five missions offer real and tangible benefits to people living in every part of our country: higher living standards, cleaner energy, safer streets, longer and healthier lives, and a renewed confidence that the future will be better for our children. I am delighted to report to the House that we have already begun the change that we set out in our national missions, making our economy stable, launching a new border security command, setting up Great British Energy and setting out ambitious plans for housing.

Alan Gemmell: The excellent Ayrshire chamber of commerce is helping Ayrshire businesses to grow. After 17 years of the Scottish National party failing business in Scotland, businesses in Ayrshire need that support, as well as this Government's five missions. Does the Minister agree that, to deliver the change that our country needs, we need a new way of doing politics, working in partnership with communities, business, civil society and trade unions?

Ellie Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for that question and commend the work of the Ayrshire chamber of commerce and businesses in his constituency. The Prime Minister has set a clear direction for missions to mobilise action beyond Government, including across business, civil society and local government. Missions require wider sectoral and societal engagement and action across the UK; they are not simply tasks for one agency or sector. I am pleased by the progress that we are making in this area, and was delighted last week to see the launch of the civil society covenant, which marked a new beginning in the Government's relationship with, and made clear the pivotal role of, civil society in delivering our missions.

Mr Charters: Brew York and Piglets Adventure Farm are just two examples of highly innovative businesses in my constituency. Does my hon. Friend agree that, from lager to lambing, businesses will play a critical role in delivering the five missions, so business engagement is key?

Ellie Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the work that Brew York and Piglets Adventure Farm do in his constituency. I absolutely agree that engagement and working with business will be key to delivering on all five of our missions.

Emily Darlington: I congratulate the Government on trying to use the missions to stop the siloed working between Departments in order to achieve the change that the country needs. On the housing mission, it is important that we link in the Treasury and the Departments for Health and Social Care, for Transport, for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and for Energy Security and Net Zero, to ensure that we build the 1.5 million homes that we need. In Milton Keynes, we have seen how house building can create opportunities, but public support is lost when the necessary vital public services and infrastructure do not come alongside new houses. How is the Cabinet Office bringing together all those Departments so that we can achieve our housing mission?

Ellie Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the importance of housing, which is central to what we are doing in government. Each of our five national missions is ambitious and will require input and action from a number of Government Departments. That is precisely why we are running them as missions, and not in the traditional departmental silos. As would be expected, the Cabinet Office is key to supporting that; the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who is deputy chair on all mission boards, and myself are playing active roles in facilitating that cross-Government working, supported by a specialist mission delivery unit in the Cabinet office.

Strengthening National Resilience

6. **Adam Jogee** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): What recent progress his Department has made on strengthening national resilience. [900842]

19. **Dr Allison Gardner** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): What recent progress his Department has made on strengthening national resilience. [900856]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Ms Abena Oppong-Asare): Our first duty as a Government is to keep people safe. It is clear that we need to act on recent public inquiries that have called for reform, such as those into the Grenfell Tower tragedy and the covid-19 pandemic. That is why the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is leading a review into national resilience against the range of risks the UK faces.

Adam Jogee: In the last year alone, we have seen a mini-tornado in Nottingham, flash floods in Madeley and rain like no other across Newcastle-under-Lyme. We see the devastating effects of climate change every day. What is the Minister doing to improve resilience and preparation across central Government, local authorities, local communities and emergency services, to ensure that Newcastle-under-Lyme and the rest of our country are prepared for any and every extreme weather event?

Ms Oppong-Asare: My hon. Friend is right to raise that question. As the Environment Secretary has said, it is a matter of some regret that the previous Administration

left our country's flood defences in the worst condition ever recorded, and it is communities such as my hon. Friend's that have unfortunately had to pay the price. I can assure him that the resilience review will strengthen our approach to resilience across the whole range of risks that we face, including those in his constituency. We have already taken steps to improve resilience across government.

Dr Gardner: If we are to ensure that the UK is resilient to the potential threats that face our country, it is vital that people who work to bring communities together and keep us safe are given the training, knowledge and skills that they need to play their part. My constituency of Stoke-on-Trent South knows the importance of that more than most, with people working tirelessly to tackle and calm the racial tension at the centre of the violent disorder we saw over the summer. Organisations such as the Emergency Planning College do fantastic work to deliver crisis management and resilience training. Can the Minister tell the House what steps she is taking to support their work in that area?

Ms Oppong-Asare: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and in September I was delighted to visit the Emergency Planning College, which has served as the UK Government's centre for resilience expertise since its founding 80 years ago. I am pleased to report to the House that the UK Resilience Academy is on track to be established next April. It will build on the training currently offered by the Cabinet Office's Emergency Planning College, providing a wide range of training for organisations, businesses and individuals. Of course, as part of the resilience review we will further consider whether policy is working in respect of training and skills, and where it needs to be improved.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister, John Glen.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): I turn to another area of national resilience. National security experts have been warning about the Chinese Communist party's use of genomics companies to harvest DNA data globally and dominate the genomics industry supply chain. Given the increasing importance of genomics for public healthcare, and the potential dual-use application of the technology, will the Minister confirm whether her Department is conducting a risk assessment on the data privacy, national security and ethical risks posed by genomic companies linked to systemic competitors?

Ms Oppong-Asare: The right hon. Member is right to raise that question. We will ban China's economic engagement, and make sure we strengthen our national security.¹

Infected Blood Compensation Scheme

7. **Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab):** What recent progress he has made on establishing the infected blood compensation scheme. [900843]

13. **Adam Thompson (Erewash) (Lab):** What recent progress he has made on establishing the infected blood compensation scheme. [900850]

17. **Patrick Hurley (Southport) (Lab):** What recent progress he has made on establishing the infected blood compensation scheme. [900854]

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): Last week, the Infected Blood Compensation Authority issued a small number of invitations to begin testing a new claims service. Furthermore, I can announce today that applications for interim payments to the estates of people whose death has not yet been recognised have now opened. This is an important step in getting money into the hands of victims of the infected blood scandal.

Sarah Owen: My constituent Sharon Moore has been a fierce campaigner for victims of the infected blood scandal and their family members. After decades of Government negligence, Sir Brian Langstaff was clear that the community of infected and affected people should be included to enact his inquiry recommendations. However, the previous Government engaged in little to no communication with patients or organisations such as the Haemophilia Society and the Terrence Higgins Trust. I am delighted that those recommendations are being enacted today, but could the Minister please tell us how he will be working with the Department of Health and Social Care and his colleagues in that Department to make sure that people get the compensation they deserve?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's constituent Sharon Moore for all her campaigning. As I have said to the House, I have now given the instruction for interim payments to the estates of the deceased infected to open today, and I expect the Infected Blood Compensation Authority to make its first payments before the end of the year. Subject to the House's processes, I would hope that regulations for those who are affected—the second set of regulations—will be completed by the end of March next year, and I expect that payments to the affected to begin next year as well.

Adam Thompson: I am very pleased to hear that the Minister has opened applications for interim payments. Will he elaborate on how those payments may be accessed, so that my constituents in Erewash can get their hands on them as fast as possible?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I invite all right hon. and hon. Members to go on the gov.uk website, which gives the details for the Infected Blood Compensation Authority. I urge people with an interest to register with the authority, which is already sending out newsletters. However, right hon. and hon. Members are also very welcome to write to me at the Cabinet Office about specific cases. I will of course look into those cases and ensure there is a response.

Patrick Hurley: I welcome the urgency with which this Government have moved this important issue forward, especially now that we know there is a timescale for applications being opened. Will the Minister update the House on when victims can expect to receive their final compensation payments?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: As I have indicated to the House, I expect the Infected Blood Compensation Authority to make its first payments before the end of the year, and to start payments to the affected next year. The Government are moving as quickly as they can to ensure that people receive the compensation that, frankly, is long overdue.

1. [Official Report, 28 October 2024; Vol. 755, c. 8WC.] (Correction)

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): I warmly welcome the right hon. Gentleman's announcement on the £100,000 interim payments to the estates of the deceased infected, thereby maintaining the momentum that was established earlier this year, and I thank him for his thorough statement to the House yesterday introducing the statutory instrument. Will he confirm that it is his intention to ramp up rapidly from the payouts to the test case cohort of 20 infected? Can he give the House as much detail as he can about when others in the infected cohort should expect to receive their payouts?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for the constructive tone he has taken throughout the debates under this Government. That continues the work we did when I was the shadow Minister, when we worked together to try to deliver these payments as quickly as possible.

The whole purpose of having the test cohort is to enable a range of different cases to be considered by the Infected Blood Compensation Authority, to give us the best possible opportunity to ramp up as quickly as possible. That is why I expect the first payments to be made before the end of this year. I then expect payments to the affected to begin next year, and I will ensure that regulations are placed before this House to make sure those deadlines are reached.

Ministerial Standards

8. **Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD):** What steps he is taking to ensure high ministerial standards in government. [900844]

The Minister without Portfolio (Ellie Reeves): The behaviour of Conservative Ministers in their 14 years in power—partying in Downing Street while people in the whole country sacrificed their freedom, handing lucrative covid contracts to friends and donors, and failing to expel MPs caught breaking the rules—shattered trust in politics. This new Government are determined to restore trust in politics. The Prime Minister has made it clear that he expects the highest standards from those who have the privilege of serving in his Government, and he will soon be issuing an updated ministerial code. Alongside this, we are taking a range of other measures to restore confidence in government as a force for good.

Dr Chambers: As a veterinary surgeon, I am expected to maintain the highest professional and behavioural standards at all times, as are those in many other regulated professions such as doctors and teachers, and if I fail to meet those standards I face the very real prospect of being struck off. Given the behaviour of previous Ministers and even a Prime Minister, does the Minister agree that, if we enshrined the ministerial code in law, that would restore trust in politics and ensure that people who lie and break the rules face very real consequences?

Ellie Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. As the Leader of the House has said:

“This new Parliament offers a chance to turn the page after the sorry and sordid record of the last.”—[*Official Report*, 25 July 2024; Vol. 752, c. 857.]

That is why we will be issuing a new robust ministerial code. As we promised in our manifesto, the House has established a Modernisation Committee, which will be tasked with driving up standards and addressing the culture of the House. That sits alongside the work the Cabinet Office is doing to improve standards and confidence in politics.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): The Opposition support the new Government's aspirations for the highest ministerial standards, and we acknowledge the significant experience that the Prime Minister's former chief of staff can bring to her role as envoy to the nations and regions. Why then, in breach of Cabinet Office guidance, have Ministers not published a word on her terms of reference, her new salary or her special adviser severance payment, and is she correct in her understanding that she is at the top of the list of new peers?

Ellie Reeves: Anything in relation to the former chief of staff will be announced in due course. It is not right for me to comment on the terms and conditions of any individual.

The Union and the Devolved Administrations

10. **Mr Will Forster (Woking) (LD):** What steps he plans to take to strengthen the Union. [900846]

11. **Graeme Downie (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab):** What progress he has made on resetting relations with the devolved Administrations. [900847]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Pat McFadden): This Government were elected to deliver for people throughout the United Kingdom, and whatever political differences we have in different parts of the UK, the public expect us to work together for the common good. That is why we held the Council of the Nations and Regions recently in Edinburgh, which was focused on investment and good jobs across the country.

Mr Forster: I am sure we all agree that local communities know what is best for their own affairs. Will the Minister formalise the council of Ministers so that the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, along with regional leaders in England, can meet regularly to shape their communities?

Pat McFadden: The idea is that the Council of the Nations and Regions, which met in Edinburgh the other week, will meet twice a year. However, I believe that these relationships are about more than formal meetings. It is important, underneath the formalities, to establish as good and as normal a working relationship as we possibly can.

Graeme Downie: This new Labour Government have already outlined that they are going to invest in sectors vital to the economy of Dunfermline and Dollar, including renewables, defence and engineering. That investment can only fully deliver if there is alignment with the Scottish Government to deliver the pipeline of skills needed for local people to fill those jobs, which is an agenda that the SNP has singularly failed to address in

17 years in power. Will the Minister outline how this Labour Government will co-ordinate with and press the SNP to ensure that the opportunity of this investment is fully realised?

Pat McFadden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to stress investment. Investment was the theme of the first meeting; it was also the theme of the investment summit held last week. Through that, we were able to announce over £60 billion of inward investment to the United Kingdom. This will benefit people in all parts of the country. My hon. Friend is right to say that to make the most of it we have to give people the skills to do the jobs this investment will bring.

House of Lords Reform

12. **Abtisam Mohamed** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): What steps he is taking to reform the House of Lords. [900848]

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): As is set out in our manifesto, this Government are committed to reforming the House of Lords. Our objective is to bring about a renewed focus on active contribution within a smaller House of Lords that better reflects the country it serves. As an immediate first step in reform, the Government have introduced legislation within our first 100 days to remove the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords.

Abtisam Mohamed: It is extremely welcome that this House overwhelmingly supported the House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill. The Lords must be more reflective of society. Currently, it is not reflective of society or of regions like South Yorkshire and Sheffield. Does the Minister agree that there should not be places in our Parliament that are reserved purely for those from certain families, as that only preserves the privilege of the aristocracy?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Conservative party seems to stand for few things currently, and it was astonishing that it decided that one of them is hereditary privilege in the House of Lords.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): Last week's legislation was welcome and was supported by the Liberal Democrats, and we were glad of the Government's suggestion that these were initial steps ahead of broader reform. Will the Minister outline a timeframe for when further legislation will be brought forward for democratic reform of our upper Chamber, and can he assure me that safeguards will be put in place to protect against cronyism, with improved mechanisms to review appointments to the other House?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her constructive approach to this matter. Clearly, we want to see the current Bill on the statute book as soon as possible. We will then move on to the second stage of our reforms, looking carefully to build a consensus to have that smaller, better value, active House of Lords that we all want to see providing more considered scrutiny of this House. We will certainly consider her specific points about the appointments process.

Flood Risk: Resilience Framework

18. **Edward Morello** (West Dorset) (LD): If he will take steps to ensure that the UK Government resilience framework helps communities mitigate against flood risk. [900855]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Ms Abena Oppong-Asare): In the aftermath of the flooding experienced at the end of September, and as the final figure of flooded properties is confirmed, discussions are ongoing between the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Business and Trade about the activation of the flood recovery framework, which is a core package of business and community recovery support. There are stringent criteria for activation of the scheme by Ministers and the current estimates of localised impacts and a relatively low number of properties flooded in September are below the threshold for activation. However, the Flood Re insurance scheme, a joint initiative between the UK Government and the insurance industry, is available to a wide range of eligible households in flood risk areas.

Edward Morello: Climate change means that West Dorset faces a growing flood risk, with increasingly frequent heavy rainfall flooding fields, making roads impassable and turning villages like Stratton and Maiden Newton into islands. Last year, 700 properties in my hometown of Bridport, including a school and a vital healthcare centre, were put at risk by flooding. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that the necessary funding and resources are available for flood prevention and emergency response in rural constituencies like West Dorset, where large geographical areas can create additional challenges?

Ms Oppong-Asare: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is the lead Department for flooding in England and it stands up its emergency operations centre when a flood forecast or flooding incident justifies that. This includes when flooding may exceed the capacity of local response networks to manage. The EOC works in tandem with Government. We have also set up the flood taskforce, which is looking at how we can deal with flooding in the future to make sure we can address issues like those in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Topical Questions

T1. [900857] **Sonia Kumar** (Dudley) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Pat McFadden): As we have heard, last week we had the Second Reading of the House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill to modernise the Lords. We have also delivered on our manifesto commitment to hold the first Council of the Nations and Regions. We are working hard to deliver justice for the victims of the infected blood scandal. We have published a written statement today on the implementation of the UK biological security strategy. Finally, we have set out the position on the right balance of flexible working and time in the office for civil servants.

Sonia Kumar: What plans does the Cabinet Office have to support small and medium-sized enterprises in building resilience to future economic shocks and crises, to ensure that they can continue to operate under difficult conditions?

Pat McFadden: Small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy. Our agenda for growth will help small businesses. We are determined to support them. I assure my hon. Friend that they are an important part of our resilience strategy and our resilience review. Earlier this week, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Ms Oppong-Asare) met a range of businesses to discuss shared goals in respect of resilience and to ensure that they can have input into the strategy we are preparing.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Sir Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): Can the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster provide an update on the current situation for British nationals in Lebanon, including the measures being taken to ensure their safety? Are there any plans for further evacuations, given the ongoing instability in that region?

Pat McFadden: The situation in Lebanon is serious, and there are several thousand UK nationals in Lebanon. The Foreign Office advice for some time has been simple: leave now. The Government have chartered several flights to help UK nationals to leave. We are also running a “register your presence” site, to ensure we can track anyone who is in country and have the best possible communications with them. We have made preparations for other evacuation measures, should they be necessary for the protection of our citizens in Lebanon.

Sir Oliver Dowden: I thank the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for that answer. May I echo from the Opposition Benches that the correct approach for British nationals is to leave now, rather than to rely on the Government to take further steps for them? However, in the event that the situation deteriorates further, what contingency plans do the Government have in place to ensure the swift and safe evacuation of British nationals, particularly in high-risk areas?

Pat McFadden: We have been monitoring the situation closely for some months. I assure the right hon. Gentleman and the whole House that the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and all parts of Government are putting in place the necessary measures, should the situation on the ground change to a point where we judge that more needs to be done to get people out of the country.

T2. [900858] **Ian Lavery (Blyth and Ashington) (Lab):** The Minister will be well aware that thousands of low-paid workers are being exploited on outsourced contracts in Government buildings, including cleaners, security guards and people in catering. Will he update the House on what progress is being made to in-source these jobs? After all, they are critical to the efficient operation of Parliament.

Pat McFadden: Whether workers are working in-sourced or outsourced, we always want them to have a good deal and a fair deal at work. That is why the Government

brought forward this week a powerful Bill to improve employment rights for people right across the board. We believe that when people go to work they deserve fair pay and decent conditions.

T6. [900862] **Luke Taylor (Sutton and Cheam) (LD):** Figures from London councils show that three in 10 Londoners who were turned away from polling stations due to a lack of appropriate voter ID did not return to vote. What assessment has been made of the impact on overall turnout of the voter ID laws implemented by the last Government, particularly when it is understood that those measures disproportionately affect already disenfranchised communities, such as those renting from a social landlord, the unemployed, lower social grades, disabled people and young people?

Pat McFadden: It is very important that the voter ID system does not prevent people who have a legitimate right to vote from exercising their democratic right, so we are keeping it under review, and we are already making a change to make it easier for veterans to get the ID necessary to vote.

T3. [900859] **Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab):** Will the duty of candour in the Hillsborough law apply to the 70-year-long nuclear test veterans scandal?

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): I thank my hon. Friend for that question; she is a long-standing champion for justice for victims of the infected blood scandal and, indeed, the nuclear test veterans that she mentioned. We are looking to introduce a broad duty of candour—a general duty of candour. I should also point out that criminal sanctions will be really important to punish the most egregious breaches, and I am pleased to confirm today, as the Prime Minister announced in September, that the Bill we will bring forward will include criminal sanctions.

Mr Speaker: I call Dr Danny Chambers.

Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD): Thank you, Mr Speaker, but I withdraw my question.

Mr Speaker: In that case, I will go to Gareth Snell.

T4. [900860] **Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op):** The Minister will be aware that the dire financial inheritance bequeathed by the last Government means that there is rightly a renewed focus on how we spend public money. Will she tell the House what work she is doing across Government to ensure better use of public money, drive down waste and improve efficiency, in particular with regard to consultants?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Georgia Gould): As the Minister responsible for public service reform, I am clear that every single pound saved on unnecessary consultancy spend is a pound invested in the renewal of our public services and delivering our ambitious missions to change the country. We are taking tough action to cut down on wasteful consultancy spend. We are acting to stop all non-essential Government consultancy spending this year and to halve Government

spending on consultancy in future years, with a target saving of £550 million in 2024-25 and £680 million in 2025-26.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber) (SNP): As you can imagine, Mr Speaker, the people of Scotland are beside themselves with excitement—I would go so far as to say we are fair giddy—at the prospect of receiving a visit from the Prime Minister's special envoy. As we prepare the red carpet and the massed pipe bands to welcome her, may I ask exactly what was the Cabinet Office's role in the creation of the post, when we will see a job description published, and when the special envoy will finally take up the post officially?

Pat McFadden: I thought the hon. Member would be joining me in satisfaction at a nil-nil draw away from home last night. As for the personnel matter that he raised, all I will say is that I am enormously grateful to the Prime Minister's former chief of staff for her efforts as chief of staff. I do believe that we want good, normal working relationships with the Scottish Government, and anything to do with the post will be announced in due course.

T5. [900861] **Adam Jogee** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Despite representations from me and several members of Madeley parish council requesting action to tackle repeated flood incidents at Bar Hill and particularly Mallard Close, families and businesses in Newcastle-under-Lyme are still being let down by Conservative-run Staffordshire county council. Will the Minister meet me to discuss the resilience review so that we can deliver where others have failed?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Ms Abena Oppong-Asare): As I mentioned earlier, the resilience review will strengthen our approach to resilience across a range of risks we face, including flooding. We have already taken important measures through the creation of the dedicated floods resilience taskforce, the first meeting of which I attended last month.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The provision of blue-light escorts is clearly a matter of operational policing, but last week my colleagues on the London Assembly wrote to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster asking for an inquiry into the provision of tickets to politicians, including the Labour Mayor of London, and the pressure that was then applied to the Metropolitan police to provide an escort to Taylor Swift. Will the right hon. Gentleman conduct a review so that we can see what happened and ensure that, if mistakes were made, they are rectified and this does not happen again?

Pat McFadden: These are operational decisions for the police, but I am glad that the person who is currently the biggest pop star in the world was able to play in London, particularly following the threat of a terrorist attack at her previous concerts in Austria. I am glad that the show went on.

T7. [900863] **Adam Thompson** (Erewash) (Lab): It was fantastic to see senior officials from the UK's closest allies in intelligence meet recently to co-ordinate the fight against fraud, which affects the most vulnerable members of my community in Erewash. What steps

have the Government taken to support the Public Sector Fraud Authority to prevent, detect and recover fraud and error?

Georgia Gould: At the Five Eyes summit last month, I reiterated this Government's firm commitment to tackling fraud and learning from our closest intelligence allies. Fraud does not respect international boundaries. This is a top priority for this Government, and we are taking action to build a wide anti-fraud coalition on advanced artificial intelligence and analytics, and to take further action on enforcement.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): You will be aware, Mr Speaker, that we are coming to the end of Whistleblowing Awareness Week. Civil servants and others are Ministers' best friends. They are the people who can indicate where to find evidence of fraud, corruption and other criminal activity. May I press Ministers to create the office of the whistleblower, to give new legal protection, to normalise speaking out and to promote greater public awareness of whistleblowing rights, demonstrating the importance of whistleblowers in a fair, open and transparent society?

Pat McFadden: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to draw attention to two things: the good work that civil servants do and the valuable role that whistleblowers play. That is why the last time we were in government, we legislated for legal protection for whistleblowers. It is important that people can come forward without fear of what they have to reveal.

T9. [900866] **Dr Beccy Cooper** (Worthing West) (Lab): The United Nations calculates the human development index, which ranks countries based on GDP per capita, but also includes health and education measures such as life expectancy and school enrolment. As an integral part of our mission-led Government, will the Minister please outline the steps they are taking across Departments to ensure health indicators can be considered alongside economic indicators, as a measure of sustainable growth for our country?

The Minister without Portfolio (Ellie Reeves): We have seen record numbers of our fellow citizens—2.8 million—excluded from the workforce because of long-term sickness. This Government recognise that taking action to improve health outcomes and address economic inactivity is vital for achieving sustainable economic growth. We will produce a White Paper to get Britain working. That will support other steps that we are taking across Government, creating more good jobs in clean energy through our modern industrial strategy, making work pay and improving the quality of work through our new deal for working people. We are also committed to cutting NHS waiting times, improving mental health support so that we can tackle the root causes of inactivity and fix the foundations.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office, the right hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), gave a very helpful reply to a question on infected blood compensation. What discussions has he had with victims and families of the infected blood scandal in Northern Ireland since the final report was published in August this year?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his interest in this matter and his words of support about the progress the Government have made. Sir Robert Francis conducted an extensive engagement exercise during the general election period, and the Government responded to that by adopting 69 of the 74 recommendations that were subsequently made. I met victims of the scandal in the days before I made the announcement back in August. I also work closely with the Health Ministers of the devolved Administrations, including Northern Ireland.

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): Can the Minister confirm that the procurement reforms will consider social value and local impact in contracts of Government and partners, such as the Crown Estate and Great British Energy, in important areas where there are World Trade Organisation non-competition exemptions, for example floating offshore wind contracts in the Celtic sea? They can provide a critical boost to the economies of places such as Cornwall.

Georgia Gould: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I can absolutely confirm that we will do everything we can to ensure the new national policy procurement statement drives social value around communities in the UK, in line with our trade obligations.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I welcome yesterday's publication of the child poverty taskforce framework. Is the Minister able to say more about the delivery of the strategy, other than that it will come out in spring?

Pat McFadden: This shows the importance of the issue to the Government. The last time we were in office we reduced child poverty; it is an issue dear to our hearts. That is why the strategy is coming forward and why Ministers are working hard on it. We have been clear since we took office that while we want economic growth throughout the country, we also want the benefits to be felt by people in every part of the country and in every income group.

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): I am proud to be part of a mission-led Government, but mission-led government is not just about missions; it is about how the Government do that. Does the Minister agree that it should be data-driven?

Pat McFadden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Here, in the spirit of the exchanges this week, I want to pay tribute to something the previous Government did, which was to improve the data operation at the heart of government. That does help when the Government are forming policy. We want to build on that and use data. It is important that we modernise how government works. The accurate use of data can help us to make better policy and that is what we want to do.

Douglas McAllister (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab): Almost 29,000 families in Scotland benefited from maternity

pay last year, worth over £200 million. Does the Minister share my concern about suggestions from a Conservative party leadership candidate that it should be reduced?

Pat McFadden: I very much share my hon. Friend's concern. In fact, the only economic policy we have had so far from the Conservative leadership contest has been the suggestion that we reduce maternity pay. That will do nothing for families, nothing for mothers and children, and nothing for the good operation of our economy. I hope they think twice about that suggestion.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): Ahead of any Budget, there is always talk about tough decisions. Could the Minister remind us why we are in this difficult position in the first place, and will he please update us on progress on clawing back covid fraud, where we saw taxpayers' money being handed over to former Ministers' mates?

Pat McFadden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We knew we would inherit a difficult position, but it was much more difficult than we thought when we came into office. Anybody who objects to difficult decisions announced in the Budget next week should know where the responsibility for those lie: squarely on the shoulders of the Conservative party. It falls to us to clean up the mess we have inherited from the Conservatives. That you will hear more about when the Chancellor gets to her feet next week.

Graeme Downie (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): Over the last few years we have seen an increase in attacks by foreign Governments on UK cyber-security. Will the Minister please update us on what steps his Department is taking to ensure our public services across the UK are fully protected?

Pat McFadden: This is vital work for the Government. We have a combination of legacy systems with vulnerabilities and, of course, constant investment in new systems to ensure our public services can work in the most modern way. It is really important that we guard against either foreign state interference or other malign actors who would try to disable institutions and disable public services through cyber-attacks. That is an important part of resilience and an important part of protecting services for the public good.

Alan Gemmell (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend tell me what steps he is taking to keep Scotland at the heart of the Union and keep Ayrshire's economy growing?

Pat McFadden: I believe that people in Scotland have tired of the politics of grievance and division. They expect Governments, whatever their political colour, to work together to promote economic growth, get inward investment in, get good jobs for people and have good public services. Would that not be a refreshing contrast to some of the division we have had in recent years?

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

10.30 am

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

The Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell): Every child deserves the opportunity to achieve and thrive, but at the moment far from every child is being given that chance. Today's report from the National Audit Office is, sadly, bang on the money: the system has totally lost the confidence of families. Families and children with special educational needs are being failed, on every measure, and even shadow Ministers have admitted that they should hang their heads in shame at the failure to support them.

Our promise to families is that we are absolutely committed to regaining parents' confidence in the special educational needs and disabilities system, but that will be a huge and complex reform. There is no magic wand and no quick fix, so we continue to ask for patience as we work as quickly as we can to make the changes that I know families are crying out for.

There is light at the end of the tunnel. Today we have published independently commissioned insight that suggests that if the system were extensively improved through early intervention and better resourcing in mainstream schools, the needs of tens of thousands more children and young people could be met without an education, health and care plan, and in a mainstream setting rather than a specialist placement. That can pave the way for a sustainable system in which schools cater for all children, and special schools cater only for those with the most complex needs.

Our plans include strengthening accountability for mainstream settings to be inclusive, for instance through Ofsted, and helping the mainstream workforce to have SEND expertise. It is clear that we need to work with the teachers, parents, children, therapists and councils who, for so long, have been trying but have been set up to fail by a broken system. This work forms part of the Government's opportunity mission, which will break the unfair link between background and opportunity and will start by giving every child, including children with special educational needs and disabilities, the best start in life.

Munira Wilson: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question.

Today's National Audit Office report confirms what parents, carers, children and young people across the country have been telling us for years: that our system to support those with special educational needs and disabilities is in crisis and on the brink. The last Conservative Government's abject failure to tackle the systemic problems facing SEND provision has been laid bare for all to see. With half of children waiting longer than the statutory 20 weeks for an education, health and care plan, with outcomes not improving, with special schools over capacity and, damningly, with the Department for Education not knowing how much capacity is required to meet future need, we are failing our most vulnerable children.

Shockingly, 43% of councils are at risk of bankruptcy, given the deficits that they are racking up in their high-needs budget.

This is a nationwide issue. Colleagues on both sides of the House have, like me, been inundated with casework from concerned and often desperate parents who just want to know that their children will receive the support they need without waiting for months or years. The report makes clear the urgent need for whole-system reform, with joined-up thinking across local and national Government, the NHS and schools.

Will the Minister please give us a clear timeline for the full reform called for by the NAO? Will she consider Liberal Democrat proposals for a new national body for SEND to support children with the most complex needs to tackle the postcode lottery? What steps is she taking to incentivise early intervention, including training specialists for assessments and reducing the contributions that schools have to make before they can apply for an EHCP? What is she doing to speed up the building of state special schools, given that local authorities are spending a staggering £2 billion on independent special schools? Is she pressing the Chancellor for an urgent cash injection in next week's Budget so that we can start cleaning up this mess?

Catherine McKinnell: I thank the hon. Lady for raising the issue and bringing it to the House. She is absolutely right to draw attention to the National Audit Office report and its damning indictment of a system that has lost the confidence of families and is failing children with special educational needs and disabilities. She rightly calls for the system to be reformed. That is what this Government are absolutely focused on and determined to do.

One of the first differences that we made on coming into office was moving the special educational needs and disabilities remit within the schools sector.¹ Our vision is one of mainstream inclusive education for all children who would benefit from it, while having specialist schools where we know that children with the most complex needs can have those needs met. That is not being delivered, and for far too many families it is not the reality. It is a reality that we urgently need to see, not only to address the local authority deficits to which the hon. Lady rightly refers, but to create better outcomes for children.

At the moment, the system costs the Treasury a significant amount. The hon. Lady tempts me into anticipating next week's Budget statement or making announcements ahead of it, which she knows I cannot, but she is right to identify that the system costs an increasing amount but is not delivering the outcomes that children deserve and families want.

We are absolutely determined to reform the system. We are working at pace. All the changes that we have made since coming into office are to that end. We have launched the curriculum and assessment review, which will support a broad and inclusive education for all children. We have made changes to Ofsted; those changes are continuing at pace to ensure that the system takes into account the whole school life and journey. That includes creating an inclusive environment for children with special educational needs.

Most of all, we are determined to restore parents' trust that, in our education system, if their child has special educational needs they will be identified early—we know that early identification is key—and supported.

1.[*Official Report*, 4 November 2024; Vol. 756, c. 1WC.] (Correction)

We are continuing to support early language and speech intervention and to prioritise the roll-out of special educational needs training for the early years workforce to ensure that children's needs can be identified at the earliest point. We are expanding our childcare system to ensure that more children can get into settings as early as possible, so any needs can be identified and so we can rebuild the public's trust that every child in our state sector will get the opportunity of a fantastic education, regardless of any additional special educational needs or disabilities.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Select Committee on Education.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): The National Audit Office report could not be clearer: children and young people and their families are being failed by a SEND system that cannot meet their needs, and local authorities are being driven to the edge of a financial precipice by a £3.4 billion funding gap. This Government have inherited an appalling legacy. The Government are clear that their focus is on the early identification of need and the inclusivity of mainstream schools, but the report notes that there is currently no process or funding to support early identification, and no specific funding or Ofsted measure on SEND support or inclusivity. Can the Minister say more about how the Government will provide the resources and the levers of accountability to address the scale of the crisis?

Mr Speaker: Order. Can Members please all look to the Chair? You are speaking to me, not the Minister. Look to the Chair, so I can hear, and then I can help. Minister, you can be a good example for everybody.

Catherine McKinnell: I welcome my hon. Friend to her position as Chair of the Education Committee, which I know will undertake vital work scrutinising the Government's approach on this issue and on many others.

We know that wider change is needed, which is why we have started to make improvements as quickly as possible. The changes that I outlined to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) amount to a whole-system change to ensure that the inclusive mainstream education that the National Audit Office has identified will provide the education that many children deserve but are not currently receiving. However, it will take time, and we will not be making promises that we cannot keep. There are some things that we can move on very quickly, but there are others that will take time to show. The change that the NAO report highlights as being desperately needed will take time, so we ask for patience while we make these incredibly urgent changes.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for securing this urgent question.

The Opposition welcome the NAO report. Every hon. Member will regularly be dealing with constituents' SEND cases. The growing demand is why we put major increases in funding in place to ensure that children get the support they need. The last Government worked with the sector on comprehensive reforms, but since the election we have heard very little from this Government

about their plans for reform. We look for more clarity, and we certainly support greater inclusivity. With too much variation in the system and parents often having to battle for support, do the Government plan to continue with the Conservatives' national standards and bring forward a standardised approach to EHCPs?

More than 100,000 pupils with special educational needs are educated at independent schools without EHCPs. How does the Minister think hitting those pupils with a 20% education tax, with more pupils moving into the state sector as a result, will help pressures on schools? What assessment has she made of the increase in EHCP applications that that will generate, putting further burdens on local authorities? Can she confirm that the axe that the Education Secretary is holding above free schools does not apply to free special schools? Finally, council budgets are under huge pressure, so is the Minister making the argument to the Treasury to extend the statutory override beyond March 2026 or not?

Catherine McKinnell: As I have said, one of the first acts of the Education Secretary was to reorganise the Department to make sure that the SEND team sits within our school team and is not separate from it. That speaks to the vision that we have for reform: a vision for our whole education system, to create the inclusive mainstream education that we know will provide the best opportunities for the maximum number of children and, as far as possible, keep children with special educational needs and disabilities within the mainstream system with their friends. That is why we have launched the curriculum assessment review.

We need to look closely at the key challenges to attainment for young people and the barriers holding them back from accessing the current mainstream education system. We are working with Ofsted to introduce report cards to look at how inclusion can be reflected as part of how schools are monitored by Ofsted. We are also increasing training for early years providers. We have extended the Nuffield early language intervention programme to make sure that no child's needs are missed out and that every child can find their voice. We have been very clear: full reform will take time, but nothing is off the table to make sure that every child with SEND can achieve and thrive in mainstream schools. We have also started legislative change: the children's wellbeing Bill will be introduced in the coming months.

The shadow Minister made a point about private schools. Ending tax breaks on private schools will help to raise the revenue to fund our educational priorities for next year, including recruiting 6,500 new teachers. As he knows, the Treasury is consulting on plans to enable those changes to come into force in January and on how to design those plans to make sure that no child with special educational needs on an education, health and care plan will be adversely affected.

On the question of free schools, the review announced this week relates only to mainstream free schools. We are starting a process with local authorities and trusts with the mainstream schools that are in scope, with a strong focus on assessing that need to make sure that school places are in the local area, where they should be, and that they align with our vision for mainstream inclusive education for every child who needs it.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): Nearly 5% of children in Hackney have an EHCP—and that is not accounting for others who have special educational needs. With schools closing, we have an opportunity to create alternative provision. The other week, one poor headteacher told me that more than a third of her reception class has special educational needs, most of which were not identified before the children started school. Clearly, there is a need for a different vision. Will my hon. Friend meet me and people from Hackney—or even visit Hackney—to see what we can do with spare school spaces to motor this change forward in Hackney, faster than is possible nationally?

Catherine McKinnell: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. She rightly identifies the need to ensure that we have the right school places for children whose needs are currently not being met in the most productive way possible. We are open to meeting hon. Members to discuss where in their constituencies this can best be achieved. I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss this further.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): Cambridgeshire county council is failing to meet the conditions of the dedicated school grants safety valve agreement, with only 5% of EHCPs being granted within the 20-week timeframe; the average in England is 49%. Families in my constituency face huge challenges in ensuring that their children's education is not disrupted or negatively impacted. How do the Government plan to address these unacceptable delays?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Member is right to identify those challenges. In its analysis, published today, the National Audit Office said that the current system was not working and not serving the needs of children and their families in the way that it should. We are moving at pace to review the system in a wholesale way, and the changes that I have outlined will support that. In addition, we will legislate to ensure that local authorities can plan properly for places and admissions in their areas. We want every state school, regardless of how they were established, to co-operate in ensuring that places are there for the children who need them. I have outlined a whole range of changes that will seek to address the problem that he mentioned.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): I am in no doubt that the Labour Government have a terrible inheritance on SEND provision, but children in my constituency of Easington who rely on services provided by the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust face unreasonably long waiting times. Incredibly, they have to wait up to five years for assessments for autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and other related conditions. What steps is the Minister taking to reduce those unacceptably long waiting lists, and support both children and their families during these lengthy waits for assessments?

Catherine McKinnell: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I reiterate that the Government have inherited a terrible legacy, not only on special educational needs and disabilities, but on our public spending and the state of our public services overall. The example he raises is good, as it highlights the importance of working

across Government to resolve issues and help the families who need support. Whether that is done through the education system, which my Department is responsible for, or through the health service, we need to work collaboratively across Government to address the huge backlogs that far too many people face in getting the support that they need. I can assure him that that is a priority for us.

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): In the past two weeks, I have met two families whose children are suicidal, one of whom is nine years old. The other one was committed to a secure unit for most of 2023. The cause of their suicidal thoughts was their educational needs not being met by the education system. Neither of those children have EHCPs. Conservative-controlled West Sussex county council is completing only 9.4% of EHCPs within 20 weeks. One block is the lack of educational psychologists. Does the Minister agree that increasing the supply of educational psychologists is essential?

Catherine McKinnell: I am so sorry to hear about the cases the hon. Lady raises. She highlights very well the huge challenge that we face in addressing needs—in ensuring that we have not only the inclusive mainstream education system that every child should feel they belong in, and that provides the education they need, but the mental health support that we know is sadly lacking. The waiting lists are too long for far too many children and families. We are prioritising investment to ensure mental health support and educational psychologists are available in schools, because we know how important it is to get the right support in place to help the families and individuals affected, and to enable schools to address these needs.

Rosie Wrihting (Kettering) (Lab): After today's shocking report, does the Minister agree with me that we need to rebuild the SEND system from the ground up?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This change needs to be delivered in conjunction with teachers, families, councils, educational psychologists and the health sector. We need to work together to ensure support is available at every stage. The system needs reform and significant change. We cannot carry on as we are with this “lose, lose, lose” system, which is letting down far too many families.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): Are the Government surging support to local authorities to help them process and complete EHCPs within the statutory timeframes? My communities are seeing a significant increase in applications because of the decision to impose VAT on independent schools. I have three SEND schools—[*Interruption.*] Government Members may shout, but that is the reality my councils face. I am asking for urgent support for those councils that have to deal with these increased numbers.

Catherine McKinnell: We have been clear about our manifesto commitment and our approach in Government. Our priority is to ensure that we have the investment in our schools that we need in order to ensure that every child has the teaching and the school experience that they deserve. We know that councils are facing significant

challenges processing applications and delivering for children with special educational needs after 14 years of a system that has let down families and children, and which the former Secretary of State for Education herself described as “lose, lose, lose.” This is the legacy we are dealing with and the mess we are clearing up, but we are determined to do that for families and children who we know deserve better.

Mr Mark Swards (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): Sadly, today’s report confirms what many parents in my constituency of Leeds South West and Morley have been telling me since long before the election: the SEND system in this country is failing. As a secondary school maths teacher, I know all too well that SEND provision is not up to scratch. I have seen at first hand that, after 14 years of negligence by the Conservative party, parents and children have lost hope of ever seeing an improvement in the system, following the SEND crisis. Does the Minister agree that although there is no silver bullet, we must improve the SEND system and give people hope that it will improve?

Mr Speaker: Order. This urgent question will run until about 11.30 am, so if I am to get everyone in, we will have to speed up the questions and answers. I want to take as many questions as possible, as this is a very important subject to all of us.

Catherine McKinnell: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is understandable that a huge number of hon. Members want to ask questions on this subject. We have inherited an appalling legacy of failure on this front. We have prioritised the issue and we are determined to fix it, but that will take time, as hon. Members have recognised, but we are moving at pace to fix the broken system.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): Parents and teachers in North Herefordshire tell me how concerned they are that special educational needs funding has stagnated for the last 10 years, while needs have increased. I visited Westfield school in my constituency, which is in desperate need of capital investment. It was allocated funding under the school rebuilding programme, but the implementation of that programme has been very slow. Can the Minister assure me that she remains committed to the programme, that it is on track, and that she will amend the way that the funding system works to incentivise mainstream inclusion?

Catherine McKinnell: On the hon. Lady’s final question, I can assure her that we are determined to prioritise mainstream inclusion, and to ensure that schools are supported. We will have the framework in place to encourage, incentivise and support schools to do what we know will create the best outcomes for the vast majority of children in this country: inclusion in a mainstream system where they can thrive.

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): Given today’s report, and the shocking and devastating impact that the reality has on children, young people and their families, what message does the Minister have for the children and young people with SEND and their families in Portsmouth North?

Catherine McKinnell: We recognise how challenging this situation is for families who are not getting the support they need for special education needs or disabilities.

We know that the system is broken—the National Audit Office report lays it out bare. We are determined to fix this; that is the message that I want to send.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Within five months of entering office, this Government will introduce VAT on independent schools, with all the impact that may have on the state sector. How long will we have to wait for an actual plan for SEND children, rather than just political posturing around VAT?

Catherine McKinnell: The changes that we have set out and are determined to make all aim to improve the situation that we have inherited, after 14 years of neglect and decline under the previous Government. I have set out at length all the changes that we seek to make through legislation—and the changes we have already made—to our education system to ensure an inclusive mainstream, and high and rising standards and opportunities for all.

Darren Paffey (Southampton Itchen) (Lab): Today’s report is damning but not surprising. It is an indictment of the former Government and their 14 years of failure. Even today, they shamelessly deflect and gaslight the very families whom they have failed. Independent SEND provision is growing in Southampton Itchen and across the country. Those places are needed, but councils are left at the mercy of market price and—often, when it comes to residential care—venture capitalists. That is wrong. Does the Minister agree that as part of whole-system reform we must return to basics, and that profiteering from SEND is the wrong approach? Will she meet me and my constituents to hear what they want from this whole-system reform?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend raises an important challenge that we are determined to address. We want mainstream inclusive education in our state school system, which every child should have access to and thrive in. However, we need specialist places for children with complex needs when that is the only place where their needs can be met, and a system that not only best serves the needs of children but is sustainable. I will take away his comments, and that will be part of our thinking as we go ahead.

Sarah Green (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): Other Members have asked about educational psychologists. There is a real shortage right now. Are the Government considering enabling other professionals to undertake some of the assessments to help unblock the waiting lists?

Catherine McKinnell: I thank the hon. Lady for the constructive way in which she put her question. I will take it away, and consider how it would fit into our broader plans to ensure that we have an education system that can meet the needs of children in terms of both their educational requirements and their mental health, special educational needs and disability requirements, within a broader health system that can meet those needs as well.

Alex McIntyre (Gloucester) (Lab): Far too many families in my constituency have come to me in tears, not just at the lack of support for their children with SEND but at a system that seems set up to stop them

[Alex McIntyre]

getting that support. How many appeals are successful because they should have got through the first time around? People feel they are being let down by the system, so will the Minister please ensure that our reformed system will not make families have to fight to get the support that their children so desperately need?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend is right: the system is letting down families and children, and creating a situation where not only are educational outcomes impacted by the poor response but too many families' lives are affected by trying to deal with the system. That is why we are determined to reform it. The evidence shows very clearly that inclusive mainstream schools that meet demand will reduce the need for education, health and care plans, and the need for families to go through the process in the first place.

Bradley Thomas (Bromsgrove) (Con): What additional resources will the Government provide to Worcestershire county council, given what will undoubtedly be the profound and devastating impact of the Government's education tax?

Catherine McKinnell: The changes that we are looking to make to remove the exemptions for private schools will be used to fund more teachers in our state sector and create the inclusive mainstream education that we know every child deserves.

Ben Goldsborough (South Norfolk) (Lab): SEND provision in Conservative-run Norfolk has collapsed after years of adversarial mismanagement by the county council. I welcome the steps that my hon. Friend has taken so far. Will she commit to recognising the value of co-production to ensure that SEND family voices are valued and money is spent wisely?

Catherine McKinnell: We are very clear that this reform is a journey that we want to go on with all those who support our children and families, whether that is teachers, school staff more broadly, education professionals, health professionals or local authorities. Everybody wants this to work better, and we need to work together to achieve it.

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Data for autumn 2023 and spring 2024 shows that more than a third of children with an EHC plan were persistently absent—more than double the rate for pupils without identified SEND. Persistent absence is a very complex issue, and a multi-faceted approach is needed to tackle the problem. In the light of this damning report from the National Audit Office, does the Minister agree that we cannot have parents facing prosecution for the failings of the system? How will she work across Government to ensure that parents of children with SEND can be sure that their children will get the support that they need to attend school safely and receive the education that they deserve?

Catherine McKinnell: The Government have inherited an absence epidemic in this country. Last year, one in five children were persistently absent from school, missing a day every fortnight or more. We know that strong

foundations are rooted in attendance at school. Children cannot receive an outstanding education that unlocks opportunities if they are not in school. I recognise the challenge that the hon. Lady has set out. It is important that we work together to create an inclusive mainstream education system that every child wants to attend and feels they belong to, so that those opportunities are unlocked for them, as they should be for every child in this country.

Lola McEvoy (Darlington) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement on this damning report on SEND. Last week, the Minister and the Secretary of State visited my constituency. We went to Mount Pleasant Primary, a shining example of inclusive mainstream SEND provision in the state sector. Does the Minister agree with me and the teachers there that children with physical conditions and disabilities could be referred for an EHCP by their GP much earlier, so that they arrive at school with everything they need in place, ready to excel in their education?

Catherine McKinnell: The visit to that school in my hon. Friend's constituency was wonderful. The school is one of many examples of the provision of inclusive mainstream education. We need such provision to be in schools in every community and available to every child. She rightly recognises the challenges of co-ordinating between health services and education provision, and the vital importance of those systems working together to achieve outcomes for children. I will certainly take away her specific suggestion and share it with my colleagues in the Department for Health and Social Care.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): Parents in my constituency are not interested in what the Minister thinks about the Conservative party. They may recall that EHCPs were introduced under the coalition Government. They want us to work together to make things better. We all know that a problem with EHCPs has led to a tripling of costs for county councils. In the Westminster Hall debate that the Minister took part in with me recently, she was much more constructive than she is being today, and I would like to believe that that is the approach that she wants to take to these issues. Does she have a timescale for the reform of EHCPs?

Catherine McKinnell: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's comments, and I will always work cross-party with colleagues to achieve the best for all children in this country, but levelling the blame for the current situation at a Government only five months old cannot be accepted; the inheritance that we have taken on cannot be underestimated. We will continue to work on putting right what has been failing for the past 14 years, and the Department for Education is moving at pace on work to that end. We will make specific suggestions for legislative changes, and for any other necessary systemic changes, in due course.

Laura Kyrke-Smith (Aylesbury) (Lab): Many concerned parents wrote to me at the start of term because they had finally been given a school place for their children with special educational needs but had no transport to get their child to and from school. Will the Minister reassure my constituents that we will take measures to

ensure that every child with special educational needs has a reliable and safe means of getting to and from school?

Catherine McKinnell: Transport to school is the responsibility of the local authority, and families need to work with their local authorities to ensure that they are not disadvantaged in getting their children to school by transport. I appreciate that that is a challenge—our transport system, too, is in crisis after 14 years of Conservative Government—but we will continue to work across Government to ensure that all our public services meet the needs of families. In the interim, my hon. Friend's constituents should work with the local authority to ensure that they get the transport they require for their children's educational needs.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): Zak is nine years old. He is one of dozens of children in my constituency who have been failed by the SEND system. Zak was traumatised by his experience in an inappropriate school setting, causing his learning to regress and both his parents to stop work. Oxfordshire county council has an accumulated high needs deficit of £56 million because of inadequate funding, which has failed families such as Zak's. Has the Minister pressed the Treasury to increase that funding and maintain the statutory override in next week's Budget?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman tempts me into commentary on next week's Budget, in which I cannot indulge him.

Ms Julie Minns (Carlisle) (Lab): I speak both as a parent whose child was badly failed in SEND provision under the last Government, and as an MP whose surgeries have been visited on every single occasion by a parent who is struggling not just to get an EHCP but to get from a school the flexibility that matches their child's need. I say respectfully to Opposition Members—including the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds)—that until and unless you have walked in my shoes and the shoes of your constituents, you should show a little humility and decorum in how you respond on this issue. In the review, will the Minister encourage schools to be more flexible in their SEND provision for children who need it?

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind Members that when they say "you", they mean me—and I do not want responsibility.

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend speaks with great passion and compassion on behalf of her constituents, and I agree with everything that she says. I reiterate that what she outlines is the epitome of what we are seeking to achieve on inclusive mainstream education, so that it can meet the needs of the vast majority of children with special educational needs and disabilities in our country.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Children with special educational needs in Harrow face long journeys to get to the schools they need in order to deal with their problems, something that the previous Government recognised. The three MPs in the area, on a cross-party basis, the council and all the headteachers agreed that there was the need for a new special educational needs

school in Harrow. The site has been acquired, but since the general election everything has gone quiet. I do not expect the Minister to give an update here and now, but will she undertake to review the position and come back to the three MPs and the council to ensure that we provide that school for the benefit of the children of Harrow?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to identify the current significant transport requirement to meet the needs of children. Obviously, the way that we wish to address that is to ensure that there is inclusive mainstream education available in every community for every child, and we are working at pace to achieve that. The special school is under review and we will report back as soon as possible.

Mike Amesbury (Runcorn and Helsby) (Lab): What more can the Minister do, working with her ministerial colleagues, to ensure that integrated care boards such as those in Cheshire and Warrington meet their part of the statutory obligation of 20 weeks for EHCPs?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the need for the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care, and all those working to provide the services that children and families rely on, to work together to achieve that statutory obligation. I will take his question away and feed it back to my colleagues in the Health Department.

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): I would like to raise the issue of children being off-rolled and put into alternative provision. I speak as not only an MP but a parent who this has happened to, and I have a constituency meeting on Saturday where it is the subject. Is the Minister aware that children who are put in alternative provision are entitled only to 15 hours a week of education? There is absolutely no way they can recover and go on to achieve properly on 15 hours a week. I ask the Minister to consider how that fits with the new curriculum plan.

Catherine McKinnell: We are looking at the system in the round, which includes ensuring that we have inclusive mainstream education, and making sure that schools are required to work with local authorities on admissions and off-rolling, so that there is the provision within communities that children rely on. Where special schools or alternative provision is required, it is important to ensure there is an opportunity to break down the barriers for young people. Ideally, the vast majority of children can go back into the mainstream system as part of that inclusive provision. I will take away the hon. Member's specific query. It is an issue we are looking at as part of the wider system.

Sarah Coombes (West Bromwich) (Lab): I know from speaking to families in Oldbury, Oakham and other parts of my constituency, just what a SEND crisis the last Government left us with. Even when children finally get their EHCPs, parents still feel as if they are having to fight for every bit of support that they need. We cannot fix that overnight, but can the Minister set out what steps she is taking to give families in Sandwell some hope that things will change?

Catherine McKinnell: Although the urgent question today has come about because of a damning report from the National Audit Office, which lays bare the huge challenge we face in this area, my main purpose in responding—an opportunity I am grateful for—is to restore hope for families: it is a priority for this Government and we are determined to fix it. That should give hope to the constituents whom my hon. Friend serves.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): On a recent visit to a school in my constituency, it was put to me that not all schools fully participate in dealing with special needs children, and my casework over the years substantiates that. What efforts is the Minister making to ensure that all schools participate fully?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman is right to identify that all schools are part of solving this huge challenge that far too many children and families face. That is why we have made changes to how Ofsted assesses schools, changes that are still in progress; it is why we are carrying out the curriculum and assessment review and looking at attendance measures; and it is why we are looking at local authority co-operation with schools, to make sure that all schools within a local area can work together to ensure that inclusive mainstream education is available for all.

Sam Rushworth (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): A mother in my constituency came to see me. Her son has been off-rolled from mainstream primary school, which she would like him to attend, and offered only a distant special school that is entirely inappropriate for his needs. She would like to know why Durham county council is prepared to spend £30,000 a year on transport for her son to attend a school that she does not feel is appropriate for him, but will not spend the same amount on a classroom assistant who could help him to be in mainstream school. That is happening under rules introduced by the previous Government. Will the Minister meet me to discuss this?

Catherine McKinnell: I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend. He has outlined just one example of how the system is broken and needs to be fixed.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): Parents and children in Chichester have lost confidence in the SEND system, with families effectively pitted against each other and against Conservative-led West Sussex county council, which this year delivered only 10% of its EHCPs within the 20-week statutory framework. Does the Minister agree that is unacceptable, and will she meet me and other West Sussex MPs to discuss this specific issue that West Sussex county council seems to have?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Lady has outlined how the system is broken. We know it is broken. We want to fix it, and I am happy to work with colleagues across the House in order to do so, so I would be happy to meet her, as she suggests.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): This damning report will come as no surprise to too many families across Oldham and Saddleworth. Given that there is a difference of nearly 20% between SEND children being in education and training and

non-SEND children, what are we doing to ensure that SEND provision and support is available in foundation apprenticeships?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend highlights the fact that not only is the system creating stress and failing far too many children and families, but it is not creating the outcomes that we want to see for every child, including those with special educational needs and disabilities. I will raise the important point she has made with my colleague in the Department of Health who has responsibility for apprenticeships.¹

Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): On Friday afternoon, alongside my right hon. Friends the Members for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) and for Godalming and Ash (Jeremy Hunt), I arranged a meeting with parents, governors and teachers at independent schools. They were unanimous that imposing an education tax partway through an academic year will have disastrous impacts on the education of every child, but especially those with special educational needs. What assessment has the Minister made of the impact of Labour's education tax on the caseload of EHCPs, and on the capacity of local authorities such as Surrey and Hampshire to meet them?

Catherine McKinnell: The Treasury will produce its impact assessment as part of the normal course of implementing new taxation, and the hon. Gentleman can refer to that assessment once it is published.

Rachel Blake (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): I have been working with parents of children with SEND for a number of months now. They talk to me about their children's experiences in mainstream schools and the fact that the support has not been what it should be, even though they are looking for an inclusive education for their children. Can the Minister outline what support mainstream schools might need in the near future in order to provide that truly inclusive education to so many children who have been let down?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend raises an important point: it is right that we require schools to provide inclusive mainstream education, and that we put in place the workforce, the training, and all the support that is necessary for that to be delivered. That is why one of our priorities is to have 6,500 more teachers within our teaching system, to ensure we have the specialist teachers that every child should have. We are looking at training; additional training support for special educational needs and disabilities has already been rolled out for the early years, and we want to ensure all schools have access to high-quality training that supports them to meet that need.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): Demand for EHCPs for children in Somerset has tripled in six years, and the county's SEND budget is forecast to be in deficit by £290 million in the next five years. Previously, Somerset spent, on average, £22,000 per child with an EHCP, but now that is £18,000. So this is not about overspending; it is about the increasing number of children needing help. As a start, could the Minister look at the current legislation, which lacks clear definitions of which children should be assessed or funded? This ambiguity, especially post covid, has led to a huge and rapid increase in the number of children needing support.

1.[*Official Report*, 4 November 2024; Vol. 756, c. 2WC.] (Correction)

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Lady raises an important point. We will be looking at the system as a whole, and at any legislation that needs to be amended or brought in to achieve our vision for an inclusive mainstream education that not only provides education for all children regardless of their special educational needs and disabilities, but provides specialist places for those with the most complex needs that cannot be met within mainstream education. We know the evidence shows that, where those needs are being met within the inclusive mainstream education system, the need for EHCPs is significantly reduced.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab): Last year alone, my local authority of North East Lincolnshire spent £1.3 million sending 114 children out of area to special educational needs settings. Could the Minister reassure constituents across North East Lincolnshire and in my constituency of Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes that the actions she is taking will not only support local authorities and reduce these additional costs, but provide the kind of education their children need closer to home?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend sets out very well the vision that we are seeking to achieve for all children. The purpose of all the changes we are making in our education system is to ensure that inclusive mainstream education is available to all children and that there are specialist places for children with the most complex needs.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): With more and more children requiring SEND provision, the scale of the challenge is undoubtedly large. The previous Conservative Government did offer a beacon of hope for children in Buckinghamshire, with the previous Secretary of State confirming funding for a new SEND school in the county. Can the Minister confirm whether those funds are still secure and whether Buckinghamshire will still get that new SEND school?

Catherine McKinnell: As the hon. Member is aware, we are looking at the whole system in the round to ensure that we have the inclusive mainstream provision that the vast majority of children will not only benefit from but do better in, and that we have specialist places where they are needed. We are working at pace to ensure that we have the right places for the children who need them as fast as possible.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I draw the House's attention to my registered interest as a governor of a special educational needs school. The Minister has rightly pointed out the failure of the SEN system over many years, but it is important that we recognise the herculean effort made by teachers and support staff in schools, and it is not those individuals who have failed young people. Further to her answer to my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Ben Goldsborough), could the Minister outline how she will engage with representative bodies of teachers and support staff in schools to ensure that they are included in the rescue plan?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We in government cannot deliver any of the change we want to see; it will be delivered by the teachers, the

support staff, the education professionals and the health professionals in our system. He is right to draw attention to their valiant efforts in a system that has been letting down them and the children and families they serve. We will be legislating to bring in the school support staff negotiating body to ensure that the support staff in our schools, who are the lifeblood of so much of what is provided to our children, have their voice as part of the national conversation.

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): Somerset has the third highest rate of school exclusions and the second highest rate of suspensions in England for children with SEND. Does the Minister agree with today's National Audit Office report confirming that the Government must develop a whole-system approach, to ensure that the most vulnerable students in Glastonbury and Somerton get the education they deserve?

Catherine McKinnell: I absolutely agree with the National Audit Office. Although it is a damning report, we recognise much of what it says and are determined to fix it and put it right in the way the hon. Lady suggests.

Andy MacNae (Rossendale and Darwen) (Lab): SEND is the single greatest issue facing schools in my constituency, and I have had far too many heartbreaking conversations with families who are not getting the support they need. Does my hon. Friend agree that supportive early intervention and diagnosis is the single most effective way of reducing this demand and ensuring better outcomes?

Catherine McKinnell: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Early diagnosis and early intervention are known to significantly improve the opportunities and outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities, but one of the biggest challenges in this space is the battle that many families face with a system that is letting them down, and we are determined to change that.

Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD): Special needs education was underfunded by the previous Government, affecting many families in my constituency. I know that the Government have been left with a £22 billion hole in the country's finances, but will the Minister ensure that there is an increase in funding for SEND education in the local government settlement at the end of this year?

Catherine McKinnell: I recognise the challenge that the hon. Gentleman raises. He tempts me into anticipating the Budget statement next week, but I will say that we recognise the challenges that many local authorities are facing and are alive to those concerns.

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): The adversarial system has caused such damage and upset. Can the Minister confirm that she will look towards a system in which expectations are clear and co-produced, and will she also look at the funding formula more generally, because some places have far less high needs and direct funding for students than others even though they have to cover much greater distances?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend raises a number of issues and I fear we are running out of time to give them the response they deserve. I will be happy to

[Catherine McKinnell]

respond in more detail in writing because she does raise some important issues that we are determined to address.

Luke Taylor (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): Projections show a cumulative deficit of over £4 billion on educational balance sheets by 2026, and the override mechanism ending, which will allocate those deficits to county balance sheets. This is a pending disaster for local authorities, and the report suggests that it will push 43% into bankruptcy. The report's conclusion is that the SEND system, if unreformed, is financially unsustainable, yet we have not heard meaningful plans for reform. Will the Minister take this opportunity to commit to the national body for SEND that was included in the Liberal Democrats manifesto, which will end the postcode lottery, ensure funding for higher needs students and address the urgent funding crisis for local government?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman is right that the NAO has identified that the system is currently unsustainable, and not only is it financially unsustainable but it is not sustainable for the children and their families that are being let down. The Government are determined to fix this and are working at pace to do so.

Adam Thompson (Erewash) (Lab): A whole 10% of my constituency casework relates to SEND provision, so I recently issued a public letter to Conservative-led Derbyshire county council expressing my deep concern over the state of its provision as many affected families feel voiceless. What steps will the Government take to ensure that councils, including Derbyshire county council, actually fulfil their responsibilities to children and families?

Catherine McKinnell: Councils are at the forefront of seeking to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities and their families, and they are being let down by a system that is broken and that the NAO shows is completely unsustainable. So we will work at pace in government, working with teachers, parents, schools, school support staff, the health service and local authorities to ensure that children get the opportunities they deserve.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): Devon county council projects an overspend on special educational needs of £38.5 million. That is explained partly by additional travel costs in rural areas such as mine in mid and east Devon. The last Conservative Government threatened that such an overspend would put at risk the so-called safety valve for Devon. How will the Minister help enable good-quality SEND support to be delivered closer to home?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman is right that the solution to many of these challenges is to create inclusive mainstream education in every community, so that every child can benefit from it and thrive.

Andrew Cooper (Mid Cheshire) (Lab): Parents want the best for their children, schools want to deliver the best for their children and local authorities want to provide the best for their children, but the system sets everybody up to fail. It is adversarial instead of being

person-centred, and it actively incentivises bad outcomes. I am pleased to hear the Minister say that we need to rebuild the system from the ground up, but does she agree that that needs to go hand in hand with rebuilding child and adolescent mental health services and improving the speed of diagnosis for autism and ADHD? Will she commit to working with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to help deliver that?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend makes the case very well. I agree that we need to work at pace to improve the mental health support available for young people, to improve the availability of educational psychologists and to work across government, including with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care, to ensure that we are unlocking opportunity for all.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister very much for her answers to the questions and for always trying to be helpful. Movilla high school in my constituency has increased its enrolments from 402 to 600 pupils. That is because staff have worked hard, but also because education authority support has enabled the school to extend the special provision for pupils with autism to include 10 and 11-year-olds. It has established two nurture classes in the mainstream. Does the Minister agree that additional funding to create SEND units within the mainstream for the pupils who need support is a way forward? Will she consider that suggestion to make lives better?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman is, as always, characteristically constructive in his contribution, and I thank him for that. I am more than happy to take away his suggestion and consider it as part of our wider reform of the system.

Catherine Atkinson (Derby North) (Lab): There are more than 20 cases in my constituency of children with special educational needs and disabilities who are missing out on care and school placements, and I am meeting the council about them tomorrow. I thank the Minister for speaking with me this week about the concerns of families. Can we make it a priority to help local authorities to offer these children the best possible placements?

Catherine McKinnell: I wish my hon. Friend well in her meeting tomorrow. We know the challenges in the system, and they are laid bare in the National Audit Office report. There is no shortage of will right across the House to get this right and to put the system right. As we draw to the end of these questions, I must reiterate that it will take patience, because there is no quick fix to the situation we have inherited. However, we are determined to fix it, and we will do so on an ongoing basis and as quickly as possible.

Dave Robertson (Lichfield) (Lab): Saxon Hill academy in my constituency does amazing work to support young people between the ages of two and 19 with physical disabilities and complex needs, but for many of the students, it is much more than a school. It is literally a home away from home, due to its sleepover club, which allows pupils to stay at the school overnight one night a week. The funding for that provision was extended for two years in December last year. Can the Minister

assure me that as part of the Government's SEND review, we will look at sustainable funding for such additional provision?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We need to move to a more sustainable footing in the longer term and make sure that councils can plan ahead. That is something we are looking at.

Emily Darlington (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): An entire generation of Milton Keynes children with SEND needs has been let down by the previous Government. In addition, the cuts to local councils and schools have made the situation much worse, particularly in respect of high-level teaching assistants, who are crucial to ensuring early detection of and ongoing support for children with SEND in mainstream education. Will the Minister ensure that the school support staff who do that important work are included in this essential review to support children in Milton Keynes?

Catherine McKinnell: Absolutely. I am always very careful to say that we thank and applaud both the teachers in our schools and the incredible support staff, who not only support teachers in their role but ensure that every school can function and provide the opportunities that we know will enable all children to thrive.

Mr Speaker: That completes the urgent question, but let me say to all those in the Chamber that I think this is a very important issue. I do not think there is a constituency that is not affected by it. Thanks to the Minister and thanks for all the contributions, which are certainly on the record now.

Business of the House

11.35 am

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Will the Leader of the House update the House on the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Lucy Powell): The business for the week commencing 28 October includes:

MONDAY 28 OCTOBER—General debate on remembrance and the contribution of veterans.

TUESDAY 29 OCTOBER—Remaining stages of the Great British Energy Bill.

WEDNESDAY 30 OCTOBER—My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will deliver her Budget statement.

THURSDAY 31 OCTOBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

FRIDAY 1 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 4 November will include:

MONDAY 4 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

TUESDAY 5 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

WEDNESDAY 6 NOVEMBER—Conclusion of the Budget debate.

The House will rise for the November recess at the conclusion of business on Wednesday 6 November and return on Monday 11 November.

Chris Philp: It is rather telling that only one Government Member appears to be excited about the prospect of the Budget next week. They obviously know what is coming.

Let me start by congratulating Morgan Edwards on his appointment as director of customer experience and service delivery here in Parliament. He starts his role in December. Apparently he was previously employed at Legoland in Windsor. Quite why the parliamentary authorities thought someone with experience of presiding over squabbling juveniles was well suited to working here, I really do not know.

I have to say that the business has been a little thin in recent weeks. We have a general debate today and a general debate on Monday—we have had no fewer than 10 days of general debate so far. Yesterday, we had regulations that would ordinarily be taken in Committee, and business ended early on Tuesday. We expect that at the end of a Government's time in office, but it is a little early for this Government to be running out of steam.

At this point in the 2019 Parliament, we had had 31 new Bills introduced; we currently have only 18, a third of which had been published or consulted upon previously, and those Bills that are coming forward are being rushed. The Employment Rights Bill, which had its Second Reading on Monday, has much of its policy deferred into regulations, to be debated in Committee at some point in the future, denying the full House the opportunity to properly debate those important issues.

When it comes to the winter fuel payment regulations, which we discussed previously, we should have had the report of the Social Security Advisory Committee before we debated and voted on that important measure.

[Chris Philp]

The committee has now finally written its report, and it says that it is concerned about the take-up of pension credit, that the Government's forecasts of fiscal savings have question marks hanging over them and that we need a full impact assessment, which the Government did not bother providing. The committee has also called for specific changes to the regulations. Will the Leader of the House bring the regulations back to the House for us to consider again now that we have the committee's report and it has recommended changes?

I believe that the Prime Minister is in Samoa attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government summit. Will the Leader of the House confirm that he will make a statement upon his return next week? I understand that one of the topics under discussion is the question of reparations. My view is that it is totally wrong to be demanding money, amounting to as much as £18 trillion, for sins—very serious sins—committed hundreds of years ago. Will the Leader of the House confirm that it is her view and the Government's that it is totally wrong to entertain discussions about reparations in relation to things that happened hundreds and hundreds of years ago? I believe that is the Government's position, and I believe the Prime Minister has ruled out even entering into discussions on that topic, quite rightly. Will she confirm that that remains the position of His Majesty's Government?

Finally, I ask the Leader of the House to organise a debate on foreign interference in elections—an important topic that concerns us all, and something that Members on both sides of the House have criticised. I understand that more than 100 Labour party staffers are enjoying themselves in the United States in the presidential election that is under way. Ministers have claimed that this is all spontaneous and has all been organised and paid for by the staffers themselves, but that claim appears, to put it politely, grossly implausible now that it has emerged in a now-deleted social media post that the whole thing was arranged by the Labour party's director of operations, Sofia Patel. She wrote in that deleted post that there were "10 spots available" for campaigning in the swing state of North Carolina, and she said, "we will sort your housing".

It looks to me as though that is being organised by the Labour party's director of operations.

Does the Leader of the House agree that it is damaging to our national interest—this is a serious point—if the governing party, the Labour party, is organising interference or campaigning in another country's election? [Interruption.] Does she agree that it will make it difficult for His Majesty's Government to deal with the newly elected Administration in America if the other side wins, and that that will undermine our national interest? Does she accept that by engaging in organised campaigning in this way, Labour is putting party interest before national interest, and will she organise that debate? [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Please, I do not need further comments. I am sure Members are trying to catch my eye, but that is not the best way to do it.

Lucy Powell: I join the shadow Leader of the House in welcoming Morgan Edwards to this place. I am sure he brings great experience from Legoland that can be brought to bear in this Chamber.

I send my condolences to the family of Geoff Capes. As a child of the '80s, I remember what a legend he was, and I believe his shot put record is still unbroken.

I take this opportunity once again to point the House to the call for views launched by the Modernisation Committee last week. Tomorrow, new limitations on MPs' second jobs come into force. The House will remember that before recess, we voted to remove the exemptions on paid advocacy roles. I wanted to give Members time to adjust to the new rules, hence why they are coming into force tomorrow. That was a manifesto commitment and we are determined to restore trust in politics, raising standards and delivering on our manifesto commitments.

The shadow Leader of the House again mentions winter fuel payments. I gently remind him once again that we published an equality impact assessment, which we were not required to do, but we were forthcoming with it. We brought forward to this House—I do not think this would have happened under the previous Government—a full vote on the measures, and they were clearly passed by this place.

The shadow Leader of the House asks about the Prime Minister's visit to CHOGM. I can confirm that there will be a statement from the Foreign Secretary next week about that and other matters, and I look forward to the right hon. Gentleman asking some questions. The issue of reparations is important, and I am glad that he has raised it. We recognise the horrific impacts and the understandable and ongoing strength of feeling across the Commonwealth and other communities about these matters. He is right, however, that our position on reparations has not changed. At the conference this week, we are committed to working with our Commonwealth partners on the very pressing issues that we face today, and looking forward to the future, not looking to the past.

The right hon. Gentleman raised the issue of campaigning in the United States and elsewhere. I note that he wants a full debate on that while also questioning why we are offering full general debates on other issues; I am not sure whether wants that general debate or not. Campaigning abroad happens in every election. People do that in a personal capacity, as well he knows. This is a bit rich, really, coming from the Conservative party. Its would-be leaders have spent weeks debating and arguing over who would or would not vote for Donald Trump. The former Prime Minister Liz Truss went to the Republican national convention and spent her time there discrediting the sitting President.

Mr Speaker: Order. Just to say, those others are not MPs, by the way.

Lucy Powell: I feel that it is a bit rich. It is for the American people to decide who their next President is and this Government are committed and determined to work with whoever wins that election.

The right hon. Gentleman then raised issues of business, which I will happily come on to. Today marks our 30th sitting day since we won that landslide general election victory. In that time, we have introduced 20 Bills—that is 20 Bills in 30 sitting days: over half of our King's Speech programme has already been introduced. I remind him that that is way more than the coalition Conservative Government managed in the whole of 2010, which was the last time we had a change

of Government. We have passed our first Labour Act in 14 years and made 34 statements to Parliament—more than one a day.

There is still much more to come, and I am sure the right hon. Gentleman wants to know about it—on planning, border control, education, mental health, crime and policing, Great British Railways, the Hillsborough law, buses and much, much more. He and I both sat through the last Parliament, although others here did not: we both know that at the end it really was a zombie Parliament, clocking off early on seven out of 10 days in its last year. The last Government had run out of ideas and could not agree on what to do and when, so they did nothing. They dithered and delayed on their own flagship legislation, and we are getting on with delivering some of the things that they failed to do.

For example, this morning there is the Football Governance Bill, which they long promised. We have reintroduced it, strengthening the position of fans and financial sustainability in the game. We are delivering where the previous Government did not. What about the Renters' Right Bill, which the previous Government had long planned but never fulfilled? We have taken it forward. Perhaps the most disingenuous example of all is Martyn's law. The then Prime Minister promised to introduce it by the summer on the day before he called a general election, knowing full well that he was not going to be able to introduce it at all. We have brought it in. Frankly, we have brought more change to this country in our 30 sitting days than the previous Government did in 14 sorry, sorry years.

If the shadow Leader of the House really wants to look at effective use of time, he might ask what his own party has been doing for the last few months. It seems to have taken three and a half months to whittle five candidates down to just two—not that anyone has particularly noticed. However, it is fair to say that we have seen a few signs of life in recent days. The Conservatives have finally shown a bit of oomph, a bit of what it is all about to be the party of opposition—they have taken a really principled stance: to stand against the abolition of hereditary peers.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): On Monday, I visited Keech hospice, which serves many residents in Luton North. As always, it was inspiring to see the care that it offers children and adults at their time of need. But it is not without its challenges. Whether through time for debate or the new Government's NHS consultation, how can we best ensure that funding for hospice care is given the attention it so richly deserves?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend raises an important issue that has been raised a number of times during business questions. We want a society where every person receives high-quality, compassionate care at the end of their lives. It is a crying shame that the hospice sector relies so heavily on fundraising and voluntary support. We will continue to work closely with the sector to make sure that it can survive and thrive going forward.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Marie Goldman (Chelmsford) (LD): I welcomed the emphasis that the Leader of the House placed on the Modernisation Committee's call for views. I am sure

that many Members have been sidling up to her and saying, as they have to me, "Wouldn't it be good if we could change this particular aspect of the way in which Parliament does things?" I am pleased to be able, now, to direct them to the Modernisation Committee's website, where they can submit their own views, and I encourage them to do so.

I also thank the Leader of the House for presenting the business programme. I note that several days have been provided for the Budget debate, to which I am sure we are all looking forward—although I am not totally convinced that the shadow Leader of the House and the official Opposition are looking forward to it. If reports in the media are to be believed, they had the opportunity to change the timetable for their leadership election so that the new leader might be able to respond to the Budget, but it appears that they were not too keen on that idea. Perhaps they were not entirely confident of their own ability to respond to the Budget, but we shall see what happens.

Many of the questions to Ministers from Members on both sides of the House are regularly being answered with a rather frustrating, "Wait until the Budget." However, while many of us understand that there are good reasons for the fact that detailed responses often cannot be given ahead of the Budget, time is ticking on, and the seasons do not really seem to care about the Government's timetable. Winter is fast approaching, but our NHS does not have the funding that it needs to fully support local health services. According to figures from the House of Commons Library following work commissioned by the Liberal Democrats, 12-hour wait times at A&E have been going up and up throughout the country. I am extremely worried about what that means for my constituents, and I am sure that other Members will be concerned about theirs.

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine has previously estimated that long A&E delays led to about 14,000 excess deaths last year, which means that 268 people have been dying, unnecessarily, every week because they are having to wait too long to be seen. It really is a matter of life and death, and that is unacceptable. Yes, it is another damning indictment of the last Conservative Government's failure to get a grip on healthcare in this country, but it is what we do right now that really matters. Make no mistake: it is a choice, and we can choose to fix this.

While the Liberal Democrats are calling for a wider funding boost for the whole of the NHS, we cannot keep lurching from winter crisis to winter crisis. Will the Leader of the House call on the Chancellor to create a new ringfenced fund—

Mr Speaker: Order.

Marie Goldman: A ringfenced fund that takes account of the average emergency winter funding for the NHS—

Mr Speaker: Order. One of us is going to sit down, and it certainly is not going to be me. The hon. Lady has already taken three minutes. She should not start speaking faster and more loudly just to try and stop me. She must come to an end now, and do so very quickly.

Marie Goldman: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Chancellor set aside money to be spent on building up winter resilience and winter-proofing the NHS?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Lady, and echo her comments about the Modernisation Committee. It has captured a great deal of interest in this place, and I encourage Members to do as she suggested. She is entirely right about the Conservative party's leadership race. It is a matter for the Conservatives as to why they are not putting forward a new leader to respond to the Budget, but over the past few weeks we seem to have seen a fair amount of soft-balling from the acting leader and deputy leader during our exchanges. Perhaps if they were not down in their own rabbit hole of oblivion, they would have presented someone better to come to the Dispatch Box next week.

The hon. Lady is also right in saying that public services are in deep crisis after 14 years of failure and under-investment. My husband is an A&E doctor, so I know all too well that a crisis faces our NHS this winter, as it has done every winter in recent years. The Health Secretary has taken rapid action to end the doctors' strike, which was causing so much additional stress to the NHS, he has taken early steps to ensure that there are extra appointments, and he is doing a huge amount of work to bring down waiting lists and to foresee some of the winter crisis. There is no doubt that the choices that will confront us in the Budget will be difficult, given our woeful economic inheritance, but there is hope ahead. We will get the economy growing again, we will get that investment into our public services, and we will fix the economy for the long term.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): Many of my constituents in Battersea have written to me to express concern about Israel's ongoing siege in northern Gaza. The scale of the suffering and loss of life is enormous, and they are calling on the Government to use all their levers to take action, including suspending any trade negotiations with Israel. We need an arms suspension, as well as a ban on all goods that have been produced in settlements. Can we have a Government statement on the tangible actions that will be taken to bring an end to the awful suffering?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for her question, and she is absolutely right. The people of Gaza have endured 12 months of this conflict and are suffering from a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. Over 100 hostages are still being held by Hamas in truly awful conditions, which is why this Government are absolutely clear that the fighting must stop now. We need an immediate ceasefire and the release of all the hostages. We need much more aid and support to get into Gaza, and we need long-term peace and stability. The Government are working at pace with our international partners to achieve those ends, and there should be a statement on this matter in the coming days.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am looking forward to the magical words "business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee" in future weeks. I think there is one remaining member of the Backbench Business Committee to be appointed, which prevents us from meeting, so I urge the House to get on with that. May I suggest to the Leader of the House that it would be helpful if she announced

the business to be held in Westminster Hall at these sessions? That would elevate the status of Westminster Hall debates.

Today we have seen the Charity Commission publish a damning report on Mermaids, which concludes that the charity's poor governance has led to mismanagement. That has serious implications following the statutory inquiry into not only Mermaids, but other charities that look after vulnerable children. Could we have a statement from the Government about what action they will take to ensure that vulnerable children are protected, and that charities do not mismanage the resources they are provided with?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I, too, look forward to being able to announce business decided by the Backbench Business Committee in future weeks. He might want to have a word with the shadow Leader of the House about the importance of providing time for general debates and Backbench Business debates, which he seems to think are not of interest to this House. The Government have provided time for some of those debates in the absence of a fully formed Backbench Business Committee. The hon. Gentleman makes a good point: there are some really good debates happening in Westminster Hall next week, including on online safety, the funding of children's hospices and the readiness of the NHS this winter—a number of issues that get raised in these sessions regularly. I hear what he says about the report into Mermaids, and I will make sure that if there is not a forthcoming statement, he gets a response from the relevant Department.

Ian Lavery (Blyth and Ashington) (Lab): Civil servants in the Department for Work and Pensions have received what can only be described as a derisory pay offer; indeed, individuals on the lowest grades are being discriminated against. Can we have a debate in Government time to discuss the value of our civil servants and how we can address their wages, terms and conditions? Will she urge the relevant Ministers to get around the table with the Public and Commercial Services Union and try to resolve the dispute?

Lucy Powell: In my short time in government, I have seen at first hand the exemplary work that our civil servants do every day. Much of the time they do it quietly and secretly and do not get the credit, so it is great that my hon. Friend has raised the matter on the Floor of the House.

It is up to individual Departments to negotiate with their trade unions on pay rises. I think the average award this year is 5%, but my hon. Friend is right that, working together with our partners in the trade union movement, we can end industrial action and support people getting higher wages and better working conditions.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I have served for several years on the programme boards for restoration and renewal. The existential threat to this building is fire. I have raised on several occasions, as I know others have, the importance of installing a water mist system, installing more fire doors and making sure that they all shut. This is such an important issue. I do not demand an immediate answer, but will the Leader of the House

try to persuade the authorities that rather than having endless debates on whether to decant, we need to protect this building with a water mist system? The modern systems are designed so that they will not even damage paintings, but they could save the building.

Lucy Powell: All I can say to the right hon. Gentleman is lucky him for sitting on the programme board for so long. In all seriousness, the safety of this building and of the people who work here is paramount for the House authorities, for me and for the Speaker—you and I discuss it regularly, Mr Speaker. The right hon. Gentleman is correct that we must address these issues. I hope that he will continue to offer his advice and thoughts through the programme board in the coming months; I am not sure whether his party will nominate him to do so, but I hope it will.

Dawn Butler (Brent East) (Lab): In my borough of Brent, the average private rent has increased by an eye-watering 33% to £2,121 a month. We have the highest eviction rate in England and Wales. I am inundated, as I am sure many Members are, with emails about mould and disrepair. The Government's Renters' Rights Bill is very welcome, but does the Leader of the House agree that we need to talk more about rent controls?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend raises an important matter for her constituency. She is right about the Renters' Rights Bill, which has finally come forward and had its Second Reading under this Government. It is much stronger than the previous Bill. It will end no-fault evictions, will give renters and tenants more enhanced rights than they have had in a generation and will tackle issues with quality and mould. It will be an important Bill, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will want to get stuck into the debates as it makes progress through the House.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): North Lincolnshire council has just published proposals for a green growth zone, which will help to revitalise the local economy, provide engineering jobs and help young people to find a route into the renewable energy sector. As that appears to fit perfectly with the Government's growth agenda, will the Leader of the House arrange a statement, or preferably a debate in Government time, on green growth zones across the country?

Lucy Powell: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the green growth zone in his constituency. He is right to point out that this Government's mission to be a clean energy superpower by 2030 is critical not just to reaching climate targets, but to creating the jobs of the future, boosting growth and giving us the energy security that we so desperately need. I am sure that the topic he suggests would make for an important debate. Perhaps it can be arranged through the Backbench Business Committee when it is up and running, which will hopefully happen imminently. If not, I will certainly look at his request.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): The UK was right to suspend direct arms export licences to Israel, the use of which risks breaching international humanitarian law, yet it continues to deliver F-35 components via the global supply chain. I have

asked many times whether the Government will negotiate an end-use agreement with international partners to end the supply of F-35s to Israel. In a written answer, I was told:

"The US Government manages the...Global Supply Chain."

Sadly, that does not address the issue. Can we have a statement from the Foreign Secretary on what discussions he has had with US counterparts on ending the supply of F-35s to Israel from the global supply chain?

Lucy Powell: This Government have taken more action than many in suspending licences for arms exports, because we are upholding international law and we are following the legal advice that we have received. That is why we have suspended approximately 30 licences to the Israel Defence Forces for arms that may be used in the current conflict and would be in breach of international law. I anticipate that the Foreign Secretary will come to the House, hopefully next week, with a further update on the middle east.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): In a righteous echo of St Matthew's Gospel, the elimination of vicious, violent criminal Chris Kaba reminds us that those who live by weapons die by the same. Further to yesterday's statement, there are real doubts about the fitness for purpose of the Crown Prosecution Service and the Independent Office for Police Conduct. Can we have a debate on whether those organisations have become so infected by a kind of bourgeois, liberal, doubt-fuelled virtue-signalling that they have lost the will to defend the law-abiding majority from a criminal, wicked minority?

Lucy Powell: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Home Secretary came to the House yesterday and announced new steps that we will take to protect our armed police officers. It is welcome that we have cross-party support for those measures, some of which will be included in forthcoming Home Department legislation. I am sure that we will have ample time to debate them further then.

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): Kinship care is vital. Where kids cannot be with their parents, keeping them with family and friends, where possible, is often for the best. In Portsmouth, there are estimated to be 560 kinship carers like Carol, whom I met recently in Paulsgrove. However, kinship carers receive less money per week than foster carers. Will the Leader of the House allocate time for a debate on pay parity between foster carers and kinship carers?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend raises an issue of great significance to many Members of this House. The role that kinship carers play in our society is often underestimated and undervalued. We should all want to put that right. Our manifesto made it clear that every child should have a loving and secure home; that is why we are determined to include kinship carers and others in the work that we are doing to make sure that every child has a supportive home.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): Among local farmers, reports abound that the Government intend to cut the farming budget by more than £100 million. That is compounded by the reality that the full farming recovery and internal drainage board funds have not

[Alicia Kearns]

been distributed, despite the fact that farmers have faced appallingly wet weather over the past few months. Will the Leader of the House consider committing one day of the Budget debate to food security and supporting our farmers?

Lucy Powell: We recently had a debate in Opposition time on farming, and the important issues that the hon. Lady describes get raised here regularly. This Government support our farmers, support our food security and recognise the difficult period that farmers have faced, especially with climate change. That is why we want to support our resilience and ensure we tackle issues around climate change. There will be ample time for these matters to be raised in the Budget debate, so I encourage the hon. Lady to put in to speak.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): The latest ONS statistics on drug-related deaths make horrifying reading. The rate of drug poisoning deaths in 2023 was double the 2012 rate. Just under half of all drug poisoning deaths registered in 2023 were confirmed to have involved an opiate, while 1,118 deaths involved cocaine. That is over 30% more than the previous year, and it represents the 12th consecutive annual rise. How can the Leader of the House facilitate our coming together as a Parliament with the relevant Departments to produce a grown-up, evidence-based drugs policy framework that is rooted in harm reduction, which is long overdue?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is right to point out the very serious and harmful effects of drug addiction and the number of deaths that it causes. Many of us will have been affected by such tragedies for our constituents or for our own loved ones. The next Health questions are in November, but the topic might also be suitable for consideration by the Backbench Business Committee or as the subject of an Adjournment debate.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Right hon. and hon. Members across the House agree that it is right that the House consider the issue of assisted dying. However, many of us are deeply torn on the issue and want to look in depth at the practical, moral, ethical and legal considerations. We do not feel that a private Member's Bill with only five hours of debate before we have to vote on Second Reading is the right vehicle. The Prime Minister committed to Government time on the issue, so I urge the Leader of the House to introduce legislation in due course, in Government time and with proper pre-legislative scrutiny and impact analysis, so that if we are to take such a grave decision, we will have all the resources for doing so at our disposal.

Lucy Powell: I recognise the difficult issues that the hon. Lady raises and which many hon. Members are struggling with and considering. Such matters as assisted dying are matters of conscience that have traditionally always been addressed through private Members' Bills, because the Government do not have a view. There will be a free vote for Government Members.

There will be no Government time, but the Second Reading will get the same time for debate as that of other Bills, and there will be lots of other opportunities for these matters to be debated. The hon. Lady could

apply for other debates to take forward other issues, but it will be a matter for the House to decide, and we will take it forward on the basis of what the House decides.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): May I add my voice to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) in respect of the ONS report released yesterday, which showed that 5,448 deaths related to drug poisoning had been registered in England and Wales? Once again, the areas of greatest deprivation have been disproportionately affected. The north-east region, including my constituency, is the hardest hit. Every one of those preventable tragedies has an impact on families, friends and colleagues. As chair of the drugs, alcohol and justice all-party parliamentary group, may I draw the House's attention to this public health crisis, on which I have tabled early-day motion 302?

[That this House notes with alarm data released by the Office for National Statistics on 23 October 2024 showing that a record 5,448 deaths related to drug poisoning were registered in England and Wales in 2023; further notes that the highest death rates are again in areas suffering greatest deprivation; recognises that the influx of highly potent synthetic opioids such as Nitazenes risks a rapid rise in drug deaths; and calls on the Government to tackle the crisis by committing to long-term sustainable funding for drug treatment in the autumn budget and future spring spending review; continuing to implement the recommendations of Dame Carol Black's independent review of drugs, and accelerating the availability of naloxone, the lifesaving antidote to opioid overdose.]

Will the Leader of the House urge Ministers to meet officers of the APPG and treatment providers? Can we have a debate in Government time on this very important issue?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that health inequalities are inextricably linked with all other inequalities. The trends are clear to see. Yesterday's report on drug-related deaths should serve as a wake-up call. It is absolutely devastating for any family for their loved one to die in this way. As the subject has already been raised twice at business questions today, I am sure that there would be a lot of interest if my hon. Friend applied for a debate.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): Will the Leader of the House join me in wishing the very best of luck to my Hamble constituent Jack Jarvis, an Army veteran, and his team—David Bruce and Nutty Edwards, both from the Royal Marines, and Adam Radcliffe—as they train in my constituency for a world record rowing attempt from New York to Southampton in aid of the veterans charity Head Up? Can we have a statement from the Health Secretary or the Defence Secretary on mental health services? Will the Leader of the House wish my constituents the best of luck in their attempt to raise money?

Lucy Powell: I am delighted to wish the hon. Gentleman's constituents luck in their ambitious challenge to row across the Atlantic for such a worthy cause: Head Up, which I know well, does really important work. I am sure that Monday's general debate on veterans will be a good opportunity to raise the matter again.

Paul Waugh (Rochdale) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the introduction of a beefed up Football Governance Bill. I thank the Leader of the House for all her hard work in

opposition on beefing up the proposals. I wish to pass on a message from the co-chairman of Rochdale Association Football Club, who says he would love to host the new football regulator as part of the redevelopment of Rochdale's ground. Would it not be perfect for the north-west, the beating heart of our national game, to host the football regulator?

Lucy Powell: I am really pleased that the Football Governance Bill is being introduced in the House of Lords today. The Bill has been strengthened and will put fans at the heart of our football. The previous Government promised but failed to deliver it.

Stuart Andrew (Daventry) (Con): We tried.

Lucy Powell: As the Opposition Chief Whip says from a sedentary position, he really did try to deliver the Bill. It was a cross-party effort, but the election was called a bit too early for that Bill, and perhaps for some of his colleagues as well, so it did not come to pass. We have strengthened the Bill and put fans at the heart of football.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Paul Waugh) will be pleased to know that the Government are committed to hosting the football regulator in Greater Manchester, but he might want to fight with me and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), about whether it is in Wigan, Manchester or Rochdale.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I am not sure I will endorse fighting at the Dispatch Box.

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): Glastonbury and Somerton is home to wonderful cider, with producers including Tricky Cider in Langport, Harry's Cider in Long Sutton and Burrow Hill Cider near Kingsbury Episcopi. Cider produces around £2 billion-worth of value for pubs each year, but damaging business rates are threatening the future of some pubs. Can we have a debate in Government time about the benefits of reforming business rates on pubs and hospitality?

Lucy Powell: I go to Glastonbury once a year and I occasionally have some of the local cider while I am there, so I can confirm the south-west of England produces some really good quality cider. It is one of our great exports and one of our great drinks in this country. I am sure that the hon. Lady will want to raise these issues during the Budget debate next week, and I look forward to her doing that then.

Jo Platt (Leigh and Atherton) (Lab/Co-op): I often say that, in order to move forward, we need to look back. With that, will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Northwest Computer Museum in Leigh on showcasing the history of computers and inspiring the next generation, with education and new tech? Will she advise how best we acknowledge such organisations so that we continue to inspire the next generation of technological innovators?

Lucy Powell: Local museums, such as the Northwest Computer Museum in my hon. Friend's constituency, do brilliant work in showcasing the best of this country's past, so that we can drive forward for the future. As a

near neighbour of my hon. Friend, I know the important role computer technology has played in the history of Leigh and Atherton, and Greater Manchester.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): Recent events at the West Midlands Fire Authority, regarding failures of governance, leadership, financial discrepancies and staff grievances, highlight deep-rooted and troubling problems, and I am afraid there are too many unanswered questions. Will the Government ensure that there will be an independent and transparent public inquiry, so that the West Midlands Fire Authority meets the obligations and standards that my residents, and people across the west midlands, rightly expect and deserve?

Lucy Powell: I am sorry to hear of the poor findings about the fire service in the west midlands. It is a much needed service that local people should be able to rely on in times of need. I do not have details about those findings, but I will ensure the relevant Minister gets back to the right hon. Lady as soon as possible about what can be done.

Lee Pitcher (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): Last week, I had the pleasure of welcoming amazing students from Hayfield and Hill House schools to Parliament on educational visits. In the same week, I was immensely proud that New College Doncaster, in Auckley, was awarded centre of excellence status by the Leadership Skills Foundation, and that Hayfield school was found to rank among the top 15 schools in South Yorkshire. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Hayfield and New College on these blooming brilliant achievements, and will she encourage schools across the country to take advantage of the excellent educational visits we offer here in Parliament?

Lucy Powell: I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in congratulating Hayfield and New College on their blooming good achievements. He is right to highlight the fantastic educational programme offered by Parliament—it is really important that we educate the next generation on our democracy, their role as citizens and the important role that Parliament plays.

Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD): Yesterday, Sky News reported that the Government are set to receive a £1.5 billion windfall from Octopus Energy, just weeks after the Chancellor announced a £1.4 billion cut to winter fuel payments for millions of pensioners, which the Older People's Commissioner for Wales has said in the past week will cost thousands of lives. The windfall provides an opportunity for the Government to reverse their policy and do the right thing to ensure that millions of the most vulnerable in our society get the vital support that they need. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate in this House on the opportunity that the windfall gives us?

Lucy Powell: Let me gently say to the hon. Gentleman that he should not totally believe everything he hears on the news. However, he raises an important matter. People are facing challenges this winter in paying rising energy costs, as they have done over many years. The very difficult decision by this Government to means-test the winter fuel payment is not one that we wanted to take, but we inherited a huge black hole, not just for this

[Lucy Powell]

financial year but year after year. We have had to fix the foundations of the economy to put us back to economic stability. The truth of the matter is that when the economy crashes, interest rates go sky high and costs and inflation get out of control, it is pensioners on fixed incomes who pay the heaviest price. That is why we have had to take the difficult decision that we have taken.

Douglas McAllister (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab): Data released by the National Records of Scotland this week shows that male life expectancy in my constituency is the second lowest in the country, and Scotland continues to have lower life expectancy than England and Wales. Low life expectancy is strongly linked to deprivation and 17 years of SNP failure. Will the Leader of the House arrange an urgent debate on how this Government can work constructively with the Scottish Government to tackle the causes of deprivation and enhance the life chances of my constituents?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue of male life expectancy in Scotland. The figures that he mentioned are worrying. This Government are committed to working with the Scottish Government to tackle the challenges that the country is facing. That is why we convened our first Council of the Regions and Nations in Glasgow a couple of weeks ago. He will be aware that Scotland questions are next week, and he might want to raise it further then.

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): You will know the importance of Uckfield hospital, Madam Deputy Speaker—a hospital that you previously represented and that your constituents enjoy using locally. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on community and district hospitals? The Health Secretary spoke at the Dispatch Box about the importance of local access, but I hear that Uckfield hospital's elective surgery has been mothballed for six months and that local staff are being sent elsewhere. That flies in the face of the decisions that this Government say integrated care boards should be taking.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Given the mention of Uckfield, I will be listening to the answer very closely.

Lucy Powell: I will try to make sure it is a good one for you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Lady is right to say that one of the key ways in which we can deal with the crisis in our NHS—and it is a very serious crisis that we face—is to get more services into communities so that people do not need to attend acute care at the wrong time, and to deliver that preventive community care model that the Health Secretary rightly pointed to. I do not want to make this party political, but the hospital building programme that we inherited was a work of fiction. Many promises made by the previous Government did not have any budget line allocated to them at all. I know that these are issues of high priority for the forthcoming Budget, and I hope that she will get the answers that she wants.

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): Boxing engages children and young people from deprived or marginalised backgrounds. Matchroom's chairman Eddie Hearn rightly

says that the thing about boxing is that everyone is welcome, and there is no barrier for entry. The Matchroom in the Community initiative, run by the passionate Alex Le Guével, has impacted more than 1,200 young people, collaborated with 22 sports providers and even saved a local boxing gym. It is truly transforming lives. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the work of Matchroom in the Community, and permit a discussion in Government time on the positive impact of amateur local boxing clubs?

Lucy Powell: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Matchroom in the Community in his constituency on its amazing work. I know from a similar club in my constituency, the Moss Side Fire Station boxing club, that important work is done to engage young people who would otherwise not be engaged and might be causing problems elsewhere. That is why this Government are committed to supporting such youth services.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): So many of my residents in rural Beverley and Holderness have benefited from the simply brilliant £2 bus fare. Could we have a debate or a statement from the Transport Secretary as soon as possible after the Budget on the future of the £2 bus fare, which has seen so many more of my residents able to get to work, be a full part of the community and meet members of their families?

Lucy Powell: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman's constituents are benefiting from the £2 bus fare, which this Government have said will continue to the end of the year, for now—I am sure that further announcements will be made in the coming days. We are also introducing the better buses Bill in this Session to ensure that many more places can benefit from having a say and from bus franchising in their local areas, which will keep fares lower for longer. I am sure that he will raise these issues in the Budget debate next week.

Warinder Juss (Wolverhampton West) (Lab): Last night I met the University and College Union representative at the City of Wolverhampton college in my constituency. He raised concerns about the wages of teachers in further education being significantly less than those received by pre-16 education teachers, and about the general under-investment in further education. These further education teachers provide vocational training for electricians, bricklayers, plumbers, plasterers and IT technicians, to name but a few. Does the Leader of the House agree that the skills agenda and further education go hand in hand? Will she please meet me or grant a debate in the House to discuss fair funding for further education?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this issue, which was raised with me by the Manchester college on my recent visit there. The work done in our further education institutions transforms lives. It is critical to the mission of this Government to grow the economy and provide opportunity for everybody, everywhere. That is why we are bringing forward a number of pieces of legislation to enhance further education. Hopefully, there will be further announcements in due course.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): Yesterday I was pleased to welcome the wonderful Dawn Dines and the Stamp Out Spiking charity to Parliament to

showcase their awareness campaign that launches next Monday. Spiking is one of the most evil crimes. Can the Leader of the House arrange for the Home Secretary to make a statement to update the House on the progress being made to implement the previous Government's anti-spiking strategy? What further steps will this new Government take to stamp out this heinous crime?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the important work of the Stamp Out Spiking campaign. He is right; it is a blight in many of our town and city centres. Work has improved over recent years to reduce the number of people using spiking drugs, but further work is needed. I am sure that the Home Secretary will update the House in due course.

Alex McIntyre (Gloucester) (Lab): Next week, members of the European Pride Organisers Association will vote on the hosts of EuroPride 2027. I am proud to back the only UK bid to host that festival, Pride in Gloucestershire, which would include an opening ceremony at Gloucester docks and a festival in Gloucester Park. Will the Leader of the House join me in encouraging members of EPOA to vote for Pride in Gloucestershire for EuroPride 2027?

Lucy Powell: I wholeheartedly encourage all the association members to vote for Pride in Gloucestershire. I am sure that the event would really help to put Gloucester on the map, would bring a huge amount of interest and, and would support the local economy. As the MP for Manchester Pride, I know how important these events are, and I wish my hon. Friend and his town all the best with that.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): In broad daylight, in a public place, my constituent was attacked by a man who is well known to the police. When he realised that he was being videoed and the police were being called, he lashed out and threatened to find my constituent, slit his throat and burn his house down. Early police advice was that my constituent's name need never be disclosed, but now Avon and Somerset police say that his full name will have to be disclosed in court. He does not want to expose his family to the threats that were made. The case will collapse without the protection of anonymity for victims. Can we have a debate on offering greater public protection to victims in court, thereby bolstering public confidence in policing and our courts system?

Lucy Powell: This sounds like a horrific incident in the hon. Member's constituency. I am really sorry to hear of it, and I hope that she will pass on our best to her constituents. These issues have been raised many times, and we have had many debates on them. The Government are committed to introducing a victims and sentencing Bill in this Session, wherein the issue of anonymity for victims will be widely discussed.

Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab): David Lowndes is a hero of ours in Peterborough. For 51 years, he has chronicled life in our city, as the snapper for the local paper. Just last weekend, in rain and shine, I met David taking photos at the Diwali festival and at the rededication of a war memorial. This year, his regular contract with the *Peterborough Telegraph* comes to an end. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating David

on his contribution to our city and journalism, and will she ensure that we have time in this House to debate the value of good local journalists?

Lucy Powell: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating David Lowndes on a very long career in local photojournalism. What an important role he and others like him play in capturing moments, and telling the stories of our constituents and communities, and the things that we care most about. I am sure that a debate on the importance of local journalism would be very well attended, were he to apply for one.

Sarah Bool (South Northamptonshire) (Con): Tomorrow is Northamptonshire Day, and I am very proud to represent the constituency of South Northamptonshire. I am delighted to hear the announcement of a new bus route from Ratley to Northampton via Syresham. Does the Leader of the House agree that we need to protect and enhance our bus services, alongside the £2 bus fare, and will she agree to a debate in Government time on this important issue?

Lucy Powell: Well, I did not know that it was Northamptonshire Day tomorrow. That is a good thing for me to add to the diary for future years. The hon. Lady raises the issue of reliable local bus routes, which she will know have been decimated in recent years. The £2 bus fare has been an important marker in restoring the service, but the Government are introducing a better buses Bill, which will give local areas and local transport authorities more power to franchise and create the local bus services that people rely on.

Tim Roca (Macclesfield) (Lab): I was very pleased to hear the Leader of the House announce a debate on veterans next week. Will she join me in commending the work of the Macclesfield armed forces and veterans breakfast club, which I had the pleasure of visiting recently? The club's efforts to support veterans by providing access to key services and helping to tackle social isolation in the community are invaluable.

Lucy Powell: I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in congratulating that breakfast club in his constituency on its important work. The Government are committed to supporting veterans. That is why I was really pleased to announce the debate on veterans next week. He will be pleased to know of the Government's commitment to the armed forces commissioner Bill, which will be introduced imminently.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): In Huntingdon, we have a swathe of new energy infrastructure developments. We already have the near-2,000-acre East Park Energy solar farm proposed for near Great Staughton, and the Government recently forced through plans for the Envar incinerator on the edge of St Ives, after an appeal from the developer. Over the past week, many constituents have written to me expressing their concerns about the proposed Warboys incinerator at the Old Brickworks, just 4 miles from the Envar incinerator site. The parishes of Warboys and Pidley-cum-Fenton are placed between those sites. Will the Leader of the House make time in the parliamentary schedule for this House to discuss the impact that new energy infrastructure is having on the rural communities that it is being imposed on?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Member for raising that issue, which is obviously important to his constituents. The Government make no apology for taking quick action to ensure that we have energy security, and the energy supply of the future. Our commitment to becoming a clean energy superpower by 2030 brings with it some difficult decisions and challenges. We are mindful of community concern when it comes to such decisions, but we will not let it stand in the way of ensuring energy security, lower bills and an energy supply for the people of this country.

Kirsteen Sullivan (Bathgate and Linlithgow) (Lab/Co-op): Across the country, retailers on our high streets are increasingly worried about rising retail crime and antisocial behaviour. I recently met business owners in Bathgate to discuss their concerns and raise awareness of the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act 2021, which was introduced after a long campaign by the Co-operative movement. Will the Leader of the House make a statement on when we can expect a Bill to make the assault of shop workers a specific offence in England and Wales?

Lucy Powell: Shoplifting continues to increase at unacceptable levels, and is causing huge issues for local shop workers and those running retail outlets. My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue. She will know that, under the previous Government, there was effectively immunity for those shoplifting, because there were no prosecutions for theft under £200. The Government are committed to bringing in a new offence of assaulting a retail worker. That will be in the forthcoming policing and crime Bill, which I hope will be introduced in the coming weeks or months.

Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): Colin and Coryne Hall, residents in the Bordon part of my constituency, are being evicted by the Ministry of Defence from their property, along with a number of other residents in the area. Could we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Defence about the MOD's treatment of its non-military tenants? This is just an example of how the Defence Infrastructure Organisation is not prioritising Bordon. Can we have a debate in Government time on how the DIO handles its responsibilities to local communities?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Member for raising what is obviously an important issue for his constituents Colin and Coryne Hall, given their circumstances. It is not an issue that I am familiar with. He will know that I recently announced that there will be a debate on the Floor of the House on Monday on supporting veterans, at which Defence Ministers will be present. He may want to raise the issue there, but I shall certainly raise it with Ministers anyway.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. Around a dozen Members wish to speak, and we have only a few minutes left, so let us try to be as short and sharp as we can.

Laura Kyrke-Smith (Aylesbury) (Lab): Last week, I joined Rabbi Neil Janes and Father Stuart Owen on a walk through my constituency to mark the Jewish festival

of Sukkot, and to thank and raise funds for local organisations that support people in need of all faiths. Will the Leader of the House grant a debate on how we can support and encourage interfaith understanding, dialogue and action, of which this walk was a really powerful example?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that question, and pass on my thanks to Rabbi Janes and those who have come together in her constituency to deal with these issues. She is right to call for interfaith communities to come together. I am sure that she will continue to do that in her constituency.

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): When the Cineworld in Yate opened in 2015, it was a big day for the town and came as a result of years of campaigning by former MP Steve Webb. Sadly, the cinema has recently closed its doors. It is one of the many cinemas across the country unable to keep up with rising costs. A key burden facing those businesses is the business rates system, which leaves them paying more than they can afford. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate in Government time on the need to reform business rates, and on how a new system could benefit local cinemas?

Lucy Powell: I am sorry to hear about the closure of Cineworld in the hon. Lady's constituency. We will have several days of debate on the Budget, starting next week, and I am very confident that business rates will be high on the agenda in those debates, as they always are.

Mr Mark Sowards (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): My constituent David Gold has been in touch to say that a year ago he really struggled to get a GP appointment. He went directly to the hospital to seek advice and eventually got an appointment, and was subsequently diagnosed with stage 3 bowel cancer. We know how important it is that those with cancer get an early diagnosis. An employee from the GP practice in question told me that in their 35 years of service, they had never seen primary healthcare in such a sorry state. Will the Leader of the House grant an urgent debate in Government time on getting GPs the resources they need to offer appointments quickly?

Lucy Powell: I am really sorry to hear about my hon. Friend's constituent. The Government are committed to introducing an extra 40,000 appointments per week by the end of this Parliament. That work, led by the Health Secretary, is already under way, and I hope it means that such a situation will not happen again.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is common for us to believe that freedom of religion or belief violations do not occur in the west, but they do. Recently, the Breccia di Roma, an evangelical church in Italy, has been embroiled in a legal battle regarding its place of worship. The Italian tax agency denied the church tax exemptions granted to other religious institutions on the grounds that its place of worship did not exhibit sufficiently religious architectural features. Despite favourable rulings from lower courts, the Italian supreme court ruled against the church, claiming that it was liable for commercial taxes. The church, represented by Alliance Defending Freedom International, has now

taken its case to the European Court of Human Rights. This case is discriminatory, so will the Leader of the House join me in raising concerns about that violation of freedom of religion or belief, and will she ask the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to raise the matter with its counterparts in Italy?

Lucy Powell: Yet again, the hon. Gentleman raises the important matter of freedom of religion or belief in business questions. I will certainly get him answers to his question. He has asked me previously about the case of Jimmy Lai, so he might like to know that the Foreign Secretary raised that on his trip to China last week.

Sean Woodcock (Banbury) (Lab): Banbury FM provides news, music and information. Its services are in many ways much better than those provided by larger FM licence-holders. Unfortunately, Ofcom's effective veto on stations obtaining FM licences means that Banbury FM and many other independent local radio stations are accessible only via digital platforms. That deprives parts of society—especially the elderly and the isolated—access to their services. Will the Leader of the House commit to a debate on improving access to FM frequencies for independent radio stations, and on the potential for Ofcom to provide on-demand licences?

Lucy Powell: Local radio stations play a really important role in their communities. I am sure that if my hon. Friend were to apply for an Adjournment debate on the subject, it would be very well attended.

Frank McNally (Coatbridge and Bellshill) (Lab): The SNP Government have botched their attempt to deliver a national care service in Scotland. Key stakeholders, trade unions and care organisations have raised significant concerns, and local government has withdrawn support. Will my right hon. Friend make time in the near future for a statement outlining the preliminary discussions that the Department of Health and Social Care has had with stakeholders, so that the House can be assured that the national care service in England will move forward with the support of staff, service users and other relevant bodies, and not make the same shambolic mistakes that have been made in Scotland?

Lucy Powell: Social care is a devolved matter. As my hon. Friend rightly says, social care in Scotland is at breaking point because the SNP plans have failed and the national care service there is in name only. He may wish to raise that matter in the forthcoming Health and Social Care or Scotland questions.

Graeme Downie (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): Despite there being a healthy number of large supermarkets and other petrol suppliers in the city of Dunfermline, research by a group of my constituents has found that petrol there is consistently up to 5p per litre more expensive than it is when sold by the same suppliers less than 10 miles away. That harms small businesses and individuals alike. Can the Leader of the House suggest a way to examine that clustering of prices in order to ensure that businesses and individuals are treated fairly?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Competition and Markets Authority has found that competition between fuel retailers has weakened, which,

as he highlights, has had a detrimental effect on constituents such as his. I think he would get strong backing for a Backbench Business or Westminster Hall debate on that important matter.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Andy MacNae.

Andy MacNae (Rossendale and Darwen) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. After last week, I shall heed your request for speed.

Rossendale is the only local authority area in the north without any sort of rail station or commuter link, as I may have mentioned in the House before. That cuts my constituents off from opportunity and constrains the growth of east Lancashire, despite years of hard work by the borough council—with the support of the county council and myself—on its excellent and deliverable plans for a city valley rail link. Will the Leader of the House agree to grant a debate on the delivery of that link in the context of a northern rail strategy?

Lucy Powell: As the MP for a nearby constituency, I know all too well how poorly served Rossendale and Rawtenstall are by transport links. I support my hon. Friend's calls to get better transport links to his constituency. The Government are currently reviewing all that, but we are absolutely committed to supporting better northern rail links.

Jonathan Hinder (Pendle and Clitheroe) (Lab): Women affected by the changes to the state pension age continue to wait for clarity on the compensation recommended by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman in its March report. I appreciate the state that the public finances have been left in, and I acknowledge the complexity of this issue, but many of my constituents are concerned that justice is being further delayed. May we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the Government's plans to respond to the report, and will MPs be given the opportunity to debate its findings and the next steps?

Lucy Powell: As my hon. Friend knows, the ombudsman report was published in March. It is a serious report that requires serious consideration by the Government—I know that it is frustrating, but Ministers are actively doing that as we speak. Of course, once they are ready to do so, they will come to the House with a full response.

Perran Moon (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): Critical minerals are essential to our transition away from fossil fuels. Virtually 100% of the UK's critical minerals need to be imported from places as far flung as South America, the Congo, China and Australasia. Despite that, there are vast deposits of tin, lithium, manganese and tungsten here in the UK. That is a truly damning indictment of the "race to the bottom" economics of the Conservative party. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate in Government time on domestic critical mineral production?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend raises such an important issue. Critical minerals are vital to our future technology and economy. They are required for phones, wind turbines, cars, fighter jets—you name it. I think that if he were to apply for an Adjournment debate, he would get one.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call James Asser, whose patience has been noted.

James Asser (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The East London gymnastics centre in Beckton is a grassroots facility that is well used by local people and community sports groups, but it also contains national facilities used by Team GB and some of our Olympians. The facility has now been sold by its owner to a housing developer, and faces imminent closure despite a vigorous local campaign, which will have an impact on our national training facilities. Will the Leader of the House consider providing an opportunity to debate grassroots sport and what measures we can put in place to protect such facilities in future?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is last but by no means least. That development in his constituency is worrying, and I thank him for raising it. Our Team GB gymnasts and other gymnasts are the pride of our country and have always done very well, especially in recent Olympics and other games. I will certainly raise that important matter with the relevant Minister and ensure that my hon. Friend gets a reply.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): With over 50 contributions, many constituencies have been well represented.

Black History Month

12.49 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Ms Abena Oppong-Asare): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Black History Month.

I start by wishing Baroness Doreen Lawrence a very happy birthday—she is bright beacon for us all. It is a great pleasure to open the debate to mark Black History Month. I have led debates on the subject many times since 2020, but this is my first time from the Government side of the House, and as the first ever woman Minister of Ghanaian descent at the Dispatch Box.

For some of us, every month is Black History Month. Many Members cannot dis-entangle our own narratives, family trees and stories from the broader celebration of black history. It is not the stuff of dry history books; it is about vibrant family stories told around kitchen tables, and lived experiences shared by our mums, dads, aunties, uncles, grandparents and great-grandparents. I know from our previous debates that we will be hearing some of those vivid stories this afternoon.

Why do we celebrate Black History Month? We do so because black history is British history; because the lives of black Britons are the building blocks of our nation, from the Roman occupation to the Windrush generation; because history is never static, but a story constantly being told and re-told over again; and because the voices of black Britons have so often been marginalised and dismissed, ignored and overlooked. The racism and bias that our forebears faced—within the factories, the foundries, the armed services, the universities and the national health service, on the streets, and even in our homes—is made worse by historians brushing it under the carpet. This country and this House cannot overlook our complex and painful history of empire and slavery.

A key theme this year is “reclaiming the narrative,” and I pay tribute to all the families, historians, scholars, teachers and storytellers who keep the narrative alive. We have a duty of care to our ancestors; a debt of honour to the countless millions who built our economy, shaped our society and forged the nation.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on leading this important debate in Government time. The Black Cultural Archives, which I am hugely proud to say is based in my constituency on Windrush Square, is the only national organisation dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of black history in the United Kingdom. It does not currently have recognition as a national organisation. Will the Minister work with me and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that the Black Cultural Archives has that status and recognition, as well as sustainable funding, given the vital role it plays?

Ms Oppong-Asare: I thank my hon. Friend for that suggestion; she has done a lot of work in that area. I know the Black Cultural Archives really well, having visited it on many occasions over the years. I, too, am concerned, and I will be happy to work with Ministers, alongside my hon. Friend, to look at ensuring that its legacy continues.

It was a special honour to join Mr Speaker last week in Speaker’s House to mark Black History Month—it was truly a hot ticket. It was a pleasure to hear my right

hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) speak on that occasion. She reminded us of the terrible hate that black Britons faced in the 1950s and 1960s, and how working-class communities came together to protect one another when the fascists came to town. Jewish, Irish and Asian communities, as well as the settled white communities, worked alongside the African-Caribbean communities.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the Minister for leading the debate, and I think it is only fair also to commend the hon. Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) for initiating it. Does the Minister agree that the celebration of culture and heritage, as well as their accomplishments, is something that benefits everyone in our community? The strength of this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has its foundations on our ability to be British and yet to be so much more.

Ms Oppong-Asare: I completely agree. I mentioned how in the past different communities have come together alongside the African-Caribbean community, for example to fight the blackshirts, the National Front, and the British National party. These are the shoulders on which many of us stand. Alongside Bernie Grant and my fellow Ghanaian—and great friend—Lord Paul Boateng, they lit the path for so many of us to walk down.

I do not want the House to think I am only going to mention those of Ghanaian descent, even though we make the best jollof rice—do not let my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi) tell you any different. But there is one more Ghanaian person I must mention, as I always do in this month: Akyaaba Addai-Sebo, the co-ordinator of special projects for the Greater London Council, who organised the first recognition of this month in 1987. In the 1970s, he had seen the Americans celebrate black history and believed that Britain should do something similar.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend on her speech. She is doing a fantastic job and she looks amazing. I am not getting into the jollof rice argument, because I am Jamaican. She mentioned one of the founders of Black History Month, who was a constituent of mine. Does she agree that it is no coincidence that in 1987, when Black History Month was first launched by the GLC, this place also made history with the election of the first three black MPs: the Mother of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), Lord Boateng, and the late and very great Bernie Grant?

Ms Oppong-Asare: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that, and I am glad she took the cautious path by not saying that Ghanaian jollof rice is not the best—she knows it is. I echo her points and I will be paying tribute to those MPs later in my speech.

The stories we will hear this afternoon are our stories. We have come a long way since the 1980s, when we first celebrated Black History Month. We celebrate the trailblazers today. I have mentioned the first black Mother of the House, the first black Minister and Cabinet Minister, Paul Boateng, and Baroness Lawrence. I must also mention Baroness Amos in the other place, who became the first black woman to serve in Cabinet. She is from my area, the borough of Bexley, and inspires me

every day. Of course, no one political party has a monopoly on trailblazers; I know that Opposition Members will want to mention the black trailblazers from their own parties and political traditions.

Since the general election in July, we can celebrate the most diverse Parliament in our history, making this House look and sound far closer to the diverse communities we represent. Such representation matters. If the nation's children look at our Parliament and do not see women and men who look and sound like them, then they will assume that Parliament is not of them or for them; they will assume that the rulers are one thing and the ruled something else. I do not need to tell the House how damaging that is to democracy, or how populists thrive and democracies die. It is not about ticking boxes; it is about ballot boxes.

I said we have come a long way—and we have—but the path of progress does not run straight and true. Progress can be reversed and set back. Social media provides a new platform for old hatreds. The scourge of racism is given new life through social media—each one of us faces it every day online. In our communities too, racism is real, and the struggle against it is real. It is not just overt racism; it is also the damaging effect of racism in our institutions. It is the routine micro-aggressions that black MPs and black staff face every day, and the hateful language in parts of our media. It is when the successful black business executive is mistaken for the cleaner, when the qualified jobseeker is blocked because of their surname, or when the political candidate is told, “This seat is not for the likes of you.”

That is why this Government are committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity as part of our mission-led Government, and why we strive for opportunity for all in education, work, public life, and in every community and part of the UK. I believe that the Government's wide-ranging legislative programme will start to address many of the injustices that scar our society. The Bill on equality in race and disability will introduce mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting for employers with over 250 employees. We will reform the Mental Health Act 1983. Currently, black people are 3.5 times more likely than white people to be detained under that Act, and over seven times more likely to be subject to a community treatment order. We must urgently address this issue.

We will also tackle the abhorrent maternal health gap. In England, the risk of maternal death is nearly three times as high for black women and twice as high for Asian women as it is for white women. It is a grave injustice that there are such stark inequalities in maternal outcomes, and this Government are committed to closing the maternal mortality gap.

In so many other areas, the Government are making changes that will improve lives. Earlier in my speech, I mentioned the Windrush generation; we have been calling for justice for those treated so terribly by previous Governments, including the full implementation of the recommendations of the Wendy Williams review. I have called for that in the House multiple times, and I am pleased that today, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has announced that the Government will fulfil their manifesto commitments in full. We will appoint a Windrush commissioner to oversee compensation and act as a trusted voice; we will establish a new Windrush unit in the Home Office to drive things forward; and we

[Ms Oppong-Asare]

are injecting £1.5 million into a programme of grant funding for organisations to support people's applications for compensation. This will speed up and clarify processes that have been shamefully slow and difficult. We will continue to listen to the voices of Windrush, honour their contribution to this country and seek redress for the scandal that has engulfed so many of them. At last—after too long—the Windrush generation will see some measure of justice.

I am proud to open this debate, but I am not satisfied with where we are. We have a long way to go. Yes, I am interested in black history, but I am also interested in black futures. That is why we need lasting change, real reform, solid progress, and a never-ending quest for justice.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Minister.

1.1 pm

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I, too, wish Baroness Lawrence a very happy birthday.

I congratulate the Minister on such a positive opening speech. How wonderful it is to have this discussion in the main Chamber! I have been working with the hon. Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) on the all-party women in Parliament event, and I am delighted that joint working between Government Front Benchers and Back Benchers has brought this debate to the Chamber today. I am particularly pleased to see the number of people who are keen to be here on a Thursday—that is fantastic, and I look forward to the contributions from across the House.

The theme of this year's Black History Month is reclaiming narratives, and it is vital for every member of society to recognise the achievements of black Britons and the contributions they have made to our country and to the world. All of us as MPs have amazing constituents and friends who educate and inspire us, and that will be highlighted in today's debate. It takes me back to my best friend from school, Genevieve. She educated me about what it was like to flee her country, Uganda, with just a passport, and what it had meant to her and her future to go through such a harrowing time with her family.

We need only look across the fields of sport, entertainment, culture and politics to see how much of a contribution black Britons are making. We see that most clearly in today's celebration. I agree with the Minister that looking forward to the future is vital, but Black History Month takes us back to the 1980s, which was when my friend Genevieve and I met. It was established in 1987, and not only has it grown as a movement; it has led to real debate and reflection. I am sure that this House will do it justice this afternoon, and that we will note just how far the UK has come and how different it is as a country from when Black History Month was established. We have heard from the Minister about the historic moment when three black MPs were elected to this House in the 1987 general election, and the difference that made. The right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) was elected in that year, and we celebrate her being the Mother of this House.

As for my party, the oldest political party in the western world, the fact that we could be led by a black woman is a testament to the arc of change that we have seen—that is no doubt in part due to the trailblazing of the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington—and, indeed, she would be our fourth female leader, although there is another one available. [Laughter.] You know what I mean. Other members of the black or mixed-race heritage community have joined our Benches, and there are some we dearly miss. Bim Afolami, in particular, made an important contribution in this place for our party. As the Minister said, looking at the Chamber today and at Prime Minister's questions, we can see the breadth of representation. I think it is fair to say, despite where we are as a party, that there is more to do, and we are all keen to inspire that work and to work together on it.

Turning to the contribution in the field of sport, people can just watch any football match to see black Britons making their mark. Whether it is Sterling, Saka or Rashford, these are household names in the English team, although I will show my age by admitting that my favourite is Ian Wright.

Marsha De Cordova: As the hon. Lady is talking about sport and football, it is only right that I pay tribute to my brother, who is a premier league footballer—Bobby Reid-De Cordova. He is doing an incredible job, and I am incredibly proud of him because of what he demonstrates, not just on the pitch but in the communities within which he has served.

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Lady for that contribution—I have a brother myself of whom I am extremely proud, so I get that. There is something slightly less competitive in that relationship sometimes. I pay tribute to him and his work, and, above all, his skill.

Dave Robertson (Lichfield) (Lab): If we are talking about footballers, can we remember people such as Alex Scott, who is a trailblazer for the women's game, as well as those from the men's game?

Mims Davies: I will be coming on to that in my remarks. As a former Sports Minister, I am absolutely focused on highlighting the women's game and, above all, making sure that sport is not niche when it comes to reporting on women and their achievements—that it is literally a fair and level playing field—so I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Of course, it is with a note of sadness that we need to remember one pioneer of black sport, Alford Gardner, who died earlier this month. Prior to his death, he was one of only two surviving Windrush passengers, and he was recognised at the Pride of Britain awards for his work establishing the first Caribbean cricket club in the UK. As Sports Minister, I was keen to encourage representation and further opportunity, particularly for football managers, and to work with the beautiful game on those things—if you cannot see it, can you believe that you can get there? I still think there is more to do.

We rightly herald the voyage of the Empire Windrush as the start of the story when it comes to truly understanding black history in the UK. I thank the Minister for her update to the House on what is being done to support the community.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): There is one cohort that it would be nice to hear mentioned by the Front Benchers: the black warriors who came to this country to fight in two world wars, and particularly to fight the Nazis in the second world war. I commend to people on both sides of the House with an interest in this subject the book “The Eighth Passenger” by the late Miles Tripp, which prominently features Flight Sergeant Harry McCalla. He was the rear gunner in his Lancaster and flew dozens of perilous missions; he survived, and Members can read about what happened after the war. We need to salute, in both senses of the word, those people who came to fight the Nazis.

Mims Davies: Hear, hear! A little further on in my speech, I will mention some of that, but I have certainly learned even more from my right hon. Friend.

James Asser (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): The hon. Lady mentioned the importance of the Windrush generation and the Windrush story to the start of the story of Black History Month. My constituency is one of the most diverse in the country, and long has been. In the 1920s, we had the biggest black population in London, but our black history prior to the second world war is often forgotten. Does she agree that we need to do more to celebrate, and to remind people and teach them about, that longer history?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and I think that point makes the importance of today’s debate apparent. We on the Opposition Benches and all MPs in this House are so keen to champion our constituents and what we know of them, and he has given us another a great example.

To turn to our NHS, 7.4% of people employed in the NHS are black people. Indeed, when faced with acute staff shortages, the Government called on Caribbean women to fill those gaps: 5,000 were working on hospital wards within 10 years, and by the 1970s two thirds of student nurses and midwives originated from the Caribbean. The Minister rightly talked about health disparities, and the massive focus we must have on them, whether in maternal health—that was raised at the birth trauma event just this week—the menopause, or in understanding intersectionality. Professor Laura Serrant used her very moving poem “You Called...and We came” to point out what we owe to the generations of black people who came from overseas and have given and continue to give the best of their lives—and, indeed, their food and culture—to this country, as well as having really added to our labour market.

We know that the experience of black people in this country has been long, and at times complex and difficult, but we know that the more we learn and the more we work together, the more that is changing. In fact, the first black MP is believed to have been elected back in 1767. Many will know the story of Mary Seacole and her remarkable role in the Crimean war, which we now understand and celebrate much more. Such an awareness, as has been raised already in the Chamber today, is key.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) said, in our darkest hours we have turned to our friends to support us, and it is estimated that 16,000 Caribbean men stepped up and fought for Britain during the second world war, while half a million Africans served in both combative and

non-combative roles during the same conflict. One long overdue narrative we must talk about is that 800 million people from the Commonwealth stood together against the greatest evil of racism that has ever been known, and the Minister alluded to that in her speech. As we know, contemporary attitudes have sometimes airbrushed many black British stories out of our history and our understanding, so challenging and understanding such narratives continues, sadly, to be very important.

While we accept and celebrate the progress, it is very important that we continue to challenge any complacency, and while we reflect on the changes we have seen, we need to do more. In fact, appalling racism and abuse were displayed in the 2021 Euro finals—not that long ago—and I applaud and thank the charities and groups that continue to stand up against this abhorrent abuse. There is an opportunity with the Online Safety Act 2023 to continue to work with social media companies to crack down on racist abuse and make it clear that it has no place in this country.

To conclude, as a Minister in the Government Equalities Office, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, I focused on young people and social mobility, arguing that their postcode, what they look like, their background and their network should never hold them back. We should all continue to work incredibly hard to tackle racist abuse and make sure that we fix the long-standing racial disparities, so the Minister has my support and my party’s support on this. I am particularly proud that, when we left office, we had delivered 62 of the 74 actions in the British action plan on racial disparities. However, as the Minister said, there is more to do.

I look forward to the contributions of Members in this important debate, as we celebrate Black History Month in this House and, importantly, look to the future.

1.15 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent East) (Lab): It is a pleasure and a privilege to take part in this debate on the Floor of the House in Government time for the first time ever. I thank the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for East Grinstead and Uckfield (Mims Davies) for her excellent speech. It is a pleasure to co-chair the all-party parliamentary group on women in Parliament. Talking about footballers, Raheem Sterling is from Brent—a proud Brent boy—as is Rachel Yankey, and they do amazing things in the community.

I thank the Minister for her moving and excellent speech. I am sure the Nigerians would disagree about jollof rice, but I will try not to get too involved in that. As she said, she is the first woman of Ghanaian decent at the Dispatch Box. I remember that when I stood at that Dispatch Box in 2009, and I was the first black woman ever to stand there as a Government Minister, it was so moving and I almost felt as though I had the weight of history on my shoulders. I congratulate her on that, and also on the Windrush announcement. That is a phenomenal announcement, and a lot of people today will be very grateful for it. I would like to thank Wendy Williams, Jacqueline McKenzie, Martin Forde and Patrick Vernon for all the work they have done on Windrush.

Reclaiming narratives is important for this Black History Month, because it is not about explaining black history, but about reclaiming some of the narratives out

[Dawn Butler]

there changing some of the assumptions. I always remember a teacher saying to me at school, “Don’t assume, because when you ‘assume’ you make an ‘ass’ out of ‘u’ and ‘me’.” When I met Pam, whose family owned a cotton farm in Mississippi for over 100 years, I was expecting all these stories about uprisings and everything, and she just told me about the entrepreneurship, the sustainability and the fair pay. I was so enthralled by her story—mytunika.com—that I purchased the shirt I am wearing today, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) for helping me iron it.

The thing about business is that it is easy for someone to make huge profits if they do not have to pay people, if they do not have to provide accommodation, if they do not have to treat them fairly and if they can treat them as if they are nobody. No one with a conscience or any compassion would say that is a good business model, but six years ago, in 2018, I received a message, as did everybody else in the country, to inform me that we had finished paying the reparations owed. The message said:

“The amount of money borrowed for the Slavery Abolition Act was so large that it wasn’t paid off until 2015. Which means that living British citizens helped pay to end the slave trade.”

I was absolutely shocked when I received that message. I thought, “I won’t consent to my taxpayer’s money paying slave owners compensation.” The British Government paid £20 million, which was 5% of GDP at the time, and that is now the equivalent of about £100 billion. This money was paid to compensate slave owners for lost capital associated with freeing slaves—40% of the UK’s budget. So there is a precedent for paying reparations for slavery; it has just been paid to the wrong people.

Marsha De Cordova: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her speech, and I must say her shirt is lovely. She is making a vital point about reparations, and does she agree that while it is important that we look to the future, we must also have that discussion about reparations, because both she and I are descendants of those who were enslaved?

Dawn Butler: I thank my hon. Friend. I understand that the Prime Minister has said we have to look to the future and that he is dealing with 14 years of corruption and mismanagement by the Conservative Government, but we do have to consider reparations because it is the right thing to do. This question makes me wonder whether it would ever be conceivable that this decision would be made today. Would we pay traffickers for their loss of trade? Would we pay pimps for their loss of trade? It is a ridiculous assertion.

So I thought to myself, who made this decision and how was it made? Obviously, it was made in Parliament. Back then there were no women, no black people, no people of colour; it was just white men and they made that decision. And we only finished paying nine years ago, so it is still very current.

While the British Government have not disclosed a complete list of the recipient individuals and firms of bonds related to compensation for slaves, researchers at University College London have compiled a list of over 46,000 current individuals and groups who have received Government payouts related to the abolition of slavery.

Many powerful British families, including current business and political elites in the United Kingdom, are among the recipients uncovered by the UCL team. So when we hear the arguments that to make our money—to make our millions—we just have to work hard and pull ourselves up by our boot straps, that is not quite the full story. That is why the narrative needs to be reset, and structures created in order to uphold a white supremacist view need to be revisited and restructured.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Clapham and Brixton Hill) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for her fantastic speech. As she will know, a number of people are calling for reparations, including Members of this House; there is an all-party parliamentary group for Afrikan reparations of which she is a member. Does she agree there should be a discussion about the different ways in which people want reparations to be paid? People have heard about large sums of money and have got scared, but they have not thought about all the different ways, such as through environmental or educational reparations, that we could go about repairing the sheer imbalance of equality that we as a country created by taking part in the enslavement and trafficking and colonisation of other countries. There are many different ways in which we could support those we so seriously disadvantaged, and does my hon. Friend agree that everybody should come along to the APPG conference this Sunday, 27 October, if they would like to hear more?

Dawn Butler: I thank my hon. Friend for her excellent plug for the conference on Sunday, and I will be there. The thing about resetting the narrative is that we have to learn. We have to educate ourselves, and there is nothing wrong in that. There is also nothing wrong in changing our mind. There is nothing wrong in having one position and then learning something new and understanding—for instance that reparations is not just about money—and then changing our mind.

Slavery destroyed the African economy. It stripped Africa of its people and also stripped Africa of its riches. There is a narrative that Africa is poor because of corruption and we must help these poor African children. I would like to change that narrative and say that Africa is rich. Africa is rich in natural resources ranging from arable land, water, oil and natural gas to minerals, forests and wildlife. The continent holds a huge proportion of the world’s natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable. Africa is home to some 30% of the world’s mineral reserves, 8% of the world’s natural gas, 12% of the world’s natural oil reserves, 40% of the world’s gold and up to 90% of its chromium and platinum. It has the largest reserves of cobalt, diamonds, platinum and uranium and 10% of the planet’s internal renewable fresh water source. So I want everybody to consider the narrative that Africa is rich and it has had its wealth stolen.

Africa is also a net creditor to the rest of the world. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clapham and Brixton Hill (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) said, there are lots of big numbers being mentioned such as that \$777 trillion needs to be paid in reparations. Most recently Dr Michael Banner, dean of Trinity College Cambridge, claimed Britain owed £205 billion in reparations. Patrick Robinson, leading judge at the International Court of Justice, declared that the UK should pay \$24 trillion for its involvement in slavery. There are a lot of figures and

that is a lot of money, but at the end of the day some things will be easy to compensate. It is not just about money. We could give back artefacts and the bodies of freedom fighters and stolen jewels and precious metals wherever they may be. We could make good the land and seas ruined by oil spills, correct the education of history, compensate land and home owners, and cancel the debt. There are lots of things that can be done to make sure we have reparations.

I realise that it is complicated to calculate what is owed, but we must not forget that in order for slavery to continue people put a number on other people's lives; people were sold for money. If it could be done then, it can be done now.

The first homo sapiens on earth—modern humans—are thought to have evolved in Africa around 300,000 years ago, and it is fascinating reading about the different continents and about Africa and the middle stone age and how they developed different tools and painting and where they came from. It led me to write a poem about being of the first ones that seems to have upset quite a few racists, and I say to them that they should not scroll through my social media feed unless they want to get upset.

This is my poem.

So you wanted to see me broken

Head bowed and tears in my eyes

More fool you you didn't realise my strength is powered by your lies.

You are the wrong one

The violent one

The weird one

Whereas I, I am the chosen one of the first ones

You see this skin I am in

This beautiful mahogany brown

This skin you don't like I believe

So why try so hard to achieve

By burning yourself by the sun

For me there is no need

Because I am the chosen one

I am of the first ones

I know I am black and beautiful

An African freedom fighter

My skin is my protection

And you my friend don't matter.

Because I am the chosen one

As I am of the first ones

So you wanted to see me broken

Head bowed and tears in my eyes

More fool you, you haven't realised

My strength is despite your lies.

No one should shy away from the truth even if it hurts and is painful. Slavery has always been wrong, and that is why we have a modern slavery Bill which has started in the other place. We should remind ourselves that knowing the truth is not the same as hate. This is not hate speech; this is love speech. This is the way we right the wrongs of the past and look forward to the future.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Liberal Democrats spokesperson Josh Babarinde.

1.28 pm

Josh Babarinde (Eastbourne) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) for that amazing tribute and that awesome poem, and I also thank those on the Front Benches who have spoken so far to celebrate Black History Month. I join in paying birthday wishes to Baroness Doreen Lawrence, and as far as the jollof question is concerned, as a Nigerian I will come to that later.

As the first black person ever elected as a Liberal Democrat MP—[*Interruption.*] About time indeed; better late than never. It is an honour to stand here to mark Black History Month. The theme of Black History Month this year is reclaiming narratives and I cannot think of a more pertinent time in recent history to be pursuing that endeavour. People may look at what happened after Saka missed that goal at the Euros, after the riots this year and after the spikes in hate crime, and feel that our country is not what it once was. They may feel that our country is unwelcoming or is closed, but I say to them that Britain is far more than the divisive minority found in some corners of this country and indeed in some corners of this House. At our core, we are an open, tolerant and multicultural country that is enriched, not compromised, by diversity.

Eastbourne's black community are a shining example of that diversity and contribution. I will highlight some of their contributions today, not least because I was born and bred in the wonderful town that I now represent. I will not describe my family, because that is cheating, but I will talk about someone who certainly feels like family: Jenny Williams. Jenny is the first black woman ever elected to Eastbourne borough council since it was established in 1859. Jenny's career working to diversify the arts, whether through the Arts Council, her organisation Take the Space or many vehicles in between, has helped to change the landscape in the arts at a grassroots and national level, and our town and country are much richer for it.

I am also proud to pay tribute to Solomon Berhane, a fellow Eastbournian and the inspirational headteacher at St Catherine's college. He has been an Eastbourne lad since coming to the UK aged 4. Like me, he is a Hampden Park boy, having attended local schools, and he now leads one. He is a role model not just for black children in Eastbourne, but for all children in my town.

Marie Baker runs EurAfro World, the specialist salon to which people travel from far and wide to experience the magic of Marie's hairdressing. She runs far more than a salon, though. It has essentially become a community—a space that is oozing with heart, laughs and the juiciest of conversation. If people want to go anywhere for gossip in Eastbourne, they need to go to EurAfro World.

We are also home to the amazing Dante Hutchinson, who is a pro scooter rider. He is a four-time UK scooter champion and a one-time world champion, and he has inspired a generation of young people into the sport. He does Eastbourne so proud.

The last Eastbournian I will pay tribute to today is Mebrak, whose tenacious work for Eastbourne through Diversity Resource International has supported black communities in my town and beyond—including, I think,

[Josh Babarinde]

in your constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker—through research, translation and support for black carers. I thank Mebrak today, too.

From my seaside home to this riverside House, there is much to celebrate. This is the most ethnically diverse Parliament ever. I will take this opportunity to pay tribute to the journeys that those folks of colour, particularly those black folks, have made in coming to this House. I recognise those who have sought to lift those black voices and bring them to this House, too. I am thinking of the likes of Operation Black Vote, the non-profit organisation that supports ethnic minorities to engage with and seek roles in civic life. OBV's magistrates programme has seen dozens of black people contribute their experience and expertise to our criminal justice system, enhancing our court system's capacity to dispense justice with fairness and equality.

Particularly close to my heart is OBV's MP shadowing scheme and the Pathway to Success programme, which have supported so many to get a taste of what MP life is like. Many alumni of that programme are now Members of this place: my friend the hon. Member for Croydon East (Natasha Irons) is one, and I am another. I thank the man, the myth, the legend that is Lord Simon Woolley in the other place—the godfather of black British politics—for his decades of work to help make that happen. How could I forget our very own black fairy godmother of British politics, Baroness Floella Benjamin, who sits, pride of place, on the Liberal Democrat Benches in the other place?

Within my own party, it has meant a lot to have been part of the Stellar programme, which has supported me in my journey, first as a candidate and then as an MP, to break through the glass ceiling that the people of Eastbourne smashed so awesomely to the tune of 52% on 4 July. I am also proud of the Lib Dem campaign for race equality, headed up by Mohsin Khan and the amazing Roderick Lynch, to whom I send my best wishes, and the Lib Dem racial diversity campaign, led by Chris French, for the work that they have all done to support black people to stand for council and for this place. We have had inspirational councillors elected—Nancy Jirira, Tumi Hawkins, Ade Adeyemo and so many more. I know that other parties have equivalent schemes. Their work is super important in helping us to go even further in the next Parliament.

Black achievement in this place does not begin or end in this Chamber or the other place. I am so proud to work in this building alongside so many black House staff, without whom we can all agree this place would grind to a halt overnight. There are too many to pay individual tribute to in just one speech, but let me name just two, who I believe are watching, because Jennifer King in the Members' Tea Room has arranged for them to slip away from behind the counter. They are Margaret and Godfrey. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

The first time I walked into the Members' Tea Room, I was a nervous, brand-new MP days into the job. Then came Margaret, who knew my name, knew where I was from and took me under her wing. She gave me the biggest hug—and then, swiftly, came her and Godfrey's rightful mocking that I, as a man with Nigerian blood, cannot tolerate spicy jollof. It makes me an awful half-Nigerian. Grandma, I am so sorry!

Adam Jogee (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): I am pleased that the hon. Member has mentioned Margaret and Godfrey. Just to reassure them, there is as much love for both of them on the Labour Benches as there is on the Liberal Democrat Benches.

Josh Babarinde: I am sure they heard that loud and clear, and I thank the hon. Member for his intervention. Seriously, the response of folks like Margaret, Godfrey and many others has made me feel more welcome than so many other things could have in this House. I put on the record my thanks to them for their warmth, humour and generosity.

This House has come far, but there is still some work to do. I reflect on an anecdote, which I have permission to tell, involving me and my friend the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Ben Obese-Jecty). Some Members can see where this is going.

It was week one or two for us as new MPs. I was sat in Portcullis House, and the hon. Member came up to me and asked, "Are you Josh?" I said, "Yeah, I am." He said, "I'm Ben, and I know that you're Josh, because three people have mistaken me for you already. Has anyone mistaken you for me?" I said, "No, mate, sorry." [Laughter.] I jinxed it, because later that day it happened. I bumped into the hon. Member and said it was 3-1. We exchanged numbers. The following day, I received a message: "4-1".

I was then out and about in my constituency at Airborne, which is the world's largest free seafront airshow, held in what is officially the sunniest town in the UK. Some folks may know that the hon. Member for Huntingdon has a distinguished career in the armed forces. Somebody came up to me at Airborne and said, "It is so fantastic to see you. Great stuff. I'm really inspired by you—", and I thought, "Oh wow, that is really kind." Then they said, "And all the work you did in the Army." I thought, "Oh my gosh, in my own constituency!" It then became 4-2, and I think it now stands at 4-3.

This House has come far, and the country has come so far, and I am not prepared to let a group of unpatriotic folks in the minority take us way back. We have some serious work to do to take things forward. We need to address the disproportionate use of stop and search. We need to tackle the disproportionate levels of incarceration: 26% of the youth custody population is black, compared with just 6% elsewhere. The fact that black men are twice as likely as other men to get prostate cancer is something else that we need to address. We also need to tackle the fact that maternal mortality is almost four times higher among black women than among white women, and we need to secure justice for the Windrush generation.

Charlie Maynard (Witney) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend for his fantastic speech, and I thank all the other Members who have spoken for theirs. They have really struck a chord.

The Windrush flows through the town of Witney and the rest of my constituency. The Empire Windrush was named after the river, so many in my constituency have a connection, which they honour, to that boat, which brought so many people to this country. I think many people in the constituency remember that everybody was invited—we in this country asked for help at the end of world war two, and that help was given—but too many in this country forget that. Black History Month does a great service in reminding us who asked for help.

I also want to give credit to the Government, because the Windrush compensation scheme—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. Both of us cannot be standing, and I am not going to be seated. You need to sit when I am standing. This is an intervention, not a speech, so I have no doubt that you are coming to a conclusion.

Charlie Maynard: I am. I thank the Government for their Windrush compensation scheme improvements, and I look forward to their moving much more speedily than the previous Government in delivering them.

Josh Babarinde: My hon. Friend's point is very well made. I welcome the news that a Windrush commissioner will be appointed to help address the injustice that my hon. Friend so eloquently discussed.

I hope that I have illustrated, by spotlighting black excellence, what wonder and opportunity await us as we lift our black community. I wish to reclaim the narrative that a rising tide of racial equality truly lifts all ships. It is incumbent on all of us in this House to play our part in making that happen.

Madam Deputy Speaker: First, because I want to continue having my breakfast in the Tea Room, I wish to pay tribute to Godfrey and Margaret. Secondly, there is no doubt that anybody watching the debate will see so many trailblazers and people making history, and it is fantastic for me to be in the Chair to witness that too. I call the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee.

1.42 pm

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the first black Liberal Democrat MP, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde). We have talked about historical trailblazers, but we are all privileged to serve alongside trailblazers like him.

I want to talk about another trailblazer. It is such a joy to see the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Ms Oppong-Asare), take her place and her space at the Government Dispatch Box. I congratulate her on making such an awesome speech. We were long overdue seeing a woman of Ghanaian descent at that Dispatch Box. I think we can all agree: what a woman! *[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]*

We are surrounded by inspirations. It was a real honour to be able to listen to and learn from my hon. Friend the Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler). Yes, black fashion should be shown at its best and in all its glory, which is why I was happy to offer my very limited skills with an iron today.

It has been a privilege to hear the powerful contributions of colleagues so far. Black History Month is always a time when I know I will learn something new, hear something from a different perspective and share a fire and a renewed commitment to right far too many wrongs. Yes, Black History Month is a celebration—of course it is—but black history has been scarred by injustice. Sadly, that injustice is not confined to the history books; it is the lived experience of many of our colleagues and the people we represent. If we do not act, it will be the experience of future generations as well.

Not only are these disparities not confined to the history books, but they are not confined to one area of life. From work to pay, from education to health, all areas of society need to improve to ensure that we stop history repeating itself and ensure that equality is consistently aimed for and one day, hopefully in our lifetime, actually delivered.

We know of many brilliant black campaigners who have devoted their lives to campaigning for equality in this country, from the Bristol bus boycott campaigners Paul Stephenson and Roy Hackett to Baroness Lawrence, but we also know that far too many have died waiting to see the change that they need and deserve. At least 53 people who were victims of the Windrush scandal have died waiting for compensation for the injustice that saw the Home Office wrongfully deny British citizens, mostly from the Caribbean, access to work, healthcare and benefits. In the worst cases, people were threatened with deportation despite not only having the right to live in the UK but, as has been mentioned, playing an integral part in rebuilding our country after the war.

As the Minister said, our history and black history are intertwined. The Windrush generation should have been cause for gratitude, not scandal and hostility. Commitments to re-establish the Home Office's Windrush unit and appoint a Windrush commissioner are incredibly welcome, but we also need assurances that lessons have genuinely been learned and that any future changes to immigration law will ensure that we never see another iteration of the Windrush scandal. I would welcome further detail on how the Home Office is working with victims to speed up the delivery of compensation to those who are still waiting.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Brent East excellently outlined, black people face inequalities throughout their lives, in healthcare, employment, access to services and opportunity, to name just a few examples. That has been a focus of the Women and Equalities Committee, and I hope it will continue to be. In 2023, the Committee reported on black maternal health inequalities following the release of data showing that black women were more likely than white women to die in childbirth. Worryingly, the Committee found that black women were more likely to experience treatment that fell below acceptable levels and lacked dignity and respect, and that the needs of the patient were often ignored.

I have been lucky to meet inspirational campaigners such as Tinuke and Clo from Five X More. They continue to work with black families and healthcare providers to secure improvements, but change is too slow. In his recent review, Lord Darzi found that inequalities in maternity care persist, noting that black women are still almost three times as likely as white women to die in childbirth. That is not to mention the racism that many black healthcare workers have reported facing in their jobs and institutions. It sadly comes as no surprise to anyone that in any workplace, if you are black, you have to work much harder to progress and face additional burdens and discrimination.

Fear of discrimination can prevent black women from seeking support from their employer during times such as the menopause, making it difficult for women to access appropriate support or have their symptoms taken seriously. There is a double whammy of being an older woman and a black woman, and the Committee

[Sarah Owen]

found that, as a result of that intersectionality, the difficulties faced by women undergoing the menopause were compounded for black women.

In September, I participated in a panel event organised by the Labour African Network discussing healthcare inequalities in the UK. I was struck by many of the contributions, but particularly by those of Davina Brown, a race ambassador in the GMB union—I declare an interest as a member—and a leader in the area of empowering black women in the workplace. She noted that black women face more criticism and insecurity in work than their white colleagues. In the NHS, the largest employer of women in the public sector, depending on the NHS trust, black women can be up to four times more likely to be involved in disciplinary proceedings.

Healthcare is not the only industry where the intersectionality of gender and race means that women sadly face additional barriers to protections, support and progress. As has been mentioned, black women are woefully under-represented in popular Olympic sports such as swimming, diving and cycling, as are black men, leading to a vicious circle where children grow up finding it hard to envisage themselves competing in those areas. As we heard from the Minister, if we do not see ourselves in others in positions of power or success, how can we envisage that for ourselves? We must have stronger pathways that specifically encourage black girls and young women to realise their potential and follow their ambitions in sport.

In football, we see a much more diverse picture; many of the current England men's team are from black or mixed heritage backgrounds. However, the way they are treated by the press and the public—a notable example being the players who missed penalties in the 2021 men's Euros final—shows the huge risk posed to those who play at the highest and most visible level. In women's football, the diversity in English players leaves much more to be desired. I am grateful for the Football Association's investment in reaching girls from diverse backgrounds, including through its Discover My Talent programme. However, with black and mixed race players held to much higher standards of behaviour than their white counterparts, and at greater risk of online hate, many of us worry how their future talents will be received.

The music industry is another area where equality is desperately lacking. In its report "Misogyny in music" last year, the Women and Equalities Committee heard evidence that black women are often overlooked for promotions and have their qualifications questioned. How many times have brilliant black MPs in this Chamber had to justify why they are here, been told that they are in the wrong lift, been confused with other MPs or even been handed a handbag to carry? I would have hoped that things would be different in areas such as sports and the arts that are so much more diverse and so much younger than politics, but even there, progress is far too slow. Data from Black Lives in Music shows that black women in the music industry are on average paid the least, and that they are paid 25% less than white women—that is shocking, but wait for the next one—and 52% less than white men. Nearly half of the black women the group corresponded with said that their mental wellbeing had significantly worsened in the music industry, and a fifth sought counselling because of racial abuse.

As a result of the inquiry, the Committee called for section 14 of the Equality Act 2010, which provides protection from discrimination on the basis of a combination of two relevant protected characteristics, to be brought into force, as well as for the introduction of ethnicity pay gap reporting. It is very welcome that the new Labour Government have committed to introducing both measures. We look forward to scrutinising progress in the year ahead, but any update the Minister has on those two vital commitments—ethnicity pay gap reporting and intersectionality protections—would always be welcome.

That is where I want to end, on hope—on the hope that things will not always stay the same, and that we can move forward together. As Charisse Beaumont, chief executive of Black Lives in Music, told the Committee,

"Unless we break or tackle racial discrimination, we cannot really tackle everything else".

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Ben Obese-Jecty.

1.53 pm

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for someone recognising the difference between me and my friend the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde)!

I do not like talking about race. I do not like talking about the colour of someone's skin, with the innuendo that often accompanies it, not because it is awkward and not for any lack of pride or identity, but simply because it is so rare for the context to be positive, as well as because of the inevitable abuse from those on the left that follows any contribution from Conservative Members. Sometimes the distance between the two sides of this Chamber is far greater than just two swords' lengths.

My father met my mother in 1969 when they were teenagers, he the son of the Stool Chief of Apirede-Akuapem, Nana Oboni Ayim Nyarko III, she a white girl from West Sussex who worked in the local bank. Neither of them was a toolmaker or worked for the NHS, but I doubt that anyone will be surprised to learn that 1969 was not the cultural epoch of inter-racial relationships. It was hard—much harder than anything that I have ever had to go through. They faced prejudice that I could never imagine. But, as one might expect, they had the strength to persevere, and I am hugely proud of them because they are still together. This Christmas eve, it will be 55 years since they met, and they are still going strong. They blazed a trail that I, and thousands like me, have been able to follow. They never asked for any recognition or, I am sure, expected to receive any, but they absolutely grizzed it out, and I would not be standing here today if they had not lasted the course. Reclaiming the narrative started with their story and others like theirs.

Too often, we talk about life as a black Briton through the filter of injustice. We obsess over slavery and reparations, over grievances and micro-aggressions, over systemic and institutional racism. We unintentionally drip feed an invective of nihilistic victimhood and exculpable underachievement, and then we wonder why some find it so easy to look down on the black population, and why some within it are so unwilling to do their share of the heavy lifting.

We risk reinforcing a "them and us" narrative that tells black Britons that they are second-class citizens. We lazily accept a media landscape that revels in promoting

the very worst aspects of black culture, repeatedly valorising criminality and violent gangs and exploiting negative stereotypes for commercial gain, without ever really holding to account the companies that happily do so. It is one of the contributing factors to the milieu that feeds concerns around stop and search on the one hand, and children carrying knives on the other. It is for all of us in this House to reclaim that narrative, recognising that it is not the historic narrative that we are saddled with, but a current one to which we are voluntarily yoked.

We have a responsibility in this House, whether we like it or not, to be role models for those who follow us. We who have the confidence, the talent or the simple good fortune to find ourselves in this place have shown that race need no longer be a barrier to success. We must recognise that. Reclaiming the narrative starts with those of us who are privileged enough to be a visible representation of what is possible. Not through all-black shortlists or well-meaning but clumsily implemented pushes to increase diversity that inevitably come at someone else's expense, but because we earned it. I would never want to think that my success was in any way manufactured because somebody took pity on me because I am not white. Nor would I want that for anybody else.

Being black does not stop anyone from being selected in a rural Conservative seat, being the London mayoral candidate or running for the leadership of historically the most successful political party in the world. I am hugely proud to be British, to have served in the British Army and to be here now on the green Benches. I hope that others can feel that this country is one that they are proud to serve, too.

Generously, I will leave the last word to the Labour party, and in particular to the first black Cabinet Minister, Lord Boateng, on his promotion to Chief Secretary to the Treasury:

"My colour is part of me but I do not choose to be defined by my colour."

For me, as somebody who does not like to talk about their race, that is one sentiment that makes the gap between the two sides of the House a little less than two swords' length.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): We now come to a maiden speech from Liam Conlon.

1.57 pm

Liam Conlon (Beckenham and Penge) (Lab): I congratulate the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Ms Oppong-Asare), who has been a friend of mine for many years, on securing the debate. This is the first time we have had a Black History Month debate in Government time. We are incredibly proud of her and everything that she is doing. I thank those who have spoken so far—my hon. Friend the Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler), the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde), my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) and the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Ben Obese-Jecty)—for their brilliant contributions.

It is an honour to make my maiden speech in Black History Month, and I know that this debate will be welcomed by many of my constituents in Beckenham and Penge. We are proud of notable locals such as former children's TV presenter Baroness Benjamin of

Beckenham, Windrush lawyer and campaigner Jacqueline McKenzie, and my friend Michelle De Leon, the CEO and founder of World Afro Day.

Beckenham and Penge is a new constituency, so I have two predecessors I would like to thank. Colonel Bob Stewart served Beckenham for 14 years. He also served our country as the commander of UN forces in Bosnia, where he was deservedly awarded the distinguished service order. I would like to extend my very best wishes to Bob and his family.

I would also like to thank my good friend the Minister without Portfolio, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham West and East Dulwich (Ellie Reeves). She has served our communities in Penge, Clock House and Crystal Palace with an unrivalled dedication for the past seven years, and she leaves a strong legacy that I will strive to build on. It would be remiss of me to mention one of the Reeves sisters without paying tribute to our new Chancellor, who is the first female Chancellor. The Chancellor and the Minister without Portfolio both attended Cator Park School for Girls in Penge. When I visit local schools, I always talk about them—they are an inspiration to so many girls and young women in my constituency, and we are incredibly proud of them.

When Colonel Bob Stewart made his maiden speech, he described Beckenham by saying:

"Politically, it is a fabulous place. It has been a Tory hotbed for ever."—[*Official Report*, 26 May 2010; Vol. 510, c. 215.]

Once upon a time that was true—we count John Major among our former residents—but 14 years on, I am delighted to update the House: today it is in fact the Labour party that has the strongest connections to my constituency. Beckenham and Penge is home to not one but two former general secretaries of the Labour party, who oversaw two of our greatest victories, in 1997 and 2024 respectively: Lord Tom Sawyer and the mighty David Evans. We also have the longest serving chair of the parliamentary Labour party, Lord Cryer, and a former general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, my good friend Lord Monks. I can tell hon. Members that knowing that all those people were watching me as a candidate was one way to keep me out campaigning in all weathers.

Beckenham and Penge is a rich tapestry of distinct and diverse communities. It stretches from the SE20 postcode in Crystal Palace, where no fewer than 19 world records have been set—it is the spiritual home of UK Athletics—and where there is a historic park, grade I listed dinosaurs, and Crystal Palace Bowl, in which Bob Marley played his largest ever UK gig, all the way through to the beautiful BR postcodes of Shortlands, West Wickham and Beckenham, where former resident David Bowie launched his music career. I am incredibly proud of my London Irish identity, so it is special to represent the only place in London with a Gaelic place name—Penge, meaning "edge of the woods".

Coming back to the subject of today's debate, I should say that there has always been a lot of solidarity between the Irish and Caribbean and African communities in London, who encountered a shared experience of discrimination. As has been mentioned, they were invited to this country to staff our NHS, build our roads and help make our country the great place it is to live. They were often met with discrimination, including signs on windows that read "No dogs, no blacks, no Irish". That shared experience of living on the edge of society

[Liam Conlon]

caused trauma but brought about solidarity between those communities. That solidarity is important, and it represents the best of Labour values, too.

Each place and community in Beckenham and Penge has its own history and story to tell. Although our communities are diverse and distinct, we are also connected and united by shared values of solidarity and care, and the belief that everyone should be able to fulfil their potential and that we are stronger together than alone. Those are the values that shape my political outlook, too. They come from an understanding of society rooted in my experience of the NHS as a teenager, and of disability ever since.

Let me tell you what happened to me. When I was 13, the day after we broke up for the summer holidays in year 8, I had an accident in which I shattered my right hip. That led to irreversible damage to my knee and spine. From that point onwards, I was unable to walk for four years. I was taken to the Royal London hospital and later to the Royal National Orthopaedic hospital. At the Royal London, I was incredibly fortunate to be placed in the care of Dr Mark Paterson, one of the best orthopaedic paediatric consultants in the country. Mark performed nearly 10 major surgeries on me as a teenager. I was then transferred to the Royal National Orthopaedic hospital where, as a sixth former, I became one of the youngest people in Britain to have a hip replacement.

Throughout those years, I spent nearly as much time on NHS children's wards as I did in the school classroom—so much so that I had to drop most of my GCSEs to focus on my core subjects. I was then forced to go back a year at school. Every year, hundreds of children in Britain are admitted to long-term care in NHS hospitals, just as I was, but although it is in many ways a grim reality, my experience of NHS children's wards, especially the Grosvenor B ward at the Royal London hospital, was that they are also places of great hope, deep compassion and world-class care.

Today I want to say thank you to the countless NHS staff and volunteers who helped me throughout those years. They quite literally got me back on my feet, and paved the way for me to become the first in my family to go to university. To the consultants, surgeons, physios, junior doctors, nurses, receptionists and hospital cleaning staff: thank you. I will pay my gratitude to you forward by using my voice in this place to fight for the NHS, just as the NHS fought for me.

But my experiences on leaving hospital also shaped my understanding of the world around me. I realised at first hand, at a young age, the million different challenges that disabled people face every day, and how invisible they are to anyone else. Today, disabled people are among the most marginalised in Britain. There is a disability employment gap in this country of 29%. Only one in four disabled children has access to sport at school, and millions of disabled people in this country face the indignity of not being able to access public spaces, or even board a train. I do not need to read a briefing to know what that feels like. It is why representation matters, and why I am determined to make my voice heard, as one of the disabled MPs in this Parliament.

I hope that when my successor comes to make their maiden speech, Beckenham and Penge will be an even better place to live; that our NHS and public services

will be available to everyone, whenever they need them; and that we will be living in a society that is fairer and more inclusive of disabled people, and in a country that recognises its diversity as a strength to be celebrated and championed. I will work hard to make those things happen, for as long as I am lucky enough to represent my community in this place.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): That was a memorable maiden speech. I call Siân Berry.

2.7 pm

Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): I am grateful to be called to speak in this debate. Like others, I thank the Minister for her commitment to further action on redress for the Windrush scandal. I also commend the Commonwealth nations, which are making sure that there is a conversation internationally about redress and action on reparations for the transatlantic trade in trafficked and enslaved Africans. I applaud the hon. Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) for her powerful arguments on that point earlier.

I will take the opportunity to talk a little about Brighton today, particularly the Brighton & Hove Black History group. It was formally launched in 2002 and is now a thriving team of local volunteers from very diverse cultural backgrounds. It owes its existence to the passion and dedication of Bert Williams MBE, who has spent so much of his retired life researching and presenting the multicultural history of our city. The Brighton & Hove Black History website is an amazing resource for finding out about the impact that black residents have had on the city throughout its whole history, and it is full of beautifully presented photographs. Everyone should visit it.

Today, there is a lot to celebrate about Brighton and how it looks at its history, including its black history. Afrori Books in North Road has been running since 2021 and was founded by Carolyn Bain as a safe space for black people and their allies. Carolyn was inspired to open the shops because

"I was tired of going to bookstores and having to search for ages to find the tiny BAME section that had been allocated to Black authors. Surely, they deserved more than that?".

Afrori delivers anti-racism training to adults. It runs anti-racist clubs in schools across Sussex. It has hair workshops, author events, women of colour yoga sessions, writers' workshops, music events, a book festival and so much more.

In Brighton we are also very lucky to have the brilliant Black & Minority Ethnic Community Partnership centre, a sustainable resource centre that champions the black minority ethnic community in Brighton and Hove, owns its own building—such a big thing for groups like that—and supports BME communities and their families in so many ways. I have met young refugees there, and long-retired Caribbean nurses, all playing their part in our brilliant community.

I cannot omit to mention some of our incredible local artists. We have AFLO, the poet, an amazing spoken-word artist who uses poetry as a vehicle to address racism and mental health issues. We have Fox Fisher, an incredible non-binary artist, author, film-maker and educator who is cherished in our LGBTQ community. We have Jordan Stephens and Harley Alexander-Sule, better known as Rizzle Kicks, and QM Records, a Brighton-based label and events company founded and

run by Ned and Nicholson from the well-known local band Normanton Street. I could go on, because those are only a few of the amazing, creative people who are leading the way in Brighton.

Now in its third year, led by its directors Carolynn Bain of Afrori Books, Althea Wolfe and John Mayford, Brighton book festival is a grassroots festival with equity at its heart. The directors' aim was to create another space in Brighton where writers from under-represented backgrounds would be the main focus, and where diverse audiences could see themselves reflected.

In August, for reasons that should not have been required, I became just one of thousands of people who joined in powerful collective action in response to far-right riots and threatened racist action against members of our community. As always, Brighton and Hove came together to say loud and clear that those who spread hatred, fear, fascism and racism have no place in our city. As has happened earlier in our history, thousands of Brightonians defended the values for which our city is well known. This is an important part of building a better history for our future, and confronting and defeating the racism in our communities.

Brighton faces challenges, as all places do—we have heard Members say that powerfully. We have seen the rise in hate crimes nationally, with hundreds of racist hate incidents and crimes every year. The safety of black people in Sussex is not helped by the fact that, according to the most recent statistics, they are more than eight times as likely to be stopped and searched by police as white people. According to Home Office data on rates of stop and search by race found that the equivalent of nearly 30 black people in every 1,000 living in our area were stopped in a 12-month period. That is not proportionate, and it does not help to keep people safe.

Strip-searching children is also one of the most racialised tactics used by the police, who are six times more likely to strip-search black children, and I am glad that the Children's Commissioner for England has taken up this countrywide children's rights issue. Every police service needs to take action to prevent this traumatic practice from causing further harm. I recently met representatives of StopWatch, which does fantastic work on strip-searching, as well as on institutionalised racism in the justice system more broadly. The Runnymede Trust has conducted excellent analysis, adopting an evidence-based approach to tackling the causes of the racist riots during the summer. We must continue to pay attention, and do much more to ensure that all the ways in which overt and systemic racism affects black people in our city and our country are brought into the open and confronted honestly.

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): Let me first thank all Members for their contributions to the debate. This week, when asked about reparations for slavery, the Prime Minister replied that he was facing forward. Does the hon. Member agree that in order to face forward we must know our past, and does she think that it should become compulsory in our education system to learn about race, empire, colonialism and slavery?

Siân Berry: I absolutely agree with the hon. Member about education. As for his point about reparations, the echoes of this injustice will not simply fade away; we need to talk about it and take action.

Let me end by talking about one more injustice. Jay Abatan was murdered in Brighton outside a nightclub in January 1999. No one has ever been convicted for his killing, and his brother Michael, who was there on the night Jay was attacked, has spent 25 years campaigning for justice. I have met him several times over the past year at community events, and at a vigil on the anniversary of Jay's death. Sussex police have apologised to the family for how the case was handled, but I know that Members supported my predecessor's early-day motion expressing concern about the fact that Jay's murderers have still not been brought to justice. I hope I can rely on the same support from Members here for any action that I take on the Abatans' behalf, for the echoes of this injustice, too, will never fade until we take such action.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I now call a fellow Brummie, Paulette Hamilton.

2.15 pm

Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham Erdington) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I start by thanking everyone who has spoken in the debate so far. It is an honour to speak today in recognition of Black History Month, a time to reflect on the immense contributions of the black community across the United Kingdom and around the world. This year's theme, "Reclaiming Narratives," could truly not be more fitting. We are at a turning point in our country's history, where the stories that we tell can shape the future for generations to come. My parents, like many others, helped to shape the city I was born in through their hard work and determination. They laid the foundations for me to become Birmingham's first black Member of Parliament.

As a proud child of the Windrush generation, I stand here with immense pride and gratitude for the black history that has shaped my own journey and the journey of countless others. It is essential that we acknowledge the challenges that we continue to face, but more importantly, we must celebrate the progress that we have made and the potential that lies ahead. Last week I had the privilege of hosting a Black History Month event in my constituency of Birmingham Erdington, and I was proud to stand alongside a panel of black trailblazers who have broken barriers, opened doors and created lasting legacies for others. Among them were some extraordinary figures, including Birmingham City Council's first black deputy leader, Councillor Sharon Thompson, the Deputy Mayor of the West Midlands; the first black MP to represent her constituency, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi), who was absolutely brilliant; and the first black woman to chair the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi). All those people demonstrate the power of reclaiming narratives through their leadership. This is not just about the victories of the present; we must lay the foundations for future progress.

For me, the theme of reclaiming narratives is deeply personal. I would not be standing here as a Member of Parliament were it not for the black leaders, mentors and role models who have inspired me. One such figure is the incredible Mary Seacole, a pioneering nurse and a woman of extraordinary resilience, who was the inspiration behind my own decision to become a nurse—a profession

[Paulette Hamilton]

to which I dedicated 25 years of my life. Her courage, her commitment to caring for soldiers in the Crimean war, and her unwavering determination to serve when society sought to marginalise her because of the colour of her skin, showed me that one individual's actions can, and do, change the course of history.

Mary Seacole was denied a place in British history for far too long, but as we reclaim our narrative we recognise her not just as a footnote, but as a giant in the history of healthcare. It is in this spirit that I stand here today: to remind us all of the need to highlight those who have been overlooked, to rewrite the history books, and to empower future generations with the knowledge that they, too, can make history.

Black history is British history, which means that it is everyone's history. The 2024 general election was a landmark moment, because we have the most diverse Parliament in British history—90 ethnic minority MPs were elected, which is a milestone in representation. Britain's diversity of voices is its strength, but while we celebrate this achievement, we must not stop making progress. The journey towards equality is far from finished.

Our responsibility is to promote an environment in which black history is not confined to one month of the year, but recognised and celebrated every single day. We celebrate Black History Month to remember. We celebrate Black History Month to honour. We celebrate Black History Month to educate. I urge all Members to continue to challenge the narratives that divide us, to ensure that when we tell the story of Britain, we tell it in full, acknowledging the contributions, sacrifices and legacies of black people who have shaped our country's past and present, and who will shape its future.

As we move forward, let us remind ourselves that it is not just about breaking barriers; it is about ensuring that those barriers are never rebuilt, and creating opportunities for others to follow. Let us be inspired by the courage and determination of those who came before us, and let us commit to ensuring that we are not the last but the first of many. Let us continue to reclaim our narratives. Let us continue to build a future where every story is told and every contribution is recognised. Let us continue to inspire.

2.22 pm

Mr Bayo Alaba (Southend East and Rochford) (Lab): I pay tribute to all hon. Members who have made such brilliant speeches today. I pay particular compliments to the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Ms Oppong-Asare), for supporting me on my journey into politics. I do not come from a political background—I come from a military and self-employed business background—but when I met my hon. Friend during a couple of political engagements, she saw something in me, supported me and gave me some good counsel. She even came out and campaigned for me, so I thank her for her support.

I am honoured to be here representing Southend East and Rochford and discussing Black History Month. The theme of this year's Black History Month is "reframing the narrative." To do that, I want to champion the contribution of black inventors, black scientists, black scholars, black literature, black journalists and black innovators. I also want to acknowledge the history of

black military personnel. Finally, I want to talk about black excellence in the arts, culture and the creative industries.

In celebrating black inventors, scientists and mathematicians—I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler), as a technical person, will appreciate this—I pay tribute to Lewis Latimer and Morgan Garrett. Lewis Latimer, who was born in Massachusetts in 1848, invented the carbon filament found in light bulbs, giving us long-lasting light. Morgan Garrett, who was born in Kentucky in 1877, invented the gas mask and the traffic lights system, which, as we know, has gone on to save tens of thousands of lives.

Coming closer to these shores, I pay tribute to Walter Tull, who was born in Folkestone in 1888. He was one of England's first black professional football players, going on to play for Tottenham—I didn't say he was perfect. [Laughter.] Tull went on to be one of the first black officers in the British Army, serving with credit in world war one. Tragically, he was fatally shot in northern France in March 1918.

A number of Members have spoken about the history of the UK. The original wall surrounding the city of London was built by Severus, who was the first African emperor of the Roman empire. He built the city of London wall to protect the citadel of London, as it was then. A number of hon. Members have spoken about black history being British history, and the wall is a testament to how far back black history goes.

As we are approaching Remembrance Day and talking about reshaping narratives, it would be remiss of me not to mention and champion the West African Division, formerly the West African Frontier Force. The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) mentioned the commitment, dedication and sacrifice of people from the Afro-Caribbean community who gave everything to the armed forces and the British empire, and the West African Division is a testament to that. The West African Frontier Force was formed in 1915, and was renamed as the West African Division in 1943. It comprised men from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and The Gambia. Thousands were drafted in to fight in Burma, which, as many hon. Members will know, saw some of the harshest and fiercest fighting during the second world war. The West African Division stood shoulder to shoulder with soldiers from India and Britain as they fought the Japanese enemy at the time. It is crucial that the commitment and sacrifice—sometimes the ultimate sacrifice—of those men is remembered whenever we talk about the contribution of colonial and Commonwealth soldiers in the second world war.

When talking about black excellence here in the UK, we have to talk about our huge contribution to the arts, film and, of course, the music industry. Steve McQueen is a director whose most notable films are "12 Years a Slave" and "Lover's Rock". Courtney Pine is an internationally recognised musician who I have had the pleasure of seeing many a time. Writer, director and multiple literary prize winner Malorie Blackman is the person behind books such as "Noughts & Crosses" and "Boys Don't Cry". Last but by no means least is my childhood friend Randall McNeil, also known as DJ Randall. Randall was an internationally acclaimed pioneer of UK drum and bass and the dance industry. He helped transform the UK dance industry with his style, skill and personality. Sadly, we lost Randall earlier this year.

Finally, given that we are here in the House of Commons Chamber, which has an immense history, I pay tribute to the Mother of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). As we know, she became the first black woman to be elected to the House in 1987. She inspired a generation and paved the way for many of us to follow her.

I am the first black Labour MP for Southend East and Rochford. The result of my election was declared about an hour before that of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West and Leigh (David Burton-Sampson), so perhaps I am being slightly creative here—

David Burton-Sampson (Southend West and Leigh) (Lab): It was 20 minutes!

Mr Alaba: My hon. Friend's result was declared 20 minutes after mine, and we became Southend's first black MPs.

It is really important to talk about reframing narratives. Black history has too often been seen through the prism of the transatlantic slave trade and the American civil rights movement, so I want to talk about how black British history has affected the United Kingdom. Including black people harmonises history better and more accurately, improving community cohesion and economic prosperity. By telling a more accurate story and referencing the African diaspora's impact on society, we can do just that—we reframe the narrative.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): No doubt the Mother of the House will be referenced throughout the debate; it is best not to refer to Members by their names, but by their constituencies or, in this case, as Mother of the House. I now call Jacob Collier to make his maiden speech.

2.29 pm

Jacob Collier (Burton and Uttoxeter) (Lab): It is a privilege to follow the contributions today, in particular that of my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon), who spoke so powerfully about his personal experiences. I know he will be a great champion for his constituency.

I am honoured to be the Member of Parliament for the newly renamed Burton and Uttoxeter constituency—a community rich in history and diversity. Although there were no boundary changes, the inclusion of Uttoxeter recognises the proud people and industries that are integral to our area. I am further honoured to be delivering my maiden speech in this debate on Black History Month, which reminds us of the importance of recognising the contributions of black Britons, past and present, to our society. In my constituency, the Burton Caribbean Association has supported residents for more than 45 years. Its efforts have enriched our community and celebrated the heritage of black Britons in our towns, and I look forward to supporting its work.

As I serve in this House, I commit to representing the diverse communities across my constituency, ensuring that their voices are heard, their contributions celebrated and their challenges addressed. We all have a duty to ensure that black history is British history, woven into the fabric of our national identity not just for one month,

but all year round. It is essential that we not only recognise that history, but address the challenges of inequity that remain.

To be elected to this House is the greatest honour that anyone can bestow, but to have the opportunity to serve your home town, as I do, is particularly special. I grew up in Stretton and went to local schools, William Shrewsbury and de Ferrers—the primary schoolteacher who appointed me to the school council all those years ago has a lot to answer for. On the campaign trail, I bumped into many of my former teachers and schoolfriends, including my former headteacher, Mrs Hunter. While I was campaigning after becoming an MP, a former teacher said, "I must be getting old, my former student is now my MP."

You can imagine, Madam Deputy Speaker, how strange this must feel for my parents, who are watching this debate. I believe they were the hardest-working parents of any candidate across the country and without them I could not do this job. They have been with me from the very beginning—quite literally. I come from a military family and I am proud of the service of my brother, alongside all who wear the uniform of our country and defend our freedom. As Remembrance Day approaches, it serves as a powerful moment to reflect on those who have given their lives in service to our country, and to honour the sacrifices made by veterans, current service personnel and their families. The values of duty, service and sacrifice are not just words; they are the lived experiences of everyone who serves, and I will always advocate for ensuring that they receive the respect, care, and support they have earned.

I pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, Kate Kniveton, who served in this House from 2019 until the last election. Like me, she is a Burtonian and a former employee at the Burton Albion football club. Kate used to manage hospitality and I used to manage the bar in the stand, so I am used to managing difficult people—such as Opposition Members. I commend Kate's courage and bravery in speaking out about the sexual violence she faced. For any woman to go through that privately must be unimaginable, but to waive anonymity and do so in the public eye to help other women is commendable. She undoubtedly helped others through speaking out, and I wish her and her daughter well for the future.

I also recognise my Labour predecessor and friend, Janet Dean, who served as the MP for Burton from 1997 to 2010. When Janet was elected to this House, I was not quite born yet—apologies if I have made anybody feel old—but it was Janet and her colleagues in that Labour Government who gave children like me new textbooks, new play equipment, smaller class sizes and specialist support for more vulnerable children. Much of that has now been unpicked, and it falls to this Government to give kids today the opportunities that I and my generation had under that last Labour Government. Janet has continued to dedicate herself to serving the community and can still be found helping out in Uttoxeter, particularly at Redfern's Cottage, where she makes a mean cheese scone.

I am delighted to represent a constituency that is diverse in both its people and its places. We have two major towns surrounded by many beautiful villages. Our largest town, Burton upon Trent, is best known for its brewing heritage. We are still the heart of UK brewing today, with large companies such as Molson Coors and Marston's and independent brewers such as Burton

[Jacob Collier]

Bridge, Uttoxeter Brewing Company and Tower Brewery. We often hear the remark that there must be something in the water, but in Burton there literally is: our water is rich in calcium sulphate, creating the ideal formula for pale ales and bitter—so much so that many other places copied us through a process called Burtonisation. Members are of course welcome to join me in sampling the original and the best.

The iconic red triangle of Bass became the world's first ever registered trademark. Because of Bass's global reach, it can be found all over the world, though of course, hon. Members will spot it in the many wonderful pubs across my constituency. The Devonshire Arms and the Coopers Tavern are my personal favourites. During my time in the House I will be an advocate for the brewing industry and our pubs, which are a key part of not only our history, but of our present and future.

In Burton, more than 15 different languages are spoken. We have vibrant Pakistani, Polish and Romanian cultures. That mix of cultures makes us stronger and is in keeping with the motto of our county of Staffordshire, "The Knot Unites". If you head north-west from Burton, Madam Deputy Speaker, you will probably do so on the A50, where you will most likely end up in congestion—do not worry: that is something I am working on with the Roads Minister, who happens to be on the Front Bench—but eventually, you will end up in the town of Uttoxeter.

Uttoxeter is a beautiful and proud town with a rich history of agriculture and manufacturing, and is home to Uttoxeter racecourse. In the short time I have been Uttoxeter's MP, I have heard several quite strange pronunciations of the town's name from hon. Members. Local people, however, fondly refer to the town as at "Utch" or "Utcheter"—I apologise to the *Hansard* reporters for the difficulty I have just caused. In Rocester we find the iconic yellow diggers of JCB, which is headquartered and has several factories in my constituency. I am proud of the ingenuity and innovation that we have locally, and I will continue to stand up for British manufacturing during my time in this House.

As this Government put service back at the heart of public life, there are so many of my constituents who go out of their way to help others, volunteering in food banks and youth clubs and running community activities. I have been humbled to visit some of these groups, from the BAC O'Connor Centre to SARAC—the Sexual Abuse Rape Advice Centre—Burton YMCA, Burton HOPE, Uttoxeter Heath Community Centre and The Community Church, and I look forward to visiting many more during my time in this House.

Before being elected I was a communication officer for Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, and I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all my former colleagues and to this country's firefighters, control and support staff for the dedicated work they do to keep us safe. I look forward to continuing my association with the Fire Service in Parliament.

Upon taking up my role in this House, I sadly left my role as a Unison workplace trade union rep, but it was with great pride that on Monday I voted for the Employment Rights Bill, which is just one part of Labour's new deal for working people. I believe that that Bill, like the National Minimum Wage Act 1998, will be one of the landmark pieces of legislation of this

Labour Government. It will transform the lives of workers across the country, strengthening their rights, ensuring fair treatment and restoring balance in a system that has too often been skewed against working people. As a proud trade unionist, I will continue the fight for working people in this House, ensuring that their voices are heard and securing the rights they deserve.

I thank my constituents for the honour they have given me of serving them. Every day that I am in this House, I will work to serve them to the very best of my ability.

2.39 pm

David Burton-Sampson (Southend West and Leigh) (Lab): I wish to start by thanking the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Ms Oppong-Asare), for securing this debate—the first that we have had in Government time—in the name of the Prime Minister. I thank, too, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) for all the work that she has done in encouraging this debate into the House. I also wish to recognise my hon. Friends the Members for Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon) and for Burton and Uttoxeter (Jacob Collier) who made their maiden speeches today, and everybody else who has contributed to this debate. My stomach is telling me that it would be remiss of me not to also recognise Margaret and Godfrey. [*Laughter.*]

Black history is my history, but, as so many have said today, it is all of our history in this country. The fact that, this year, the theme is reclaiming the narrative, celebrating the changemakers, is not lost on me. This debate is needed so much after the riots that we saw in this country over the summer. I am so pleased that that division did not get its way in this country and that this Government acted quickly to stamp it out. Communities, including my own in Southend West and Leigh, came together and said with one voice, "Division does not belong here."

Madam Deputy Speaker, if you will bear with me for a moment, I wish to share a bit of my narrative. Some often say that I am the human form of the United Nations, and I shall give the House a bit of an idea as to why that is. My mum is white. Her father—my grandad, David Sampson—was half-Scottish, half-French. Then we move to my nan, Ellen Hansen, who was half-Cornish, half-Danish; her dad was half-Dutch. Then we move on to my dad, Edmund Danns, his dad, was from Berbice, a sugar plantation town in British Guiana. As we have heard from so many, Edmund took up the call during the second world war to join the British Navy. By 1941, he was one of 42 people who had joined the British Navy from British Guiana.

After the war, he continued his career on the sea and joined the Merchant Navy. It was at a stop in Liverpool that he met my grandmother in 1956. She was Irene Bedford, and her dad was a gentleman called Siar Bofferd, who became known as Edward Bedford, or Buffer to his mates. He came from Liberia. Edward arrived in Liverpool as a seaman, and it was there that he met his wife, Mary Kelly. Have a guess where she was from—yes, Ireland. Members can now start to see how I embody the United Nations. Edward remained in Liverpool, and, during the war, he served in the Royal Navy, as many did, including those in the black community. These people were giving their service to this country, and that was happening well before the second world war.

In the 1960s, my nan and grandad married. My nan, Irene, was subject to terrible racism in Liverpool, which happened in so many black communities throughout these lands. Edmund had to give up sailing, because he was concerned about his wife's safety, so he took a job in a factory. Members can only imagine the racism that Mary Kelly experienced in 1925. She was an Irish immigrant married to a Liberian gentleman—they had black children.

Unfortunately, we all know that discrimination and racism have continued through the years. Yes, things have got better, but they still very much exist. I, along with many Members, have experienced this racism just simply because of the colour of my skin. The assumptions that have been made about me because of the colour of my skin are simply unacceptable. It is even worse today, as we see the effect of online racism. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent East has been very clear about the impact that that has had on her and so many others.

Interestingly, because I was brought up in a one-parent family, with my white mum, in a very white community in Liverpool, I saw myself as part of the white community. I did not really explore my black culture. The kids at school showed a little bit of racism towards me, but in the main, they did not see my colour, which meant that I did not see my colour. It was only once I left school and entered the world of work that that racism really became prominent.

I was very fortunate to work at the Maritime Museum in Liverpool in 1997. I was an actor at the time, believe it or not, and I took on a small part in an exhibition about emigrating to the New World. It was an absolutely brilliant exhibition in its basement site, and just next to it was a very small exhibition: just a couple of stands with some information. That was the slavery museum—it was so small that you would miss it. But by 2007, the Maritime Museum had created the International Slavery Museum, which took up the whole third floor of the building. I am delighted to hear that by 2028, that museum will have been significantly expanded. It is a permanent memorial to the struggles that can never be forgotten, and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Riverside (Kim Johnson) is so lucky to have it in her constituency. I hope we can all go up there and see the new museum in 2028 once it is built.

Many of us in this Chamber and in this country have never been subject to slavery or apartheid, but that does not mean that we have not suffered. We have heard today about the suffering that so many people have experienced. We must not forget the contribution that black people have made to our society to make it the great British society that it is today. I am talking in particular about the Windrush generation, who we have heard so much about already. They helped to rebuild this country. They took up positions in transport, in domestic services, in hospitality and most notably in the health service. I am delighted to hear about the creation of the Windrush commissioner: those victims' voices have to be heard, and they have to get the compensation that they rightfully deserve.

Representation is so important. As a young black kid, I often did not see representation above me in positions like this. We have already recognised the Mother of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), alongside two other Members elected to this place in 1987: they were the first black Members to be elected to

this place since the last one left here in 1893, almost 100 years earlier. That was Peter McLagan, a Scottish MP, and he was one of only four black Members who had sat in this place before 1987. But look at today: 14% of people in this place are from ethnic minorities, 41% are women and almost 10% are LGBTQ+ Members. We are now a Parliament that is much more representative of this country. Just as the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde) thanked his party for its work to ensure greater diversity, I thank my party for its work in getting us here today.

Regrettably, that representation is not the same everywhere. In business, as of March this year, there were zero FTSE 100 companies that had a black chair, a black chief executive officer, a black chief financial officer or a black chief product officer. Black employees hold just 1.5% of leadership roles in UK private companies, despite making up about 4.2% of the population. We have to remove the barriers to opportunity. Does the glass ceiling exist? I do not know, but there is something stopping people getting through. We need to help people break through it, if it does exist. This Government's new office for equality and opportunity and their equality, race and disability Bill are a good start.

I thank those who like to create cohesive communities, including many in my constituency of Southend West and Leigh. I have a little message for those who ask, "When are we going to have white history month?". Let me tell you: you have white history month every day: it is in your school curriculum, it is in the museums and it is everywhere around you. We need the same for Black History Month, because we belong here just as much as everybody else.

We need to learn from the past to drive a better future. In this place, we need to ensure that the laws and the changes we make create opportunities for all, no matter what their background is. I urge the Minister to ensure that equality and opportunity are at the heart of our Government's five missions. Everyone should be given the opportunity to live their best life—their most authentic life—to the max.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Jenny Riddell-Carpenter to make her maiden speech.

2.51 pm

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter (Suffolk Coastal) (Lab): It is an honour to deliver my maiden speech in this debate. May I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Burton and Uttoxeter (Jacob Collier), or Burton and Utch, for providing such great insight and a touching story of the constituency.

It is an honour and an incredible privilege to stand here today as the Member of Parliament for Suffolk Coastal, a seat that for the first time in its history now has a Labour MP. My journey to this place is, in no small part, down to the dedication and hard work of the incredible local Labour party, an army of dedicated volunteer campaigners who believed it possible when few else did. They worked tirelessly, with a dedication that has inspired and moved me beyond words. I put on the record my gratitude and thanks to each of them for their work, not just in Suffolk Coastal but beyond Suffolk.

I took over the seat from the right honourable Dame Thérèse Coffey, who had represented it since 2010. I would like to thank her for her service to Suffolk

[Jenny Riddell-Carpenter]

Coastal. I know that the election came at a particularly challenging time for Dame Thérèse and her family, and I know that it cannot have been an easy campaign to fight. I send her and her family the warmest of well wishes.

I pay tribute to Dame Thérèse's predecessor, the right honourable Lord Deben, who is well known to this House as John Gummer. Despite our political differences, Lord Deben is someone I look up to as a role model for what a dedicated and committed constituency MP looks like. In fact, as Suffolk Coastal was the seat I grew up in, I have many memories of Lord Deben from when I was a child. At schools, at fêtes and at many events, it always seemed impossible to meet someone who did not know or had not met the right honourable John Gummer. He remains to this day a dedicated champion for my constituency, and he has been a forthright and vocal advocate for the environment for many decades, since long before it became fashionable. I look forward to taking that work forward myself in Suffolk Coastal. I give a similar commitment to protecting the environment and making sure that we improve nature, increase biodiversity and do more to clean up our rivers and seas.

When I say that it is a privilege to represent that incredible place, Suffolk Coastal, it is a statement that I do not make lightly. For me, it is a deeply personal responsibility, because I am not just a new MP. I am also a local MP: Suffolk Coastal is where I was brought up. I was raised in Martlesham Heath, just outside Woodbridge. It is the place that shaped me, and I could not be more honoured to represent the community that my family call home.

You may know of Suffolk Coastal, Madam Deputy Speaker, because it is home to some of the most beautiful seaside market towns and villages in our country. Beautiful Southwold, Saxmundham, Aldeburgh, Walberswick and Orford—these are just some of the places in my constituency that bring thousands of people to Suffolk each year and were backdrops of my own childhood. In fact, it is such a special corner of the country that many Members of both Houses, and on both sides, seem to have retired there. My current tally is that eight retired peers are constituents of mine. If the trend continues, we may find that at the next boundary review Suffolk Coastal is renamed Westminster-by-Sea.

I know why each of them is drawn to this special place. It is for the same reason that I freely and frequently boast about the beauty and rich history of Suffolk Coastal. For a small corner of the UK, we have played a huge part in British history across arts, music and culture, as well as defence, agriculture, trade and technology. Southwold, which is now a magnet for tourists, was home to George Orwell in his youth. He took his name from the River Orwell, which marks the southernmost point in my constituency. We are also home to the most important Anglo-Saxon site in the UK, Sutton Hoo. The story of its discovery has been retold on Netflix's "The Dig". I recently visited the Sutton Hoo Ship's Company in Woodbridge and was amazed to see the work of hundreds of volunteers to build a full-size reconstruction of the Sutton Hoo burial ship—a pioneering task to recreate an important piece of our local history.

While my neighbour the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Patrick Spencer) can boast of his constituency being home to Ed Sheeran, Suffolk

Coastal flies the flag for Benjamin Britten and his partner, the opera singer Peter Pears. If Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears were alive today, they would be celebrating Black History Month and using the arts and music to tell the stories that matter locally and globally. Archives held in the Red House—their former home in Aldeburgh, which is open to the public—show that Benjamin Britten stood in solidarity with the African National Congress during the pivotal trials of 1963.

Suffolk Coastal's contributions to the UK are evident today. We are proud to be the engine of growth for the region. We are home to the port of Felixstowe, the United Kingdom's largest container port, and we boast of being home to BT's Adastral Park, a national centre of digital innovation with more than 150 businesses in the tech cluster. Although we are proud to host big businesses, we also have a unique entrepreneurialism that is deep-rooted in each of our communities. Across Felixstowe, Leiston, Saxmundham, Woodbridge and beyond, we have a strong community of business owners and entrepreneurs. In fact, across the Suffolk coast last year, we saw 54% growth in microbusinesses, more than 10 times the national average.

For all its charm and beauty, however, there is much that lies beneath, hiding in plain sight in our beautiful seaside towns and charming villages. We have a special educational needs and disabilities crisis that is no less severe in Suffolk Coastal than it is across the rest of Suffolk and the east of England. We have real deprivation in some of our rural towns. This rural poverty cuts across all age groups: we have young families struggling with the cost of living, we have people struggling to access and stay in work, and we have an older population who are often isolated in rural communities, with few or no bus services to connect them to the amenities and health services that they need most.

Next week will be my mum's 80th birthday, but she does not know that we will be celebrating her. She does not know that I am giving this speech today or indeed that her daughter is the MP for the place that she called home for so long. She has no idea that I am advocating for greater support for the disease that has taken her from us. In Suffolk Coastal, we have one of the highest rates of dementia in our country. I have no choice but to advocate for the fight against that disease, because I have seen at first hand, up close and personal, how terrible it is.

Two years ago, I had to make the heartbreaking decision to move my mum into care—to pack her bags and drive her to her first care home. I thought and perhaps hoped that that day would be a low point—that it would be my own rock bottom in my journey to supporting mum—but it was just the beginning of a year-long struggle to get mum into the right care. She was kicked out of three care homes and ended up in hospital for six weeks, taking up a bed in a ward while the system tried to find her a suitable home. She lasted three months at the next care home before I started a one-woman campaign to try to get her sectioned. I would not wish that experience on anyone. Trying to get someone sectioned is—heartbreakingly—an act of love, because you know it is the last-ditch, desperate attempt to get the help and medical support that your loved one needs.

Luckily, today that is all behind us, and mum is now safe and well, cared for in a care home, but the crisis for other families is still very much alive. Since I have been elected to this place, I have lost count of the number of

times that desperate families have reached out to me with an all too familiar tale. It is these things that fuel my determination to make every day in this place count and ensure that I speak up for those who have been forgotten and left behind or do not have a voice to speak up for themselves. I look forward to playing my part in Parliament.

3 pm

Adam Jogee (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Jenny Riddell-Carpenter), who gave a powerful and moving maiden speech. I reassure her that I will be in the trenches alongside her in the fight to support those with dementia and their families. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon), who gave a very good maiden speech, and my near neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Burton and Uttoxeter (Jacob Collier). Team Staffordshire hunt as a pack, and I was delighted to be here to listen to him.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I thank the Leader of the House for ensuring that it has been held in Government time, because each and every person who lives, learns and works in our United Kingdom, and each and every person who moved here to work in our national health service, on our railways, in our schools or on our building sites, deserves to be heard, listened to and celebrated. I am proud to be British. I am a proud son of a Zimbabwean-born dad and the proud grandson of a Jamaican who came to our country in the 1940s to help us to win world war two, as many other black and Asian men did in the great war and in years subsequent. I am proud to be black—a black British Member of Parliament, words that even 40 years still seemed so impossible and so far off. I acknowledge those who have gone before me.

I am the first black Member of Parliament in Staffordshire's history. Following in the footsteps of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Erdington (Paulette Hamilton), who, following the death of Jack Dromey, became the first woman and the first black person to represent a Birmingham constituency, I am the first black man to represent anywhere in the west midlands in Parliament. If we think about the contribution that black people such as my grandfather made to Birmingham, Coventry, Wolverhampton, Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford, it shows how far we have come, but also how long it has taken.

As we have heard, black history is British history, certainly in the context of our United Kingdom. As we approach Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday, when our United Kingdom comes together to reflect and acknowledge the sacrifices of all the men and boys, and women and girls, who went to war and contributed at home, I want to remember all those who left the colonies, as they were then, and gave their lives for freedom. Nobody here or outside this House should ever forget that we would not have beaten the Germans on the beaches of Normandy, at Gallipoli, or at Burma, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southend East and Rochford (Mr Alaba) noted, without the bravery and valour of young men—black, white and Asian. They left their green island homes and the African continent for the ravages of war. They were on the frontline in the fight against tyranny, fascism and hatred, and their bravery won the day.

For many of those who returned from the frontline, our United Kingdom became their home. These black men and women rolled up their sleeves, put their shoulders to the wheel, and helped to rebuild a nation ravaged by war. Homes were built. Our buses were back on the roads. Railways worked once again. Our national health service was established. Restaurants opened and sold food with spice, seasoning and everything nice. Fabric shops and tailors ensured that our country had some of the best dressed people on the world stage, and our United Kingdom bounced back.

So much more happened, and we as a country would not, and could not, have done it without the sacrifices and contribution of the black British community. That contribution lives on. Two weeks ago, I was delighted to welcome the Staffordshire Black Business Network awards 2024 to Keele University in Newcastle-under-Lyme. It was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the incredible contribution that black businesses make across our county, and I am very grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Tamworth (Sarah Edwards) and for Stoke-on-Trent North (David Williams) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Dr Gardner), who is next to me now, for joining me at that event.

From brand-new start-ups to long-standing pillars of our high streets, town centres and communities, black and ethnic-minority-led businesses contribute more than £25 billion to the UK economy every year. Last week, I was delighted to cut the ribbon and open officially a new black-owned business in Newcastle-under-Lyme. I pay tribute to Gloria, the owner, and her family for their determination and grit, and wish them all the best. Their new store focuses on African clothing, so I will be going to buy some ties at the weekend—with my own money—and I look forward to showing them off in this place.

As we celebrate Black History Month, we must also reflect on the promise of our country. To think that my grandfather arrived on a boat, and here I am today—that would not happen in many other parts of the world, but it happened in our United Kingdom, and we should never forget that. I am proud of my race, but it does not define me. It inspires me, yes, and it has opened doors—and, regrettably, it has probably closed a few, too—but it also allows me to show those who come after me that anything is possible. Showing that example, and not pulling up the ladder, as some have done, is how I will approach my responsibilities.

Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II said that she had to be seen to be believed, and she was right. She set an example in rebuilding and repairing Britain's relationships with the former colonies. I would not vote for the shadow Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the right hon. Member for North West Essex (Mrs Badenoch), on any day of the week, but it is important for our country, as the shadow Minister noted earlier, that we could have a black woman as Leader of the Opposition in a matter of days. It is not my place to interrupt private grief, but if she does win, I hope that she enjoys her role in opposition for a very, very long time indeed.

I now serve with the highest ever number of Labour black men in Parliament—that is wonderful. There are my hon. Friends the Members for Southend East and Rochford (Mr Alaba), for Southend West and Leigh (David Burton-Sampson), for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey), for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), for Preston (Sir Mark Hendrick)

[Adam Jogee]

and for Buckingham and Bletchley (Callum Anderson), and, of course, the Foreign Secretary, our right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy).

It is amusing that, for all my frequent appearances and contributions in the Chamber since the election, I have been confused for my hon. Friend for Buckingham and Bletchley, who is taller and better looking than me; for my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Noah Law), who rocks a grey suit in a way I never could; and for my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead, who, considering he is 15 years older than me, has definitely won that one—I had it down as 20 years originally, and had to check with him so as not to age him. I take all that as a compliment. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde), I want to acknowledge all the black staff in this House, led by the Serjeant-at-Arms, who has just left the Chamber.

Over the past decade, I have been a local councillor and served as mayor. Now, as a Member of Parliament, I have had the honour of attending Black History Month events in local schools, churches and community hubs. I have listened to people—children in particular—speak of their lived experiences good and bad, and to pensioners recalling the stories of their ancestors. The overwhelming feeling that I come away with every year at the end of this month is of how proud we are, and rightly so, of the black British contribution to our communities.

There has been much talk of reparations in recent days. I want that conversation to start with a British Government who take the Commonwealth seriously. That conversation starts by ensuring that we reflect on the legacy of the British empire and our collective and complicated history. We do that by creating a level playing field in work, health and education; by properly and effectively trading with the Caribbean and Africa—as much as I love Australia and New Zealand, we must do more and go further—through a curriculum that tells all of our histories; and by establishing genuine and real links between our leaders. I hope that the Foreign Secretary and his team will lead by example. I want to see more ministerial visits to southern Africa, the Caribbean and other parts of the world, because on those visits we can show the respect that equal partners deserve. That would go so far in acknowledging the contribution that our forefathers made and that the black community is making today, and would show that this new Government get it.

This is a joyful and hopeful debate, and I have enjoyed every single speech, including that of the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Ben Obese-Jecty)—although I will pick up on a couple of things with him outside the Chamber. It has shown the best of us. My being here was not inevitable, but it was possible. The fact that I am here shows how far the black community has come, and reminds us of what we need to do to lift everybody up and of how we must all hold on to the age-old value of anything being possible in our United Kingdom.

3.8 pm

Sarah Coombes (West Bromwich) (Lab): It is a privilege to speak in the debate and to follow such inspiring and educational speeches. The hon. Member for Brent East

(Dawn Butler) has just left the Chamber, but she has been educating me for a long time; I did my year 10 work experience with her a long time ago.

When October comes around each year, it gives us a chance to reflect on the incredible achievements and contribution of the black community. Of course, celebrating the black community should not be limited to only one month per year. As the chief executive officer of the West Bromwich African-Caribbean resource centre said to me earlier this week, they celebrate all year—from Jamaican independence and Windrush Day to music nights and fiercely competitive domino events.

I want to recognise the contribution of the black community in my area of West Bromwich, Oldbury, Great Barr, Tividale and Rowley. After the war, Britain needed workers from across the empire to fill our factories, our foundries and our fledgling NHS. People from all over the world answered that call, including many from the Caribbean. They made their homes here; the roots that they put down are now deep, and their contribution over many decades is broad.

The theme of this year's Black History Month is reclaiming narratives, so I will share just a couple of stories from my area that speak to that theme. The first is about sport, and the story of West Bromwich Albion's "Three Degrees". The 1960s and 1970s were a hard time for many in the black British community; racism was rife and the National Front was on the rise. Football was no exception, with games marred by racism and prejudice against black players and fans. Around that time, three players at West Bromwich Albion were doing something exciting. The Baggies, under manager "Big Ron", were the first English club to field three black players consistently in their lineup.

In the 1978-79 season, the talented trio of Cyrille Regis, Laurie Cunningham and Brendon Batson were an essential fixture of every Baggies side. The sons of Caribbean immigrants who came to Britain in the 1960s, they were among the first black players to play top-flight football in this country, writing their own story of struggle, success and stardom. Although that might not seem like a huge achievement today, three black players on one team was unheard of at the time. They were brilliant players in the face of the racism they endured—even sometimes from their own stands. At a time when racism in Britain was all too common, they broke down barriers for not only black players but black fans.

This week I watched a great video by Richie Anderson, a Smethwick boy, an Albion season ticket holder and one of my favourite voices on Radio 2. Richie interviewed black fans about how much watching those players meant to them, and their testimonies were as poignant as they were powerful.

I will also tell the story of a lesser known, but no less important, local hero. I am lucky to know her; she is one of West Bromwich's strong, trailblazing women: Hyacinth Jarrett. Hyacinth had trained as a nurse in Jamaica but did not much enjoy it, so when she came to England she applied for a college course in hairdressing. She was the only black applicant to the course, and she had to persuade them to let her take the entrance test. She passed the test, completed the course and opened her business, Jarrett's Hairdressers in Bull Street in West Bromwich, in 1970.

Hyacinth ran that business for 40 years, during which time she was a pioneer in training people in the art of caring for black hair. Over the years, her talents and expertise were widely recognised. She was invited to work with Birmingham College and the University of London, eventually developing a module on black hair that was added to the national foundation syllabus for hairdressing.

Hyacinth was one of the earliest members of the West Bromwich African Caribbean Resource Centre, which is where I first met her a few years ago. The resource centre and other local organisations such as the Kuumba Centre have contributed so much to the local community, and continue to campaign against the discrimination and disadvantage that black Britons sadly still face today. I am proud to have them, and so many other black-led organisations in my constituency. I look forward not only to working with them in the years ahead, but to sharing their stories, championing their achievements and helping to reclaim narratives. They have earned—and deserve—their place in British history.

3.13 pm

Natasha Irons (Croydon East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Erith and Thamesmead (Ms Oppong-Asare) and for Brent East (Dawn Butler) for making today happen, because it is an important debate. I congratulate all Members who have given their maiden speeches, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon), who was formerly part of the south London massive—I enjoy being here with him. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West and Leigh (David Burton-Sampson) that I may give him a run for his money in terms of being the human form of the United Nations, as I think I am the first Jamaican-Jewish Member of this House.

This year's theme of reclaiming narratives is an important one, because the stories we tell about ourselves are what our reality becomes. If we do not tell those stories, others will tell them for us. For me, it is about recognising our contribution, our legacies, and our roles in the story of this great nation—stories like that of my grandparents, Ruby and Egbert Napoleon Irons. Like many others, when this country called for help, they answered, swapping the sun-soaked parish of St Thomas in Jamaica for the Henry Prince estate in Earlsfield. Like many in their generation, theirs is a story of hard work, public service and sacrifice. My grandmother was a district nurse and my grandfather was a painter-decorator, so they literally came here to rebuild this country and play their part in its future. Sadly, they are no longer with us, but I hope that they are proud to know that their legacy has meant that Croydon now has its first black MP, and that they have an MP in the family.

As has been said in the debate, black history is British history. My place in Parliament would not have been made possible without the Mother of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott); my hon. Friend the Member for Brent East; and all the amazing black women in this House who have made it easy for me to be here. I have felt welcome in this place. I have not felt out of place, or as if I do not belong here. That is only because of the outstanding people who have come before me.

I end my brief speech by saying that we must remember Black History Month every single year, because every year, there will be a different thing to talk about and a different theme to pull out. I would like us in this House to take time every single year to remember the contributions that black people have made to this country—people like my grandparents, and all the other grandparents whose grandchildren are now Members of Parliament sitting on these Benches.

3.16 pm

Kirsteen Sullivan (Bathgate and Linlithgow) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate all my friends from across the Chamber who have made their maiden speech today. I particularly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Jenny Riddell-Carpenter), who gave such a glowing recommendation for retirement options, although hopefully I will not need to think about that for a while yet. I also thank my friends for the contributions that have been made so far—for sharing their experiences and stories, and the meaning that they attach to Black History Month. We are in this Chamber to celebrate black change-makers past and present who have shone a light on racial injustice and helped to shape a more equitable and just future. From every corner of the UK and the world, there are untold stories that can offer us reflection and inspiration.

I have been pre-empted slightly by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West and Leigh (David Burton-Sampson), but there is a little-known story from my constituency of Bathgate and Linlithgow that I am grateful to my constituent David for raising with me and my predecessor. While I am the first woman MP for most of the area covered by the new constituency, we can also claim the first black Scottish MP. I want to bring the story of Mr Peter McLagan MP to Parliament today. In the 1865 general election, Peter McLagan was elected and became Scotland's first black MP, representing the constituency of Linlithgowshire, which is now mostly covered by Bathgate and Linlithgow. To date, his portrait remains missing from the pioneers' gallery in this place, and that is an issue that I hope to take up.

Mr McLagan served continuously for almost 30 years, and cut across social divides, supporting women's suffrage and women's right to education—causes that, as we know, were very unpopular with his fellow Members at the time. None the less, he was a product of his time. His attitudes towards imperialism and the circumstances surrounding his wealth, which he inherited from his plantation-owning father, are reminders of the honest conversations that we must have about our history. We must be willing to learn—to understand the past in order to challenge the racism and intolerance of today. We are all historians in that respect. Nearly 160 years later, there is still much to do to ensure that all our Chambers reflect the communities that we are elected to serve.

On to the present. In Bathgate and Linlithgow, our black history is still being made. I will tell the story of an incredible black woman I have been fortunate to know for several years, Eunice Simpson. Originally from Ghana, she has made her home in Blackburn, West Lothian. Eunice always wanted to expand her horizons and do what she could to help women, in particular. She wanted to build a network of support for those in need, but her life was turned upside down when, in her final year of university, a fire that ripped

[Kirsteen Sullivan]

through her student accommodation destroyed her possessions and savings, leaving her future up in the air—or so she thought.

Eunice is not a woman to be defeated. When she arrived in the UK, she immediately got to work putting herself through the professional accountancy exams while working for charities across the Lothians. In the Bathgate and Linlithgow constituency, we are fortunate to have the West Lothian African Women's Network, founded by Eunice. It is a pioneering community project that supports black women in finding their feet, growing their businesses, connecting through culture and providing support to families. It has been hugely inspiring to watch Eunice build this group with the support of many women from across West Lothian. I can genuinely say that every time I meet her for coffee and conversation, I come away motivated and wanting to do more. There are many great initiatives, from business seminars through to black history education sessions in local schools. Everybody involved creates a real buzz around supporting one another and being each other's champions.

Eunice has reached beyond the African community in West Lothian by organising events that bring people together to celebrate our rich Scottish and African cultures. Her work to foster greater community cohesion and strengthen the bonds of sisterhood is a real testament to her passion and her drive. A month ago, the West Lothian African Women's Network held its annual African-Scottish expo in Bathgate town centre. It proudly displayed African culture in the heart of Eunice's home town. It was an opportunity to come together and enjoy music, food and dance. We welcome hon. Friends to join the celebration next year at the expo in Whitburn; I can confirm that the jollof rice is delicious and spicy.

Also a month ago, Eunice, whose future once seemed so uncertain, became West Lothian's first black deputy lieutenant. Lieutenancies, a feature of Scottish life for 300 years, are pivotal roles in grand ceremonies and in bestowing honours. Those holding the position are even permitted to fly the Scottish royal standard above their home. It is a groundbreaking role for Eunice and truly well deserved. It is recognition of her hard work, spirit and courage. It gives her the privilege of supporting the lord lieutenant in carrying out her role representing His Majesty the King in West Lothian, which covers much of the constituency. Eunice's story reminds me that black history is still being made—not just by Eunice, but by the hundreds of black women supported by the West Lothian African Women's Network, and many thousands of people across the UK.

It is a great privilege to share in this place the stories of people like Peter McLagan and the history makers of today, such as Eunice, and to recognise the importance of Black History Month. Through the Government's commitment to breaking down barriers, boosting opportunity and ensuring that equality is at the heart of every mission, we can tackle structural inequalities in pay, housing, health outcomes and so much more. We all have a part to play in ensuring that the injustices of the past are not part of our future.

3.24 pm

Mr Calvin Bailey (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): I thank and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bathgate and Linlithgow (Kirsteen Sullivan) on her speech. She

shared an important story about Peter McLagan, and I will enjoy supporting her campaign. I want to refer back to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Adam Jogee); he will enjoy reading his admission in *Hansard* that I look 15 years younger.

Black History Month has its roots in this country, in a powerful vision of education and empowerment. In 1987, Akyaaba Addai-Sebo and Ansel Wong, staff at the Greater London Council—a Ghanaian and a Trinidadian respectively—recognised a pressing need: black British children were facing an identity crisis, were reluctant to identify with their African heritage, and shrank back when called African. This realisation sparked a movement to create time and space to challenge racism and, importantly, to recognise, educate, and reflect on the invaluable contributions of black Britons to our nation's history and culture. The history of Britain is incomplete without acknowledging the profound contributions of ethnic minority communities.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree with me on the importance of that changing narrative, and the importance of the organisations in our communities that change it? In mine we have People Dem Collective, Everyday Racism and Margate Black Pride, which are putting the stories of black people in our constituencies on the map. They tell me that in the modern curriculum review, we need to make sure that black history is not just about black people; it is everyone's history, and it should be part of the curriculum.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I remind the hon. Lady that interventions need to be short. She will have an opportunity to make a speech in due course.

Mr Bailey: I thank my hon. Friend for her powerful intervention about the important and necessary allyship of those organisations. It is of fundamental importance that we empower them and help them to lift others up, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme made clear earlier.

The stories of ethnic minority communities are not footnotes; they are integral chapters in our national history. From Claudia Jones, pioneer of the *West Indian Gazette* and the Notting Hill carnival, to Paul Stephenson and Roy Hackett, who led the Bristol bus boycott in 1963, to Laurie Cunningham, the first black capped England football player from our very own Leyton Orient, British history is enriched by the lives and contributions of people of colour. To overlook these contributions is to erase a vital part of our collective history. As the author Zadie Smith has said, when you erase people's history, you erase their humanity. Recognising black British history is essential for building a truly inclusive society. It is in this spirit of inclusivity that I will carry on.

Black History Month is an opportunity to recognise the diversity and interconnectedness of the people and cultures that shaped modern Britain. One of the most important aspects of that is remembering the long and proud tradition of black and Asian servicemen and women who have defended this nation with valour and distinction. As we know, soldiers from Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent made significant contributions

to Britain's efforts in both world wars. I want to remember in particular the contributions of our aviators, such as squadron leader Mohinder Singh Pujji, an Indian RAF pilot who flew Hurricanes and Spitfires during the Battle of Britain. I would also like to share the stories of the Jamaican squadrons—the pilots of the Caribbean, as we like to remember them. There were so many brave men and women like Mohinder and the pilots of the Caribbean who played a vital role in securing our freedom. Their contributions were crucial, but are often overlooked. We will remember them next month on Remembrance Sunday.

In recent years, many of our reflections on Black History Month have centred on the story of the Windrush generation, but their intrinsic link with the history of the Royal Air Force is not always recognised. Many of those who arrived on the Empire Windrush and subsequent ships were not strangers to Britain in any sense. In fact, they were former RAF service personnel returning to our country—the country they had defended just a few years before. I wish to share with the House some of the stories of these remarkable individuals, so that they are captured in our history.

John Henry Smythe MBE, known as Johnny, was originally from Sierra Leone. He volunteered for the Royal Air Force in 1939 and served as a navigator in 623 or Jamaica Squadron. Shot down over Germany in 1943, he spent 18 months in a Nazi prisoner of war camp before being liberated in 1945. After the war, Smythe worked at the Colonial Office, caring for demobilised Caribbean and African airmen. In a twist of fate, he was the senior officer on the Empire Windrush in 1948 when it was being used to take former personnel back to the Caribbean. Recognising the lack of job opportunities there, Smythe recommended that the men be allowed to return to the UK. That decision marked the beginning of the Windrush generation. He later became a barrister, a Queen's counsel and Sierra Leone's Attorney General. He died in 1992 at the age of 82.

Sam King MBE was originally from Jamaica. He had served in the RAF during world war two. Joining in 1944, after responding to an advertisement in Jamaica's *Daily Gleaner* newspaper, King arrived in Greenock, Scotland in November 1944, experiencing a shocking temperature drop from 23°C in Jamaica to 4°C on his arrival. After three months of training at RAF Hunmanby Moor in Filey, Yorkshire, he was posted to RAF Hawkinge, near Folkestone in Kent, where he served as an aircraft engineer. King was later promoted and received further training at RAF Locking in Somerset. He had several more postings, finishing his wartime service at Dishforth, in Ripon, Yorkshire. After returning to the UK in 1948, Sam re-enlisted in the RAF, serving until 1953. Later in life, Sam became a driving force in the British Caribbean community. He co-founded the Windrush Foundation and became the first black mayor of Southwark in 1983. Sam died in 2016 at the wonderful age of 90. Having checked through *Hansard*, I can see that his contributions have rightly been recognised before by several parliamentarians, both in this place and the other, who had the honour of being his best friends.

Prince Albert Jacob, known as Jake, was born in Trinidad in 1925 and volunteered for the Royal Air Force at 17 years of age in 1943. During world war two, Jake repaired planes in America and in England, serving at bases in Kirkham, Burtonwood and Carlisle. In 1948

he married his wife Mary, an English woman, despite facing racial prejudice from her family. Jake settled in the Black Country and later in Knowle, building a life in post-war Britain. Although promised medals for his wartime service, Jake only received his war medal, defence medal and veterans badge in February 2023, at the age of 97. That is a stark reminder of the often overlooked contributions of servicemen of colour. I had the pleasure of meeting Jake at the RAF's 75th anniversary celebrations for Windrush at Edgbaston in June 2003. There is rightly a growing recognition of the Windrush generation's significance in British history, but there is more we can do to permanently fuse that into our common understanding of who we are and where we come from.

I thank Micah, the RAF's ethnic minority network and the air historical branch for sharing and preserving these stories. I also thank the RAF for lifting the black bar, allowing these people to serve our country. These men and women made a conscious choice to return to Britain. They saw opportunities to use their skills to forge a better life for themselves and their families. Their decision was an act of agency—a deliberate choice to improve their circumstances while contributing to Britain's post-war recovery.

That story of service, migration and contribution resonates deeply with many of us. That was the conscious decision that my mother made: to come to this country and build a life for her family. I stand here 47 years later as a proud Zambian and Londoner with a decorated RAF career, representing my constituency as its first black MP. I aim to stand as a shining example of agency and opportunity for all the young people in Leyton and Wanstead, contributing to our shared history alongside those from the Windrush generation who had RAF ties.

I want to finish by reflecting on what it means to have people who reflect so many strands of our national story here in this place. From the pioneering Indian parliamentarian Dadabhai Naoroji, who was elected as the Liberal MP for Finsbury Central in 1892, to the groundbreaking election of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) as our first black woman MP in 1987, we have seen significant progress. In 2010 there were 27 ethnic minority MPs; by 2019 that number had risen to 66, 10% of all MPs. As of July 2024, we stand at 90 MPs from ethnic minority backgrounds and, critically, 50 of that number are women. Representation is about ensuring that the diverse voices and experiences of our nation are heard in the Chambers where decisions affecting all our lives are made. As we all celebrate Black History Month, let us recommit to ensuring that the diversity we see in our streets, our workplaces and all our constituencies is reflected in these halls of power.

Recognising this shared history makes it all the more crucial to address the Windrush scandal, which continues to demand redress, and I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister's recognition of that and movement towards doing so. As we know, people with stories like Jake's, Sam's and John's were devastated just a few short years ago due to policies and failure originating from this place. They lost their jobs, their homes, their access to healthcare and, in some cases, their right to remain in the country they had called home. The Windrush compensation scheme was alarmingly slow and complex, and the compensation meagre. The Home Office's failure under the previous Government to fully implement all

[Mr Calvin Bailey]

the recommendations of Wendy Williams' Windrush lessons learned review further compounds this injustice. As we stand here in 2024, it is clear that the Windrush scandal is not a closed chapter in our history but an ongoing struggle for justice and recognition, and I welcome our renewed commitment to right these wrongs.

As we reflect on the Windrush generation's contributions and struggles, we have an opportunity to recognise the ongoing value of migration to our country. In communities such as Leyton and Wanstead, and Plumstead and Woolwich, where I grew up, we see the positive impact of immigration every day in our local buses, schools and GP services. From our family-run shops to dedicated new NHS staff and the entrepreneurial people-to-people links we have to fast-growing countries, our openness and interconnection with the world continues to enrich and strengthen our local areas and the nation as a whole.

Oliver Ryan (Burnley) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for letting me intervene on him during this brilliant speech. Does he agree that our diversity is often our strength and that, as in Burnley, Padiham and Brierfield, the diversity of our communities has provided people with a great sense of culture, community and togetherness, and brought a great amount of economic growth?

Mr Bailey: Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend for his powerful and significant intervention. In particular, diversity is the strength of we 412 Members on the Labour Benches.

Managed migration brings skills, innovation and resilience to our workforce and society. The courage to leave one's home, the determination to overcome obstacles and the willingness to contribute and become part of a new society are qualities that have always strengthened Britain and will continue to do so. In my view, this is about recognising the contribution of people from all our communities. Our history is a rich mosaic reflecting countless cultures, experiences and contributions, from the Windrush generation to more recent immigration, and from long-standing minority groups to newcomers who now call Britain home.

Black History Month must provide us with a vital opportunity for education and progress. These reflections are not always pleasant, and we must recognise our failings and injustices, as my good friend Stuart Lawrence and his mother will tell us. Black History Month challenges us to confront the whole truth about our past; celebrate our achievements, which are often overlooked; and renew our commitment to building a more just and inclusive society for the benefit of us all.

3.40 pm

Dr Allison Gardner (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I congratulate all Members who have made their maiden speeches today, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon), who expressed his wish to advocate for people with disabilities. I am sure that he and all Members here today will want to add that we must consider the additional challenges faced by people in the black community who are living with disabilities.

I commend all hon. Members for their contributions during this debate on Black History Month. I say that not just because I have enjoyed hearing their views and local history, but because the very fact that this House is considering black British history today shows how far we have come as a nation. That is not to say that we shy away from the complex past and significant injustices, including that of the misdirected reparation mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler)—to my shame, I only learned about that today as she spoke. Nor should we shy away from the challenges still faced today, including the shocking maternal mortality rates in the black community, which were mentioned by the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen).

I want to use my contribution to highlight not just individuals, but the communities that have given so much to my constituency of Stoke-on-Trent South, to Staffordshire and to our country. Please indulge me as I speak about people and places that extend beyond the boundaries of my own constituency, because the impact of the black British community spreads far beyond the lines drawn by the Boundary Commission. To begin with, I want to pay tribute to the many people of the Windrush generation who travelled across an ocean to make their home in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, who not only helped to rebuild our nation after the second world war, but continue to contribute in every field to the diverse tapestry that is Britain.

No account of the black British history of Stoke-on-Trent would be complete without mention of the great Doug Brown. Initially training as a physiotherapist to support wounded world war two soldiers, as well as being the physio for the great Potters—that is Stoke City football club to my hon. Friends—Doug went on to give his skills to our NHS before a 20-year career in Stoke city council. He served twice as Lord Mayor, meeting everyday people and monarch alike, and treating all with candour and humility. Doug Brown was a proper Stokie. I feel a statue coming on.

Adam Jogee: Doug Brown's son, Martin, lives in my constituency of Newcastle-under-Lyme. My hon. Friend will have my full support in her campaign for a statue of this genuine trailblazer and history maker in north Staffordshire.

Dr Gardner: I want to take a moment to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Adam Jogee) for inviting me to the Staffordshire Black Business Network's great event the other week at Keele University. That event—it was more than just a great evening—highlighted not only the contributions of the Afro-Caribbean community to our local economy, but the importance and value of spaces that offer solidarity and recognition. I met Paul and Jonathan Smith, from PPE4 Community CIC in Meir, who empower young people from low-income backgrounds and upskill them, sourcing opportunities for those ambitious young people to be the next wave of great entrepreneurs in Stoke. That is the crux of what this month is about: education, recognition and celebration.

Rachel Blake (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that a crucial part of reclaiming the narrative, which is the theme of Black History Month, is celebrating historic citizens of

our own constituencies? Will she join me in celebrating Olaudah Equiano, who set out his powerful contribution in his autobiography of 1789? He spent many of his days in the City of London and in Westminster, finally passing in Paddington Street. Will she join me in celebrating his life and looking forward to the ongoing celebrations of the powerful contribution he made to our democracy right here?

Dr Gardner: I most certainly will, and I thank my hon. Friend for her fantastic intervention.

That work takes more than just one month. From Monienne Stone's work with the Staffordshire Film Archive to produce a documentary preserving the memories and voices of the elder generations of Windrush and their experiences in Stoke and Staffordshire, to institutions such as the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre and the Black Cultural Archives which was mentioned earlier, the maintenance and education of black British history is a year-round job performed by people from every background. That act, the act of celebrating and acknowledging black British history, should be a shared endeavour, just as the part the black community has played in this nation has been just that—a shared endeavour. That is why I chose to speak today. To celebrate another community's history, culture and contribution should never be the exclusive responsibility of that community. It lies with us all. Just as this country's past was written by a multitude of peoples, so too will its future. I say let us celebrate each other, understand our differences and embrace them. That is Britain at its best.

I would like to end this speech by looking back to an individual who has become a running theme in my addresses to this House, Josiah Wedgwood. Josiah understood that the fight for liberty and the work of racial equity is the responsibility of all in this country. His famous anti-slavery medallion graced the clothes of thousands across these isles, not sold for profit, but given for free. The understanding Josiah had, with the onus on looking after your neighbour, fighting for them when necessary and celebrating them where possible, is the spirit of our great and diverse nation that I want to share with the House today.

3.47 pm

Mims Davies: With the leave of the House, I am very grateful to respond to the debate on behalf of His Majesty's official Opposition. I have been truly grateful to listen to so many heartfelt points, views and important history lessons, with Members across the House championing issues, giving insights and showing the great work of their tireless community champions. There are so many reasons to be optimistic for the future of this country, and the lives of black people within our own constituencies are absolutely reasons to celebrate.

I welcome once again the Minister's confirmation of the update on the Windrush Unit, the new Windrush voice, and the focus on honouring contributions and addressing redress. I again pay tribute to the hon. Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler)—it sounds like she is as good at ironing as I am; a great excuse to get your friend to help!—who spoke as beautifully and powerfully as ever, and I enjoyed hearing her beautiful poem.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde) on being the first black Liberal Democrat MP. He spoke about the importance of enriching the

diversity of this place, and Councillor Jenny Williams from his constituency, a trailblazer like many we have heard about this afternoon. He highlighted that this is the most ethnically diverse Parliament ever, which we have all celebrated this afternoon. He also mentioned Lord Woolley, whose focus on social mobility meant that I had the pleasure of working with him during my time at the Department for Work and Pensions. It was an honour to get to know him.

Margaret and Godfrey from the Tea Room rightly featured in speeches from across the Chamber. He is not in his place right now—there is another gentleman in his place at the moment—but our excellent Serjeant at Arms is another true trailblazer in this House. Nigerian-born with Sussex links, he is our first black Serjeant-at-Arms. He was appointed in 2019, and we are delighted to have him.

The Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen), spoke movingly about the importance of intersectionality. This gives me an opportunity to pay tribute to Helen Tomlinson, the first cross-Government Department for Work and Pensions menopause employment champion. There is a new champion in town, but she has some very fine shoes to fill. That work, reflecting black women's experience of not only the menopause but, as we heard, pregnancy and childbirth, is very important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Ben Obese-Jecty) spoke about a personal love story that overcame prejudice. He also pointed out that football had been mentioned a good deal this afternoon, but we have heard about heroines throughout the world of singing, artistry and culture as well, which gives me a chance to mention one of my heroines, the amazing Beverley Knight. What a talent she has! I had the pleasure of meeting her many moons ago, in a different guise. Anyway, my hon. Friend made a thought-provoking speech. He referred to the importance of role models, and said that, in modern Britain, race need not be any barrier to success. We all celebrate that this afternoon.

I congratulate the new hon. Member for Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon), who also represents a new constituency. In his maiden speech he mentioned Baroness Benjamin, who was an icon of the screen when I was growing up. He spoke about being stronger together, and highlighted the disability employment gap and the lack of sporting opportunities. My dad was disabled for more than 25 years, and I recognised much of what the hon. Gentleman shared with the House. He also mentioned David Bowie, whom it is always good to hear about. I wish him well in his new position.

The hon. Member for Brighton Pavilion (Siân Berry), who is not currently in the Chamber, spoke about her Brighton and Hove black history group, and the importance of black voices and authors. She also talked about an unsolved murder and its heartfelt family impact, and I wish her well in finding answers.

The hon. Member for Birmingham Erdington (Paulette Hamilton) spoke about the power of hard work and determination, and about being a child of the Windrush generation. She rightly celebrated black trailblazers and the progress that has been made, and mentioned one of her local trailblazers. She has truly made her mark in this place. She spoke about the importance of Mary Seacole, and said that “dismantling the barriers” should be the guiding message. I think we all agree with that.

[Mims Davies]

The hon. Member for Southend East and Rochford (Mr Alaba), the first black Member for his constituency, spoke about the importance of mentors, of black pioneers, of black excellence in music, and of economic prosperity for all. I think we can truly agree with that as well.

In another excellent maiden speech, the hon. Member for Burton and Uttoxeter (Jacob Collier) talked about the weaving of the fabric of black history into daily lives, and about the importance of school councils. Congratulations are due to Mrs Hunter on what she has done for the Labour party and the hon. Gentleman will continue to do. I welcome him to this place. There is a potential second speech for him on Monday, in the debate on veterans and the services, and he can crack on making his mark in the House with that.

The hon. Member for Southend West and Leigh (David Burton-Sampson) spoke about the celebration of changemakers and being the human form of the United Nations—I loved that. He also spoke about being an actor, and about the importance of tackling online racism. He mentioned the slavery museum that will open in 2028, giving us an opportunity to celebrate universal suffrage and the struggle that unites us. I congratulate him on an excellent speech.

I welcome the new hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Jenny Riddell-Carpenter). The right honourable Dame Thérèse Coffey was previously my boss, and I enjoyed working with her. In her maiden speech, the hon. Lady spoke movingly about the impact of dementia. Neither my mum nor my dad knew that I came to this place. I cannot imagine the pain of having your mum here but not by your side on this journey, and I wish the hon. Lady very well in this place. Hers was a heart-wrenching and poignant speech and a very brave first contribution, and I congratulate her on her success.

My mum was from Newcastle-under-Lyme—

Adam Jogee: That is excellent news, and I look forward to taking the hon. Lady for a cup of tea so that I can get the low-down. Can she tell us where in Newcastle-under-Lyme her mother had the benefit of being from?

Mims Davies: Originally, she was found on the steps of the local vicarage; she was a foundling. I do not think that I have ever admitted that, but the hon. Gentleman has prised it out of me. Importantly, he spoke about the ladder of opportunity.

There has been talk this afternoon about people being confused for other Members. I assure colleagues that I am often confused for others. I always like to think that it will be for Kim Wilde or Debbie Harry—I have modelled myself on them, as the House may have noticed—but it is actually for my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Dame Karen Bradley). I felt that I had better share that this afternoon. I could not be more pleased about it, especially given that she is right honourable.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich (Sarah Coombes) talked about Big Ron, the Baggies' trio of skilful black players and barrier breaking. She also mentioned Hyacinth Jarrett, another local hero, who changed the world of black hair care locally. We all need a good hairdresser, so thank goodness for Hyacinth.

The hon. Member for Croydon East (Natasha Irons) tried to claim the “human United Nations” tag, but there is definitely competition. She talked about her grandparents' response to the call for help, which was similarly reflected in many other contributions.

The hon. Member for Bathgate and Linlithgow (Kirsteen Sullivan) spoke about Peter McLagan, who became the first black Scottish MP in 1865. That was truly fascinating. He had a 30-year career, focusing on equal suffrage and women's suffrage. As we approach 2028, that is so poignant.

The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey) said that it is vital to highlight the role of black history in shaping modern Britain. He spoke about people of colour and black soldiers, who have contributed so much. He also shared the story of Jake, who was recognised so late in his life. The hon. Member gave a powerful account of those who serve in this House and elsewhere.

We then heard from another Stokie, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Dr Gardner). I was pleased to hear about the Staffordshire Black Business Network, and she emphasised the importance of having access to cash and mentors to work with.

When we were in government, a gentleman called Myles Stacey did a huge amount of work at No. 10 on social mobility, inclusion, access to cash and smashing glass ceilings. I hope that the new Government will continue to build on his work and that of the former right honourable Member for Maidenhead, who focused on racial disparity.

The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities concluded that Britain is truly a model multi-ethnic society. There is more to do and build on, and I do not want to paint an overly optimistic picture or disregard any long-standing issues, because it is really important to recognise that every country can make further progress. The Opposition will always work incredibly hard to make sure that we see the progress that we want for all our communities. As the hon. Member for Brent East said so well last week, black history is British history, and I am so pleased to have taken part in this general debate, which has been held in Government time. Once again, it was inspired by her.

Today has been a reflection of the finest times in this House, which often delivers inspirational, collegiate and determined conversation and debate. We have discussed our communities and our strengths, and celebrated difference, alongside the bonds that truly bind and unite us.

3.59 pm

The Minister for Equalities (Seema Malhotra): It is a pleasure and an honour to close today's debate and to follow the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for East Grinstead and Uckfield (Mims Davies). Our paths have crossed on several occasions in recent years. I thank her for her contributions and her powerful summary of the debate; I will not repeat it, but I support everything she said.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Erith and Thamesmead (Ms Oppong-Asare) and for Brent East (Dawn Butler) for their opening speeches and for the inspiration for this debate. I am incredibly proud that this is the first Black History Month debate to be held in Government time in the Chamber—long may that continue. The shadow Minister said that it was an example of the House at its best. I agree: it has been one of the

finest debates that I have heard in a long time. We can probably all agree that we have learned something new today.

I pay tribute to colleagues who have made maiden speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon) outlined a very star-studded Labour history in his speech, but he also told a powerful story of his own experience that I know moved the whole House. I am sure that all those great Labour figures and all his predecessors will feel great pride in watching him take his place in this House and being a powerful voice for people with disabilities, and particularly children.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burton and Uttoxeter (Jacob Collier) made a humorous but powerful speech that told a story of family and of service in many different ways. It is clear that he is a living tribute to the last Labour Government and to what we sought to achieve through opportunity for all. It was also very clever of him to talk about his campaign to improve his constituency's roads while the Roads Minister was present to hear his advocacy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Jenny Riddell-Carpenter) made an incredibly powerful speech. She walked us around Suffolk Coastal, taking in nature and biodiversity and giving us a strong sense of her drive in her politics. She told the extremely powerful story of her experience as a carer for her mother; as someone who has had that responsibility for my mother, I can understand how much of a challenge that continues to be. I am sure that she will make an incredibly powerful contribution to this House, promoting support for people with dementia and their families.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde) and congratulate him on his achievement for the Liberal Democrats. He recognised the staff of this House, mentioning Margaret and Godfrey; we have also had references to Ugbona Oyet, our Serjeant at Arms. I think that is an indication of how we think about this whole House—not only the pride we feel in now having the most diverse Parliament, but how we look to share the opportunities for careers in this place, in every part of its work.

I believe that holding this debate in Government time is a mark of how the new Labour Government are putting equality at the heart of all we do. I am proud to have been appointed the Minister for race equality in our equalities team, alongside my responsibilities as the Minister for migration and citizenship.

We have celebrated Black History Month since the 1980s, and it has moved from the fringes to the mainstream across our schools, colleges and workplaces. Our understanding of history is constantly evolving as new scholarship reveals new stories, new narratives and new truths and enhances our understanding of the experience of the black community in the UK.

We have heard from colleagues across the House, including the hon. Members for Huntingdon (Ben Obese-Jecty) and for Brighton Pavilion (Siân Berry) and my hon. Friends the Members for Luton North (Sarah Owen), for Birmingham Erdington (Paulette Hamilton), for Southend East and Rochford (Mr Alaba), for Southend West and Leigh (David Burton-Sampson), for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Adam Jogee), for West Bromwich (Sarah Coombes), for Croydon East (Natasha Irons), for Bathgate

and Linlithgow (Kirsteen Sullivan), for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey) and for Stoke-on-Trent South (Dr Gardner). Their stories, and those of their constituencies and constituents, have enhanced the House's understanding. They are important because they teach us about ourselves and our national story.

The purpose of Black History Month is to amplify black history, not confine it to four weeks. This is the story of all of us. The UK has a unique history and a unique set of global relationships and identities built on our shared language, our trade, our cultural heritage and our shared history—and we must be honest about our history. We must confront the difficult truths about the transatlantic slave trade, colonialisation, and racism at home and abroad.

My parents were immigrants who came to the UK in the 1960s. Both had been refugees as young children. We grew up above our family shop in Hounslow: we were a family of eight, with three generations living together. This was the time of the National Front, and racist comments were regularly experienced as we went about our daily life. My family's community values, compassion, commitment to neighbours and pride in Britain contributed to my becoming the first woman ever elected to the constituency of Feltham and Heston, where I grew up, and the first female MP of Punjabi origin in the House of Commons.

We have made progress. The Race Relations Act 1968, introduced by a Labour Government, made racial discrimination illegal in employment, housing and public services. Recent scholarship about the British empire has helped our appreciation and understanding. We must understand the past to navigate the future.

Black History Month allows us to hear the voices of millions of black Britons down the centuries. We celebrate some of the greatest: the trailblazers, the campaigners, the innovators and the pioneers, some of whom have been mentioned today. From Ignatius Sancho to Olaudah Equiano, from the Chartist William Cuffay to Mary Seacole, from Walter Tull to Claudia Jones, and from Bill Morris to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon, they were all icons, leaders and change makers of their time. Black and minority ethnic communities have made contributions to our politics, our public services, our NHS, our business industry, our armed forces and our sports—in fact, every aspect of our public life. I am incredibly proud that we have the most diverse Parliament on record and that we have more women elected to this House than ever before.

I have covered some of the issues that Members across the House have raised, but let me mention a couple more. The Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North, made a powerful point about intersectionality. Labour's manifesto committed to strengthening protections against dual discrimination; we will do so by bringing into force the dual discrimination provision in section 14 of the Equality Act 2010. People hold multiple protected characteristics, and we acknowledge that some people experience discrimination because of a combination of those protected characteristics. I know that you have done very important work on the matter, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Seema Malhotra]

I want to recognise the important work of Wendy Williams, whose Windrush lessons learned review exposed systemic injustices as a result of previous Governments' actions. The Windrush scandal saw Windrush and Commonwealth communities who had and have the right to live in this country being victimised because, through no fault of their own, they were unable to prove that right. As my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead outlined, today the Home Secretary has updated the House in a written ministerial statement on the Government's progress in fulfilling our manifesto commitments to the Windrush generation, to ensure that they quickly and efficiently receive the support that they deserve. The Home Secretary is at a Windrush stake-holders' roundtable this afternoon at the Black Cultural Archives. Additionally, we are reigniting the vital transformation work from the Windrush lessons learned review to embed lasting changes in how the Department serves all communities.

While we were in opposition, we made it clear that the Windrush scandal must never be repeated. The last Government's response was far too slow and far too weak, and it did not deliver justice to those who were betrayed and failed. That is why I am also proud that we will appoint a Windrush commissioner, an independent advocate for all those affected, who can represent the views of the Windrush communities and victims at the highest Government levels. The commissioner's role will be to oversee the delivery of the compensation scheme and the implementation of the recommendations of the Windrush lessons learned review, and to act as a trusted voice for families and communities.

For many people, filing a claim can be intimidating and can require them to revisit past traumas. That is why we are injecting £1.5 million into a programme of grant funding for organisations to provide essential advocacy and support for applicants who need additional help with the application process. We also brought in a new single caseworker process, which was implemented in July, in direct response to stakeholder and victim feedback. It has streamlined the process, improving consistency, increasing transparency and removing duplication that led to avoidable delays. It will give clarity and consistency to applicants, so they know who is dealing with their case throughout the process.

As promised, we have re-established a Windrush unit in the Home Office, dedicated to driving forward the action needed. The new unit stands ready to support the Windrush commissioner, when appointed. We are determined to ensure the renewed work drives enduring change that matters to the Windrush community and has a wider impact across the whole Department and across Government.

Last month, I had the privilege of visiting the National Windrush Museum with its director, Denize Ledeatte. It is a new institution dedicated to collecting and preserving the stories of the Windrush generation. The passion of those I met, including Windrush pioneers, is matched only by the lasting impact that I know the museum, its deep research and these stories will have on future generations. I look forward to attending the Windrush National Organisation conference tomorrow.

We stand on the shoulders of giants, and we do so to build a better and more inclusive future for all. I am proud that our Bill on equality in race and disability will mandate ethnic pay gap reporting for large employers, helping to tackle inequalities and discrimination in the workplace. Our Employment Rights Bill, which we introduced within our first 100 days, will end exploitative practices and enhance employment rights.

As this debate has demonstrated, there is much more to do. We must take urgent steps to close the maternal mortality gap. We must address the fact that black people are up to five times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than their white peers and are three and a half times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act. We must also take urgent action to address inequalities in housing, employment and education, which all too often disproportionately affect black and minority ethnic communities. By introducing our Renters' Rights Bill, our Employment Rights Bill and our Bill on equality in race and disability, we are working to address these issues. We will work closely with businesses and workers on developing and implementing our commitments.

We are working at pace across Government to develop and deliver wider proposals to address persistent racial inequalities wherever they arise. We have put this work at the core of our ambitious mission-based programme to change this country, so that whoever you are, wherever you grew up and wherever you come from, if Britain is your home, Britain is a country that will value your contribution. It is where you belong, and we will ensure opportunity for all to achieve their ambitions. To quote David Olusoga:

"Black British history is everyone's history and is all the stronger for it."

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Black History Month.

PETITION

Fakenham Swimming Pool

4.15 pm

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): Fakenham needs a swimming pool. I rise to present this petition on the Fakenham swimming pool, with reference to a similar online petition that has gained more than 1,250 signatures.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of Broadland and Fakenham,

Declares that local people in the Broadland and Fakenham constituency require access to adequate facilities to conduct regular exercise; further declares that since the closure of the swimming pool in Fakenham there has been limited facilities in the area; and notes that the Treasury has been instructed to review the £9.9 million previously committed to fund a new swimming pool.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to consider the resource needs of the new swimming pool and 3G sports pitch in Fakenham, Norfolk, whilst undertaking its funding review, and to retain the funding previously committed.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P003014]

Temporary Accommodation

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

4.17 pm

Josh Babarinde (Eastbourne) (LD): I am so grateful to have the opportunity to bring the subject of the crisis of temporary accommodation to the House of Commons today. I thank the Minister for her time and attention this afternoon. Having first met at the ballot box in Bethnal Green and Bow in 2019, it is great to meet here again, at the Dispatch Box.

It means a lot to me to raise this issue today on behalf of my constituent Kelly and her family. Kelly is a proud mum of three, wife to Devon, and a fighter. After being served with a section 21 notice by her landlord, Kelly and her family were forced to leave their home. She was determined to find a new home in the private rented sector but faced so many barriers. One was that many landlords required her to find a guarantor whose salary bracket was not one shared by folks in her network. Another was that many landlords demanded six months' rent in advance. For someone like Kelly who receives universal credit, having six months' worth of Eastbourne private sector rent in the bank—to pay so much up-front rent—would disqualify her from universal credit in a heartbeat.

Despite pulling out all the stops to find a new home, having been displaced from their previous one, Kelly, her three children and their stepdad Devon have been backed into the corner of homelessness—into temporary accommodation until a longer-term home can be found via the council or the private rented sector. This accommodation is too small to cater to their aspirations and their needs, especially those of Kelly's awesome teenage son, Joseph. This is a combination that, by its very nature, is temporary and not secure; accommodation that forces families to exist, not live, and that could not feel further from a home. That is not fair. I have taken up Kelly's case, and my team and I are working hard to support her, but what I find so extraordinary about Kelly is that in the midst of unspeakable hardship she is so often zooming out and reflecting on just how broken the whole system is, and she has been a tireless advocate for reforming it. A week or so ago, she said:

"Josh, take me to Parliament, and we'll speak about it up there!"

Days later, I secured this Adjournment debate, which enables us to do exactly that.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Member for securing the debate. It is an important issue, and I agree that it is admirable for someone in such circumstances to pull out and see the bigger picture. To add to that bigger picture, in the borough of Hackney, half of which I represent, the forecast cost of temporary accommodation is £54 million this year, and there are eight primary schools' worth of children, equivalent to 1% of our population, living in temporary accommodation. I am sure that the hon. Member would agree that the position is unsustainable, and I congratulate him again on bringing it to the attention of the House.

Josh Babarinde: I could not agree more, and I will come to the costs of temporary accommodation later. The hon. Lady knows as well as I do that the National

Audit Office described the situation as unsustainable. It needs a resolution, which is why today's debate is so important.

On securing the debate, I called Kelly, shared the news, and she said in reply:

"What needs to be said is going to be said in the place it needs to be said to the person it needs to be said to. You are the right person to say it, Josh."

It is therefore so humbling to welcome Kelly and her son Joseph to the Public Gallery. I hope that I am the right person, that I say what needs to be said, and that I do not let Kelly and families like hers down. With her blessing, I have shared some of Kelly's story today. She is just one of the 117,450 families who are in temporary accommodation in this country right now. That is a 12% rise compared with last year. Heartbreakingly, more than 150,000 children are living in temporary accommodation, which is enough to fill 5,000 classrooms.

Mrs Sarah Russell (Congleton) (Lab): I want to mention the plight of children missing from school. There is a massive problem with children going into temporary accommodation and simultaneously losing their school place because they have moved out of the area, or alternatively trying to retain their school place in the hope of being able to move back to the area, and then missing school for a sustained period. I wanted to draw attention to that particular difficulty. As far as I am aware, at the moment we do not measure educational outcomes for children who have been in temporary accommodation. Would the hon. Member encourage us to start doing that?

Josh Babarinde: I absolutely would encourage that. There needs to be more co-ordination between local authorities, educational settings and health and care settings. Many have advocated for a notification system in order to aid the knowledge of those situations, so that they can be addressed.

The circumstances are devastating, and we hear from hon. Members who have made interventions that that is the case in their patches too. Shelter estimates that more than two thirds of people in temporary accommodation have inadequate access to basic facilities—to cook, for example. Many food banks, including mine in Eastbourne, supply kettle packs, because many families in temporary accommodation are unable to cook or heat the food that they get from a food bank in any other way. Isolation is also a consequence, especially for those who are placed in temporary accommodation miles away from their support networks, or where the rules of their accommodation ban visitors. Most shockingly, according to the Shared Health Foundation analysis of the national childhood mortality database, temporary accommodation has been a contributing factor in the deaths of 42 infants since 2019. We cannot go on like this.

Not only is that unacceptable on a human level, but as I said earlier, the National Audit Office has been clear that the situation is unsustainable for local authorities—especially mine in Eastbourne. In my hometown, the number of families in temporary accommodation has doubled since 2019. That, combined with our food bank becoming the busiest Trussell Trust food bank in the country—it distributed more food parcels per head than any other in the UK—led to my campaign to

[Josh Babarinde]

declare a cost of living emergency in Eastbourne. It was the first place in the UK to do so, and that unlocked emergency support for those struggling most.

The surge in temporary accommodation led to the financial cost to the council jumping from £2.2 million in 2019 to the £5 million projected for this year.

Dame Meg Hillier: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his indulgence in giving way again. He is right to cite the National Audit Office's excellent work to shine a light on the issue. Does he agree that if we turned those many millions spent on temporary accommodation into money spent on good-quality affordable social housing, we would go a long way towards solving this problem?

Josh Babarinde: The hon. Lady has a crystal ball, because she has again pre-empted something I will say later. I absolutely agree, and I commend her work in her former role as Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, which I know took a deep interest in this matter.

Costs in Eastbourne have skyrocketed. In fact, the council has said that 49p of every £1 that the council collects in its share of council tax is currently spent on temporary accommodation. As a result, Eastbourne borough council has been forced to consult on incredibly tough saving decisions to avoid issuing a section 114 notice, and the picture is similar in other councils.

Sojan Joseph (Ashford) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the decision by the last Conservative Government to freeze local housing allowance for temporary accommodation claimants at 2011 rates is causing increasing pressure on local authorities, such as mine in Ashford?

Josh Babarinde: There is a lot of clairvoyance and telepathy going on here, because I will also refer to that matter later. We absolutely need to consider what is going on with LHA rates, which have been frozen at the same level since 2011—a different era.

The Local Government Association said that local authorities in England have spent £2.29 billion on temporary accommodation—a 29% increase on the previous year, and 300% since 2015—and one in four councils say that they are likely to need emergency Government support to avoid a section 114 notice. So what are the solutions?

First and foremost, we must urgently improve conditions for families in temporary accommodation, such as Kelly's. They should be entitled to essential facilities, and every effort must be made to prevent them from being displaced from their communities, support networks and the advice they need and deserve. Councils need emergency support to help them to avert imminent financial crisis. Eastbourne borough council leader Stephen Holt, who is also in the Public Gallery, led an emergency summit last year after which 118 other cross-party council leaders wrote to the previous Chancellor with proposals for emergency support. Those proposals fell on deaf ears, so I draw the Minister's attention to that letter now. It includes proposals to uprate LHA rates with a view to updating them from their outdated 2011 levels.

We also need to address the appalling practice of people opportunistically renting private rented sector homes for the sole purpose of immediately sub-letting them to councils, at an inflated rate, so they can be used

as temporary accommodation. That is contributing to the inflation. Beyond that, the Government must urgently publish a strategy to end homelessness in all its forms as soon as possible. That must involve building more homes, especially social housing.

Mr Lee Dillon (Newbury) (LD): My hon. Friend mentioned that 150,000 children are growing up in temporary accommodation. Does he agree that the health and educational outcomes of those children are adversely affected by their being in temporary accommodation, but the risk of moving reduces their chance to have a settled community and build up lifelong friendships? By developing more social homes with social rents, we would be able to give people secure tenures, and by removing hope value in development land parcels, we could develop more and cheaper social housing, reducing the economic pressures on the Government.

Josh Babarinde: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, which is why I am proud that the Liberal Democrats have been campaigning for Britain to build 150,000 social homes a year; that was in our manifesto. Having grown up in social housing, I am especially proud of that commitment.

To conclude, I say to Kelly that I hope I have said what needs to be said, in the place that it needs to be said in, and to the person it needs to be said to. On behalf of all families in temporary accommodation, and all those who would otherwise find themselves there in the future, I make a plea to the Government: honour their experiences with reform, and dignify their humanity with action. Please do not let us and our councils down. This Government are our last hope.

4.30 pm

James Asser (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde) for giving me the opportunity to contribute to his debate. I congratulate him on securing a debate on this extremely important topic. I agree with much of what he has said, and how he has highlighted the problem that we face.

My local authority of Newham faces an absolute crisis in temporary accommodation; the situation is one of the worst in the country. To give the House some indication of where we are, there are 6,700 households in temporary accommodation in Newham, which is more than in any other local authority. That number is growing by around 30 households a month. One in 20 homes in Newham is now temporary accommodation. The cost of temporary accommodation for next year will be £72 million, adding £31 million to the council's budget overspend. Homeless applications this year are up by 26%, which adds to the borough's waiting list—there are now 38,000 people waiting for housing.

Marie Goldman (Chelmsford) (LD): While Chelmsford city council's figures cannot match those given by the hon. Member, they are still stark. It is terrible to see how much they have changed over recent years. Does he agree that many councils around the country face this issue? In my constituency, the percentage of the council's core spending that goes on temporary accommodation went up from 5.62% in 2020 to 24.44% in September 2024. The number of cases in 2020 was 256, but we are now looking at 500 cases. It is a massive increase that is very difficult for councils to cope with.

James Asser: The hon. Lady makes a valuable point. The figures are hard to believe; sometimes I have to check that I have not misread them or added a zero. As she highlights, the issue affects councils across the country and seriously adds to their financial problems. This is clearly unaffordable and unsustainable, even in the short term. We desperately need support, so that we can deal with the impact on councils' budgets; they face huge pressures already.

As the hon. Member for Eastbourne pointed out through the example of Kelly, his constituent who is in the Public Gallery, the issue is the impact on families. Since the cost of living crisis began, when the supply of temporary accommodation slumped and demand soared in my borough, my advice surgery has seen a massive increase in casework. People have come to see us who have been living for months in a hotel room—a perfectly decent hotel room for someone staying three or four days, but not for a family of four or five people for months on end. They are living in a single room without cooking facilities. The impact on the parents' mental health and the children's physical health and educational opportunities was really quite serious. It is difficult to deal with the sheer numbers.

Dame Meg Hillier: I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for giving way. I am old enough to remember when bed and breakfasts were commonly used for households who could not get permanent accommodation. That was rightly dealt with because it was a scourge on modern society. Does my hon. Friend agree that we are now slipping massively backwards because of the numbers he outlined, and that we need to find a quick solution, in order to support our constituents?

James Asser: My hon. Friend is exactly right. We have gone back from people in temporary accommodation living in flats to hotels being the only option. My council is desperately seeking alternative solutions, but the sheer scale of the problem makes that very difficult. As a fellow east London MP, the Minister will understand the problem and the issues that we face. I ask the Government to look urgently at financial support in the short term, so that we can try to deal with the immediate crisis, but we also need a long-term solution—a financial solution to help councils through these difficulties, and a long-term solution, a way to build social housing. My council is one of those pioneering the building of new social housing, but in the grand scheme of things, we are effectively talking penny packets, given the scale of the issue that we need to deal with.

I appreciate that we inherited this crisis. It has been exacerbated by the cost of living crisis, and seriously exacerbated by the difficulties that councils have faced as a result of the funding settlements that they have had over the past 10 years. They are juggling 10 years of austerity and the cost of these problems. However, it is a crisis that we have to deal with. I am confident that we can, but it is clearly something that we have to tackle as a matter of urgency, not just for the sake of our councils' budgets, but to help the people who most need help.

4.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rushanara Ali): I welcome the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde) to the House, and congratulate him on securing this

important debate on funding for temporary accommodation. As we have heard from him and other hon. Members, this is such a serious issue. I know from my experience as an MP for an east London constituency that the impact that it has on children, families and the wider community is absolutely devastating; sadly, it can be a matter of life and death, because, as the hon. Member for Eastbourne says, the issue is the quality of housing as well as its supply.

This Government are absolutely committed to addressing the current high levels of homelessness and rough sleeping and, of course, the barriers faced by those who are in temporary accommodation and need a safe, secure home to live in. I recognise the financial pressures that hon. Members have highlighted; the soaring costs of temporary accommodation are placing huge strain on councils. I looked very closely at the correspondence between the previous Government and the leader of Eastbourne council that was shared with me, and I am grateful for the work that councils up and down the country have done.

Victoria Collins (Harpenden and Berkhamsted) (LD): In one of my local authorities, St Albans, we are at crisis point, and often it is families with children who lose out. The average waiting time is 31 weeks, but the average time for families with children is 43 weeks, because of problems with supply and financial pressures. We are also in an area where the cost of housing, including private housing, is very high. Does the Minister agree that where housing costs are higher, the impact on local authorities is very difficult to deal with, as they often subsidise the higher costs of private rent to try to support those families on the waiting list? We have to take that into account.

Rushanara Ali: The hon. Member has highlighted some really important issues affecting the private housing sector—costs and supply—and the impacts that they have in different areas. I will come on to the action we have already started taking to make headway on those issues.

As we have heard, homelessness and rough sleeping have dramatically increased. In England, homelessness is now at record levels. In March this year, more than 117,000 households, including over 150,000 children, were living in temporary accommodation. In the hon. Member for Eastbourne's constituency, on 31 March, 373 households and 419 children were living in temporary accommodation. It is shocking that children and families in this country in the 21st century are without a permanent place to call home, and have to live in horrific conditions where temporary accommodation is not of a decent standard. We all know of cases where that is deeply problematic.

Dame Meg Hillier: I am very pleased that my hon. Friend is in this post, because she understands the real issues. We have this ridiculous situation where families in my constituency in east London are being sent to other parts of the country, putting pressure on the housing markets and causing issues there. This vicious circle is costing the taxpayer—and households, our schools and our communities—dear. I am sure that she is moving on to what solutions may be available, and she has our support in finding those.

Rushanara Ali: I am incredibly grateful, and my correspondence box is piling up with the mix of issues that my hon. Friend points to. We need to work collectively

[*Rushanara Ali*]

to tackle these issues, because unless we deal with them in the round, one area's issues will be transferred to another, which I know is not the answer. We need to address those issues, but it will take some time for us to gather the evidence and work with Members to tackle barriers.

Josh Babarinde: The Minister has spoken about the importance of working collectively. Council leaders such as Stephen, who is in the Gallery, are very keen to do that. The Minister said that she has seen the correspondence from him and other council leaders. Would she be willing to meet a delegation of council leaders, including Stephen, to talk about the ideas and proposals in that correspondence, if she is not going to address them? But maybe she will, later in her speech. It will be really important to hear from Stephen directly about Eastbourne's situation, and to go from there.

Rushanara Ali: I will come on to what we hope we can do in the coming weeks and months. All temporary accommodation must be safe and suitable for the households affected. Interventions in place at the moment include our homelessness advice and support teams, who are drawn from local authorities and the homelessness sector to help local authorities address the placement of families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation for more than six weeks. However, I am clear that to turn this around, we have to tackle the root causes of homelessness and rough sleeping. We need to put in place lasting solutions, rather than quick fixes. For too long, we have seen the lack of a strategic approach.

The hon. Member has used his debate to highlight the devastating effects on his constituents. The story he shared is a powerful one that we can all relate to—one all our constituents have faced. Hon. Members have rightly raised the subject of the pressure on council finances. This Government are absolutely committed to resetting the relationship between local and central Government, and working in partnership in the interests of those living in temporary accommodation and who face homelessness. We want to work closely with the different nations, learning from each other about what works, as well as with regional and local government.

The Government will get councils back on their feet by providing multi-year funding settlements, ending the competitive bidding for pots of money and reforming the local audit system. We have heard from numerous councils that annual allocations are deeply problematic. The competitive nature of funding is really not helpful, and we need much more collaboration. We recognise that councils know their communities best, and with greater stability, they will be in a better position to enhance local services and facilities. I have seen many great examples of innovation and really effective work at local level, and we need to support those efforts and ensure that they are scalable. Local and national Government can learn from each other about the best models and best practice. How local government is funded is crucial in enabling councils to deliver the local services residents need, and it is also of course crucial in delivering on our missions. That is why we are committed to improving the local government finance landscape in this Parliament.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne and others have raised concerns regarding the different kinds of financing mechanisms and benefit subsidy payments for temporary accommodation. We appreciate that these are difficult times and understand the funding pressures local authorities are experiencing. The Department for Work and Pensions continues to keep rates for temporary accommodation subsidy under review and any future decisions on the levels of subsidy will be taken in the context of the Government's missions, the goals on housing and the fiscal context.

Spending plans for the 2025-26 period will be set at the Budget on 30 October, as hon. Members know. Following the Budget, future funding allocations for homelessness and rough sleeping services will be confirmed later this year. We understand this is very challenging for the sector, and we are working closely with local authorities and want to continue to extend that work to ensure that we do all we can to relieve pressures and continue to support them.

Mr Dillon: With the benefits cliff edge, does the Minister agree that those in temporary accommodation should be given longer to be able to progress on to paying or having their benefits stopped, so that they can build up a bit of a nest egg? That way, when they move out of temporary accommodation, they are being set up for a chance to succeed in the tenancy by being able to furnish their homes right from the very outset, rather than having to start from scratch each time and not having any funds to call upon.

Rushanara Ali: The hon. Member raises the important barriers to employment that I know are exercising my ministerial colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions, not least as they look at tackling the child poverty challenge—another dimension to the housing crisis. He makes an important point, and I hope we can continue to get those inputs from colleagues as we make progress on the work, which I will come on to, that we will do in relation to the inter-ministerial taskforce on homelessness.

On the housing funding point, we recognise the challenges with the cost of temporary accommodation, and earlier this year the Government confirmed allocations for round 3 of the £1.2 billion local authority housing fund, which is expected to provide around 7,000 homes by 2026. Eastbourne is due to receive around £4.4 million, and this fund aims to ease local homelessness pressures, reduce spending on unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation and provide safe and sustainable housing for those fleeing persecution.

I recognise that, as others have pointed out, there is more to do, but this is an important part of the funding settlement that is currently available and is necessary in dealing with the supply issue, although of course we have a wider agenda on housing supply. We will deliver the biggest increase in social and affordable house building in a generation; we will build 1.5 million homes over the next five years. We are also committed to abolishing section 21 no-fault evictions, preventing private renters from being exploited and discriminated against—the hon. Member for Eastbourne raised that and gave a powerful example from his constituency in his opening remarks. The Renters' Rights Bill will give renters much greater security and stability so they can stay in their

homes for longer. The issues around safety and the decent homes standard will be addressed through extending Awaab's law so that it covers private landlords. This will significantly reduce the number of poor-quality privately rented homes and empower tenants to raise concerns. Issues around quality of housing are not addressed, and we need to make sure that that is tackled. We very much hope that the combination of provisions we have already started will allow us to begin to make progress quickly.

It is just over three and a half months—just more than 100 days—that we have been in power, but we are determined to tackle these issues. I know that some of the other issues that have been raised, such as the out-of-area placement of our constituents, are deeply damaging. Families are moved away from their networks, from schools, from health providers and from other support systems. We are clear that if a local authority places a household into accommodation in another local area, they are required by law to notify the local authority of that placement. We have to build homes in the areas where they are needed so that we can reduce the need for out-of-area placements. That is why we will keep our focus on the house building agenda. Unless we tackle the supply of housing—affordable and social housing, along with other kinds of housing—we will be stuck in this cycle, and nobody wants that.

Josh Babarinde: It was important and powerful to hear the Minister reaffirm the legal obligation on local authorities to notify another local authority if they are placing folks in accommodation there. Brighton and Hove city council has for some years been going ahead with placements in Eastbourne, but notification has not always taken place. That has meant that Eastbourne borough council has not been in a position to understand the general support needs landscape and how best to support those people. Will the Minister share some words that might reassure Eastbourne council and remind Brighton council of its obligations?

Rushanara Ali: I hope the hon. Member is reassured by the points I have made already, but going forward we need to look at how we can enable much more collaboration between councils and among regional government. The interconnectedness of these challenges means they have to be addressed collectively. That is why from the national Government perspective, we will soon initiate the inter-ministerial group, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. It will be working with Ministers across Government to take action on homelessness, looking at temporary accommodation, rough sleeping and the wider agenda. We will be working with the other relevant Departments

to look at such issues as health and the benefits system. Those Departments have an important role to play if we are to bring an end to homelessness once and for all.

In that context, we are committed to ensuring that local government and regional government play their part, working with us, along with the charitable sector and the community sector. I have heard powerful stories of the work that faith organisations do to support those who face challenges around housing and homelessness. Their insights and their contributions need to be included as we develop solutions to tackle this problem.

Mrs Russell: The Minister listed a wide variety of Departments, but the Department for Education was not among them. Will she assure me that that is one of the Departments that she intends to co-ordinate with? I am sure that it is.

Rushanara Ali: Absolutely. I was giving examples, not an exhaustive list. I have already met with colleagues, as has the Deputy Prime Minister; we work very closely with the Department for Education. There is a great deal of interest and enthusiasm at ministerial level, at official level and, we know, at local authority level and among colleagues across the House in working with us to develop a cross-departmental, cross-societal strategy that focuses on getting results. Of course, we need to deal with the immediate challenges, but we need a long-term strategy too.

I want to reiterate that we are absolutely committed to tackling the root causes. I hope that we can all take hope and heart from the extraordinary work that many organisations do in communities and constituencies up and down the country. We have seen the work done in local areas by local authorities and other agencies, with multi-agency approaches in healthcare and education, for example, and of course the work that many colleagues have done here in Parliament to campaign and raise awareness of the plight of those who face homelessness.

We have a real opportunity to get this agenda right, and in that spirit I welcome this debate. I really appreciate the turnout and the interest—Adjournment debates are normally attended by only a couple of people. It is crucial that we build alliances and use the insights of Members of Parliament, who—as I have found throughout my political career—are at the sharp end, trying to support their constituents. I hope that colleagues can see that there is a real openness in this Government to work together to tackle this challenge once and for all.

Question put and agreed to.

4.56 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 24 October 2024

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

Horseracing

1.30 pm

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government support for the horseracing industry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank hon. Members for attending the debate—I know it is a Thursday, but people have shuffled their diaries to attend because of the industry's importance to all our constituencies and to the country.

Racing is, after football, the second most watched sport in the country. About 6 million people attend the races every year, among them people of all ages, 40% of whom are women. Contrary to myth, racing is a cross-class sport—not that we want to use this debate to define working people. British racing is without doubt an international success story. Four of the top 10 races in the world are held here, which is more than in any other country. We have the best bloodstock; our races attract the best horses; and Britain has some of the finest trainers and horses, including modern legends such as Frankel and Enable.

Racing, like all sports, is a business and it brings huge economic benefits. The industry is estimated to generate £4.1 billion in direct, indirect and associated expenditure every year. About 85,000 people are employed at racecourses, training yards and breeding operations, and in the betting industry. In Newmarket, racing brings in more than 7,000 jobs and generates hundreds of millions of pounds a year for the local economy.

Stuart Anderson (South Shropshire) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing such an important debate. I am delighted to have Ludlow racecourse in my constituency and, if he ever gets the chance, I would welcome him to Eyton races—a great day out. He made an important point about the local economy, so does he agree that the lack of a clear way forward and support from the Government at this stage is creating uncertainty in horseracing?

Nick Timothy: I am sure all hon. Members would look forward to a trip to Ludlow to experience the racing. If I am honest—I say this as a Conservative—this issue has dragged on for a while. I will turn to some questions for the Minister shortly, but time is of the essence.

As so often with Britain, part of the draw, especially for international investors, traders and spectators, is our history and tradition. Racing in this country dates back more than three centuries, and thoroughbred racing was first created here. The association with royalty, which continues with His Majesty the King, only adds to the prestige—I am sitting next to my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Jack Rankin), the most ardent monarchist in the House of Commons.

That success story, however, is strangely neglected. To those who do not know the industry, it can sometimes appear to be something of a caricature, with horses selling for millions of pounds, breeders paying hundreds of thousands for a particular stallion to cover a mare, and aristocrats and royals being prominent in their patronage. But the reality of racing, unfortunately, is that its future is far more precarious.

Many breeders and trainers operate on tight margins and, as many hon. Members present will affirm, any conversation with them turns quickly to prize money. A horse that wins a top-tier British race increases its future breeding value, but the immediate return is limited compared with in Australia, Ireland and France, where racing benefits from Government support, or in Japan and the United States, where there is simply more money around.

The prize fund for the Dubai Turf, for example, is £4.5 million, and for the All-Star Mile in Australia it is £2.7 million. The Queen Anne Stakes in Ascot, which is a fair equivalent, offers £600,000, and the same is true for the less famous races. At an average of £16,000 to be divided by all placed horses, prize money across the board is much lower here than in competitor markets. Lower down the pyramid, most races pay less than £5,000 to the winner. Owner expenditure far outstrips the total prize money up for grabs in British racing. That is down to how the industry is funded.

In Japan and Hong Kong, where betting is generally banned, there are exceptions for horseracing and some other sports, because they are seen as being run efficiently and by Government Departments. That means proportionately more bets are placed on horseracing than elsewhere, and in both places the industry controls the gambling. In France, prize money is underwritten by the Pari Mutuel Urbain, which enjoys a monopoly on betting. In Australia, where prize money has almost doubled in a decade, it is funded mostly through a betting tax. In Ireland, more than two thirds of prize money comes directly from the Irish Government.

Our system is different. Here the funds come from media rights, executive contributions from racecourses, owners' entry fees, and the betting levy—a 10% tax on bookmakers' profits from bets placed on races staged in Britain. Around a third of prize money comes from the levy, but income is falling. Over the past two years, the industry estimates that betting turnover on British racing has fallen by over £1.5 billion and could be as low as £7 billion this year. The Horserace Betting Levy Board says

"falling turnover is unlikely to prove a positive for the sport's long-term health",

and I agree.

Nobody expects us to adopt a Japanese or French model, but I ask the Minister how things might be changed so that we can put racing on a sustainable footing and make sure that we retain our position as the best place in the world to breed, train and race horses. First, does the Minister agree with all hon. Members present—this is probably the easiest of my questions—that the British horseracing industry is an undoubted international success story, a source of British soft power around the world, and home to many vital community assets in regional towns here, and that we must therefore do everything in our power to make sure it continues to prosper?

[Nick Timothy]

Secondly, will the Minister confirm today that the Government will not go back to square one and will instead pick up where their predecessors left off? In May, the British Horseracing Authority agreed with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport that the levy should be increased to 11.5% to create a growth fund to market and promote British racing at home and abroad, and to hold an independent review of the racing funding model.

Dan Carden (Liverpool Walton) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Member for securing this debate—he and I are co-chairs of the all-party parliamentary group on racing and bloodstock. It is important to get more money into the racing industry because there are so many people employed throughout the sport for whom racing is their livelihood, but their commitment and the lifestyle that they have to lead to do their work means that we must make sure they are in decent well-paid jobs as well. We cannot have racing squeezed, as it could be in years ahead.

Nick Timothy: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. The racing industry is connected to many associated industries and many different kinds of jobs. As I said, when people see the large sums that are invested in bloodstock and so on, they do not always see that the industry rests on thousands of people, many of whom are on low incomes.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, which is well attended for a Thursday. He knows my family's interest—I am about the only one who is not involved in racing; my father was a national hunt jockey. Does he agree that from the 2,000 Guineas and the Derby down to the small trainers, small tracks, point-to-points—Fakenham is just outside my constituency—the rural economy and pony clubs, there is an equine economy right across this country, but it relies on money trickling down from the top? Does he further agree that racing's finances are not just unhealthy, but in crisis? The problem goes across a lot of Labour constituencies as well, so I support him in asking the Government—we will hear from the Minister—for a strong steer to prevent the further decline of racing's finances.

Nick Timothy: I agree emphatically with my hon. Friend. I do not think this is a party political matter at all. We are all in this room regardless of our party badges because we know the importance of horseracing to our constituents and to our local economies and the country. A lot of the beneficiaries of the British horseracing industry reside in rural and semi-rural areas and regional towns. We spend a lot of time talking in this House about how we are going to improve the regional economy and racing is a really important part of that economy. To return to my point, we do not have time to go backwards.

As part of the work that I referred to, my third question is: will the Minister commit in this debate to the principle of a higher levy? In 2022-23, the levy raised £105 million, but the British Horseracing Authority estimates that an indexed yield of at least £133.5 million is needed for a sustainable future for racing.

Fourthly, will the Government reform the way in which the levy works? It is anomalous and nonsensical that the levy should apply to bets placed here on the races in this country, but not on bets placed here on races held overseas. That does not happen in Ireland or France, which derive significant income from the best British meetings, and we are penalising our own industry. I note that the Gambling Minister, Baroness Twycross, has committed to

“making sure that the levy is administered efficiently to best support racing.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 29 July 2024; Vol. 839, c. 801.]

Indeed, I think the way in which the levy works is a vital part of that commitment.

Fifthly, following the Secretary of State's encouragement that

“we cannot believe everything we read in the papers”—[*Official Report*, 17 October 2024; Vol. 754, c. 969.]

as somebody who sometimes writes in *The Daily Telegraph*, I demur—can the Minister rule out today the reported Treasury plan to increase taxes on bookmakers? If the idea is to crack down on problem gambling, such a blanket policy would be like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut, and would obviously damage the racing industry.

Sixthly, and finally—you might be grateful to hear that, Sir Edward—the Secretary of State rightly wants to “strike the right balance” to prevent problem gambling while also protecting the racing industry and responsible gambling, which she says

“brings joy to many people.”—[*Official Report*, 17 October 2024; Vol. 754, c. 968.]

Will the Government commit today to ensuring proportionality in their efforts to stop problem gambling?

Even though Parliament has not legislated for affordability checks, as the gambling review has dragged on, bookmakers are operating pilot checks at the behest of the Gambling Commission. The idea was that those checks would be frictionless, and we were told that eight in 10 people placing bets would never undergo checks, but we know that punters are being asked to provide bank statements and payslips to prove they can afford their bets. Nobody wants to see problem gambling go untackled, but the rate of problem gambling on horseracing is comparable with that of many national lottery products, and affordability checks are already driving people away from legal betting on horseracing and on to the ever-growing offshore black market through online accounts, where of course there are no safeguards at all.

While the numbers for viewing and attendance at races is at least the same as it was before affordability checks, we know that betting turnover, and therefore racing income, is down by 20% in two years. Independent analysis for the Racecourse Association has forecast a £250-million hit to racing over the next five years, and the BHA says that one in seven jobs in the sport could be lost because of that issue alone. We need to appreciate the difference between gambling on racing or other sports, and the fixed-margin gambling online and in casinos that drives so much addiction and suffering. If we do not, it will be to the detriment of the racing industry and the enjoyment, employment and prosperity that it brings to so many. I look forward to hearing from the Minister.

Several hon. Members rose—

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Order. To get everybody in, we will start with an informal time limit, so please do not speak for more than five minutes. Keep an eye on the clock, please.

1.43 pm

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): Thank you very much, Sir Edward—it is very kind of you to call me so early in the debate. I declare an interest as the vice-chairman of the APPG on racing and bloodstock. It is a pleasure to serve with you, the Father of the House, as custodian of the time limits and procedures. I appreciate your advice, and I will stick to the required five-minute maximum. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) on securing this important and timely debate.

I have always been a firm supporter of the horseracing industry. It may be the sport of kings, but it is loved by many thousands, if not millions, of working-class people. It is a vital part of not only our rich cultural heritage but our economic engine, especially for more rural communities and towns in areas such as mine. We have 59 racecourses across England, Scotland and Wales, and as was mentioned a little earlier, the industry draws almost 5 million spectators each year—I was actually surprised by the numbers. World-renowned events such as Royal Ascot, the Cheltenham festival, the grand national at Aintree—represented by my good and hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Walton (Dan Carden)—and the Ebor meeting at York attract people from all walks of life, who appreciate the opportunity to visit in person.

However, smaller, less famous racecourses are of equal, or perhaps more, importance to local communities. The hon. Member for South Shropshire (Stuart Anderson) mentioned his racecourse in Ludlow—I am not familiar with it, but perhaps I will visit at some point in the future. We are blessed with many such racecourses in my region, with Hexham in the north and Sedgefield—the racecourse nearest my constituency—in County Durham, and they all play a crucial role in supporting the regional economy. Of course, I must mention Newcastle racecourse, the home of the Pitmen's Derby—the Northumberland Plate—and, soon, the Fighting Fifth.

As we have heard, horseracing contributes a not insubstantial £4.1 billion annually to the UK and supports more than 85,000 jobs—it is actually the second largest spectator sport after football. It plays a significant role in rural areas, offering employment, boosting tourism and sustaining industries, including not just those directly involved in horse breeding and horseracing, but catering, transport and hospitality. However, as we are all aware, the industry faces economic challenges, many of which stem from previous policy decisions, as recognised in the 2023 gambling White Paper. As a result, it is accepted that reforms are necessary to ensure the sustainable future of this crucial sector.

One of the most pressing issues—I am sure the Minister is fully aware of this—is the need to reform the horserace betting levy, which is absolutely crucial for funding not just prize money to attract the best entrants, but equine welfare and veterinary science. Although the levy was due for review this year, the process was delayed because of the general election. In May the British Horseracing Authority and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport reached an agreement to reform the

levy, including by increasing the rate to 11.5%—I am sure the Minister will say a bit more about that. That would create a growth fund to promote racing domestically and internationally, and I gently encourage her to continue engaging constructively with the British Horseracing Authority and to build on those important earlier discussions. I understand that the British Horseracing Authority is eager to return to negotiations as soon as possible to secure a sustainable future and a sustainable funding model.

I completely agree with the argument we heard earlier that the levy should apply to all racing globally that is bet on by British punters. There is an international precedent for that, so I am not quite sure why it has not yet happened—it might be the technology, but advances in technology make it possible now. That would bring us in line with other leading nations, particularly Ireland, and would help to ensure the sport's long-term viability.

Horseracing is a vital part of Britain's economy and culture. It provides jobs, supports rural employment and attracts global attention and publicity. As I and other colleagues have said, it faces serious challenges, but those can be resolved through horserace betting levy reforms. I am confident that our new Labour Government and our new Minister and ministerial team will work with the industry to make the necessary changes and ensure that this sport continues to thrive for years to come.

1.49 pm

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) on securing this important debate.

Last week, I was lucky enough to attend the season opener at Wincanton races in my constituency. I found it hugely valuable to be there and discuss the issues of trainers, jockeys, owners and those watching the races alike. As the hon. Member said, the British horseracing industry is worth £4.1 billion a year to the UK economy, but most of that comes from mega-wealthy bettors who can afford to make substantial bets.

It is right that the Liberal Democrats have committed to implementing affordability checks, but it is vital that those checks protect vulnerable problem gamblers and their families, rather than deterring wealthy players, who help underpin the sport. One analysis shows that enhanced financial risk checks in horseracing, if implemented badly, could result in the sport losing £50 million a year. Similarly, a British Horseracing Authority survey suggests that 40% of bettors would turn to the black market if affordability checks were too stringent. Given that remote betting turnover, which accounts for at least 70% of all betting, continues to decline, the industry cannot afford to see that level of financial support just walk away. The Government must work with the industry to implement robust and frictionless affordability checks.

Racecourses, training yards and breeding operations are largely based in rural areas such as Wincanton and play an important economic role in those areas. Some 20,000 people are directly employed by the horseracing industry, and it supports another 65,000 jobs in supply chains. There is a real opportunity for the Government to ensure that local people in rural areas can access these jobs, by boosting the availability and take-up of apprenticeships and expanding higher vocational training.

[Sarah Dyke]

The lower apprentice rate should be scrapped to guarantee that everyone working in the horseracing industry receives at least the national minimum wage. That is particularly important in rural areas such as Glastonbury and Somerton, where people still typically need to spend an additional 10% to 20% more on everyday requirements than those in urban areas due to the rural premium.

We should not forget that horseracing also plays an important cultural and social role at the heart of rural communities such as mine. In Glastonbury and Somerton, charities such as Racing to School are doing valuable work to provide curriculum-based visits to Wincanton racecourse for local schools. A day at the races is also an important way for many in rural communities, including the elderly, to socialise. I urge the Government to strike a balance between protecting these vulnerable groups, tackling the harms of problem gambling and ensuring that people are not unduly deterred from the sport.

Coming from a farming family and having ridden horses for much of my life, I care deeply about the welfare of the horses at the heart of this industry. The UK has some of the highest welfare standards in the world, including in horseracing, but I fear that that may slip unless the Government take steps to address the domestic vet shortage. Half of vets leaving the industry have been in the profession for less than four years. Recruitment and retention are significantly more challenging in rural areas such as Glastonbury and Somerton.

To conclude, I urge the Government to work with the horseracing industry to introduce real safeguards and guardrails that support the progress that the industry has already made, such as the Betting and Gaming Council's new voluntary code on consumer checks. The priority must always be to protect problem gamblers from being exploited by predatory gambling companies, rather than saddling the horseracing industry with tax rises to fix the financial mess left behind by the previous Conservative Government.

1.54 pm

Dan Carden (Liverpool Walton) (Lab): Thank you, Sir Edward, for your chairmanship of today's debate, and it is a pleasure to be able to contribute. I refer Members to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and congratulate the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) on securing the debate. His extraordinary constituency has Newmarket in it, and I have not been there since I was about 10 or 11, when my godfather took me to see the sales taking place—I hope I can go and relive that experience at some point soon.

I have loved horseracing since I was a child. My dad, who was a dock worker, would take me to local racecourses. I did not grow up in the countryside, but in the city of Liverpool, and he would take me to Haydock racecourse and Aintree racecourse. The first grand national I attended was won by Red Marauder, and only four horses out of 40 finished the race—Red Marauder, Smarty, Blowing Wind and Papillon.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): That is very impressive!

Dan Carden: The racecourse was an absolute bog filled with water, and two of those horses had to be remounted to get to the finish. The event hooked me on horseracing because it was so extraordinary.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk and I now chair the all-party parliamentary group on racing and bloodstock, and our first meeting of this Parliament was attended by well over 20 colleagues. That—along with the strong attendance at this debate on a Thursday—just shows how highly the sport is considered.

I am incredibly proud to represent the Walton constituency, which now has Aintree racecourse within it. Aintree is home to one of the greatest races in the world, which is watched by more than 600 million people globally: the grand national. The economic contribution of the grand national—the three-day race meeting—is well over £60 million for. Aintree racecourse is also a world-class sporting facility, as well as being part of the local community, maintaining strong relationships, as some hon. Members will know, with Alder Hey children's hospital, Park Palace Ponies and some of our schools and educational establishments. There is so much more potential for racecourses in our communities to have a positive and meaningful social impact, especially in urban areas. There is the potential for young people to benefit from alternatives to the classroom when it comes to skills and apprenticeships, and there are alternative fulfilling careers. Racing can play a role in helping the Government to deliver their national mission for growth.

Whatever the challenges British horseracing faces, it will always benefit from its prestige, including its centuries-old thoroughbred history, from Eclipse to Frankel, and Ascot racecourse, which was founded in 1711. Horseracing bridges the class divide. All of us want British horseracing to thrive into the future. For those who work in the industry, it is a labour of love and dedication, and a total life commitment.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk did an excellent job of putting on record the low prize money offered in Britain, compared to countries with different funding models, so I do not need to repeat that. However, given the reported decline in betting turnover, the current system—the reliance on media rights, racecourse contributions, owners and the levy—leaves the industry looking precarious. That is a real concern for all those who rely on it, and like all those in leadership roles in the industry, we in this place also have concerns. My message to the Minister and her colleagues is that they, and we as a Labour Government, have a responsibility to be good custodians of the industry for the future.

British racing is British soft power; it creates bonds between states—not just our neighbours in France and Ireland, but Japan, Australia, the US and the Gulf states. It is one of the finest cultural and economic assets this country possesses, and it rightly has a reputation as a global leader. Will the Minister commit to being proactive in backing the industry and all those who work in it? Will she carry forward the current levy negotiations with at least the suggested increase and with some urgency? While negotiations between the Betting and Gaming Council and the BHA are resuming, we must remember that the Government set the red lines and make the decisions. Finally, could we have that independent review into the future of racing—into the funding model for racing—to ensure that, in the years ahead, we can arrive at a sustainable settlement to save and promote racing?

1.59 pm

Lincoln Jopp (Spelthorne) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) for securing this important debate. I declare an interest: just 12 miles or so from here, and just round the corner from where I live in Sunbury in my Spelthorne constituency, is Kempton Park racecourse, where I enjoyed Jump Sunday as a guest of the Jockey Club last Sunday. It was a glorious and memorable day, and all my family will be back on Boxing day to enjoy the King George VI and Kauto Star Novices chases.

To the people of Spelthorne, the all-weather flat and turf jumps courses are much more than that. The racecourse plays host to the weekly market and to the fortnightly international antiques market, now in its 40th year, where the buyers from the nearby Shepperton studios create the sets for the around 31 soundstages there. The annual total attendance for the racing is 20,000, multiplied many times by the global television audience, and for the antiques market it is 80,000. The course regularly hosts school visits and police training, and has a sell-out fireworks display in early November.

At its heart, Kempton Park is about the racing and the 70 or so meetings held there every year, and it is every bit as important to our national fabric as Formula 1, our world-leading track cyclists and the premier league. But, as my hon. Friend described, British horseracing, having led the world from its inception, is in danger of falling behind the leading group internationally. Where horseracing fails, it fails fast, and the Government want no piece of that.

Enough of the stick—what about a bit of carrot? The Minister has a huge opportunity to be the jockey who rides in a winner, generating growth and prosperity for our nation. With a swift and judicious settlement of the levy and protection from egregious taxation and regulation, the Minister will lead a late run on the stand rail. Glory awaits; I hope she achieves it.

2.2 pm

Sally Jameson (Doncaster Central) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) for securing this debate. I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Horseracing is a national treasure and the UK is a world leader in the sport, which is worth more than £4.1 billion annually to the UK economy, as has been said. In Doncaster, our racecourse is a source of great pride. It is one of the oldest racecourses in the country, in operation since 1614, and has been home to the best race festival, the St Leger, since 1776. As well as being the largest racecourse in the country, it acts as a concert venue, hosting iconic pop artists such as the Saturdays, Madness and Jess Glynne. It was also host to this year's election count, where I was duly elected to this place—without doubt, the best count in the country.

The importance of horseracing to Doncaster's culture and the economy cannot be overstated. On leaving Doncaster railway station, visitors to our city can see our racehorses across the road on the city's mural, and for four days each September Leger Way becomes impassable as locals and visitors alike flock to the country's most iconic fixture at the racecourse. But we

also have fixtures throughout the year—there were 36 in 2023—which are always popular events for both my constituents and visitors from further afield.

The racecourse is one of the jewels in Doncaster Central's crown. As a proud Doncaster native and regular attendee at my course, I hope that racing continues to flourish to uphold this important cultural and economic asset in my city. To do that, it is important that the Government set the necessary conditions to sustain it and for it to flourish. As has been discussed, the British Horseracing Authority and the previous Government reached a settlement on the betting levy. The changes were due to take place in September, but following the election and the welcome change in Government, we have yet to see them implemented. I ask the Government to pick up the discussions on that settlement so that the horseracing industry can have clarity on its future and on the settlement, and to ensure that racecourses such as Doncaster are able to prepare and adapt to any changes.

I also ask, as other Members have, that the Government pick up on the need for an independent review of the wider funding model for the sport after this year's settlement has taken effect, to ensure that the industry is able to succeed. I repeat the ask that consideration be given to applying the horserace betting levy to all horseracing globally that is bet on by British customers.

It is imperative that we do not underestimate the value of British horseracing to many constituencies like mine and recognise that we must protect its interests, so that racecourses such as ours in Doncaster can continue to thrive and provide high-quality events and jobs for visitors and constituents for the years to come.

2.5 pm

Mr Lee Dillon (Newbury) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) on securing this important debate.

It is an honour to represent a constituency that includes both Newbury racecourse and the Lambourn valley, which is home to some of the finest trainers in the country. Lambourn valley supports 34 trainers and employs more than 750 full-time workers, accounting for 30% of all jobs in that area. In addition to providing employment opportunities, the facilities make a major contribution to the local economy, with the gross value added from Lambourn estimated to be more than £22 million.

Nearly 15 miles south of the Lambourn valley, in the southern part of my constituency, lies Newbury racecourse. Unfortunately, our general election count could not be held there because an evening meet was going on. The venue hosts 31 meets annually, including the winter festival, and more than 23,000 people can be hosted both indoors and outdoors, generating an additional £5 million in gross added value.

It is clear that the industry is at the heart of my constituency, and it plays a vital role in ensuring the continued prosperity of the local economy. It does and can do more to support Labour's focus on economic growth, but it needs support from the Government.

The hon. Member clearly laid out six asks of the Government. Although I do not want to repeat the excellent arguments he made, I put on the record my support for

[Mr Lee Dillon]

those measures. In particular, I will briefly address his sixth point regarding responsible gambling. I agree that none of us wants to see problem gambling go unchecked, but with the use of online platforms it is surely not beyond reason for sites to allow different access for different betting needs. A horse owner recently remarked to me that he could buy a horse for £40,000 without any checks, but he now has to provide bank statements in order to stake a couple of thousand pounds on a race. We need to find a better balance between protecting those most at risk and allowing people to spend their money freely without the involvement of the state and greater regulations.

I recently had the privilege of meeting trainers in Lambourn to discuss the importance of the industry to the local community and learn more about their outstanding efforts in caring both for horses and for the surrounding environment. During our conversation, they shared their concerns about the financial difficulties they face, including being forced to sell land just to stay afloat. The situation is unacceptable. Many people, both in my constituency and throughout the country, depend on the industry economically and socially.

It is vital that the Government take action to ensure the survival and continued success of the horseracing industry. The six asks from the industry, as raised by the hon. Member for West Suffolk, will clearly help but, outside of direct interventions and tax changes, more needs to be done to support the industry indirectly. For example, balancing support for local economies such as Lambourn while balancing the environmental impacts of building in a national landscape is key.

Without a sensible approach, the horseracing industry of my home will struggle to continue. Stables are struggling with recruitment because workers are unable to find places to live. The median house price in Newbury is £99,000 higher than the median house price in the country as a whole, starting at £385,000. Prices are out of reach for most. If stables are unable to recruit staff due to high housing costs, they may be forced to close for longer periods, leaving them without enough staff to care for and train the horses properly. Increasing the availability of social housing would be a significant step forward in addressing that issue.

We have also seen nutrient neutrality rules bring developments to a halt across the country, including in Lambourn, and we urgently need the Government to provide better advice and guidance to developers and local authorities so that development can continue while we protect our precious waterways.

The community of Lambourn is currently developing its own neighbourhood development plan, and it includes a focus on the impact of planning policy on the horseracing industry. This forward-thinking approach to better inform planners and decision makers of the unique aspects and challenges of the horseracing industry is welcome and will add real context in the consideration of planning decisions. More financial support from the Government is needed, along with a stronger commitment to build social housing. We must not overlook the incredible work the horseracing industry does.

Newbury racecourse has recently been named a finalist in two categories at the Racecourse Association showcase awards, being recognised for its consistently high operating

standards. The awards take place on 7 November, and I wish Newbury racecourse the best of luck. I am due to visit the racecourse tomorrow for a behind-the-scenes tour followed by an exciting afternoon watching the races. It is always exciting to experience this wonderful sport at first hand and witness the hard work of the jockeys, trainers and yard staff in action. Historic sports like horseracing are essential for not only preserving traditions but sustaining the local economy. It is vital that we ensure its future for many years to come.

2.11 pm

Warinder Juss (Wolverhampton West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) on securing the debate.

I am not a follower of horseracing—I am a football fan and a season ticket holder at Wolverhampton Wanderers, who unfortunately are not doing too well at the moment—but we do not have to be supporters or followers of horseracing to understand how important it is to this country. Wolverhampton racecourse in my Wolverhampton West constituency is an important part of the city. Statistics have already been mentioned, but one point that has not been made is that British horseracing generates £300 million annually in taxation, contributing to the economy. I had the pleasure of going around the racecourse and saw what it does for the city and contributes to the local community. One thing that was really apparent was the high standards of animal health and welfare and how well the horses are looked after.

Horseracing is part of British culture and heritage. The first recorded race was at Newmarket in 1622, and we have had a racecourse in Wolverhampton since 1825. Wolverhampton racecourse was the first track to have floodlights. There are also evening meetings, which contribute to community engagement with the racecourse.

My hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster Central (Sally Jameson) mentioned the bands that play at Doncaster racecourse, so I would like to boast that Wolverhampton racecourse has had such great bands as Madness, the Kaiser Chiefs, UB40 and the Human League. Another important aspect of Wolverhampton racecourse is that it is a venue for meetings, conferences and wedding receptions. I have attended many wedding receptions and meetings there. Wolverhampton racecourse also has a hotel, which has 54 bedrooms, but the City of Wolverhampton council has now given planning permission to increase the capacity to 170 bedrooms.

Horseracing is a part of the economic, cultural and historical heritage of this country. As far as I am concerned as the constituency's MP, it is very much a part of the culture and heritage of Wolverhampton West. I want to ensure that nothing happens that diminishes the viability of Wolverhampton racecourse. I would like to see it continue to flourish, so that many people can attend horseracing and other events there. I very much hope that British horseracing continues and that Wolverhampton racecourse continues to flourish.

2.15 pm

Jack Rankin (Windsor) (Con): It is an honour to take part in this debate under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) for securing this important debate.

I am very fortunate that in my patch I have two world-renowned racecourses—the Royal Windsor racecourse and Ascot racecourse. There is very rarely a better place to be on a Monday night than Royal Windsor—hon. Members are all very welcome. Ascot is obviously famous the world over, particularly for its annual five-day Royal Ascot event—an event that bucked the national trend this year by seeing an increase rather than a decline in attendance, which is a credit to all involved.

For those who heard my maiden speech this week—I cannot remember the name of his constituency, but the Member for Aintree clearly did—[*Interruption.*] I apologise to the hon. Member for Liverpool Walton (Dan Carden). Ascot racecourse was founded in 1711, and that course now has 330 years of history and has hosted some of the world's greatest races. Royal Ascot has welcomed some of the greatest racehorses from countries all over the world, including the United States, Hong Kong and, probably most significantly, the Australian super-mare Black Caviar, which is often considered one of the greatest racehorses of all time. She only left Australia once, and that was to compete in Britain at Royal Ascot's diamond jubilee stakes in 2012.

It is not only equine royalty that Royal Ascot attracts. A few speakers have made the point about Ascot's soft power. We get prominent royal figures from Dubai, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, and ambassadors from the Commonwealth and indeed the world over, which makes horseracing an important tool for soft power for this country. The event showcases the best of Britain and the best of my Windsor constituency on the world stage, and is broadcast in more than 180 territories internationally.

As well as the prestige that comes with competing in Ascot's group 1 races, it is obviously a significant financial contributor in terms of increasing a stud horse's value, which remains unrivalled in international racing. As some hon. Members have already pointed out, as a result the racing industry generates more than £4 billion per year and employs more than 85,000 people. Royal Ascot alone welcomes 270,000 spectators across five days and at peak time employs more than 4,500 staff. The visits to the racecourse make up 10% of national racing attendance and their economic importance to my constituency and the surrounding areas cannot be understated. In fact, in 2014 Deloitte assessed the economic impact of Ascot racecourse, just for that event, at £68 million in off-course expenditure through food, accommodation and fashion, all of which drives money into our local economy and into London, our capital, which hosts many punters during those events.

For years, the horserace betting levy has helped to fund the grassroots of horseracing. It is not just about Ascot at the top of the tree—this all filters down into grassroots sports. It increases animal welfare and raises the profile of the sport. At its best, that reciprocal, symbiotic relationship improves the sport and, in turn, the takings of betting companies.

However, a big risk we highlight to the Minister today is that an increase in financial checks on customers risks pushing a lot of gambling underground. Less money would be reinvested in the sport, and ultimately there would be less money for the Treasury. We should of course be doing what we can to ensure that a flutter on the races remains an innocent recreational sport, and we need to give support to the people who need it,

but I would urge the Government to tread carefully and acknowledge the unintended consequences of further regulation, particularly as problem gambling statistics for racing are at low levels compared even with some national lottery products.

Any further introduction should be frictionless and should involve working closely with relevant stakeholders, whether that be the BGC or the BHA. Understandably, countries that have seen heavy regulation tend to see an increase in black market betting. PwC found that increased state regulation of gambling in Norway led to 66% of all gambling there taking place on the black market, and similar conditions have created huge black markets in Portugal, Bulgaria and Sweden.

George Freeman: My hon. Friend is making a powerful and important point. Does he agree that if we do not support the UK racing industry, including supporting prize money, we will not only drive the betting revenues away but see more and more money going into other racing? Last year's Hennessy, a big race in the autumn which I watch, had four runners, and on television all the racing that was being shown was from Ireland, where their horses had 20 entries. If we are not careful, we will end up killing the goose that lays the golden egg. Does he agree?

Jack Rankin: My hon. Friend is quite correct to say that. I am a big cricket fan and effectively we have seen what big money overseas can do to the heart of a sport that originated in this country and gives us a lot of power, and we must be really careful about what we do. Obviously, we should also acknowledge that if people are pushed to the black market, there will be even fewer barriers to entry there, which might have a bad effect on problem gambling overall.

So, we are at an important crossroads for British horseracing. As bookies' takings, which fund the levy, continue to decline, it is important that the Government's approach to gambling respects individual liberty, and drives growth rather than limiting it. Just to expand on that—

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Order. Will the hon. Member now draw his remarks to a close?

Jack Rankin: Certainly, Sir Edward.

I hope the Chancellor will carefully consider introducing further punitive taxes on the gambling sector in next week's Budget, because that would further squeeze the horseracing industry. And given that the Labour party made growth its priority, I hope that this Government will be forthright in their support of British horseracing—an industry that plays a vital role in my local economy and in generating this country's unrivalled soft power.

2.21 pm

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve with you as Chair today, Sir Edward, and I thank the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) for securing this debate.

I am proud to speak today about the remarkable contribution that the horseracing industry makes to our local economy and community in Epsom, and to say why it is vital that we support this industry. For 245 years,

[Helen Maguire]

Epsom has proudly hosted the Derby, one of the world's most prestigious and historic horseraces. However, the Derby is much more than just a race; it is a symbol of Epsom's rich heritage and tradition.

The annual Epsom Derby festival draws more than 40,000 people over two days in early June and is a spectacle like no other. That is not just because of the high-end hospitality experiences on offer, but because the middle of the racecourse is free to enter and open to the public, allowing everyone to participate. And Epsom is unique as a racecourse, in that people can stand on the side of the track without paying a single penny.

That accessibility is absolutely crucial in maintaining a sense of inclusion and community. Indeed, the downs, a public access area surrounding the racecourse, serves the community all year round. Epsom racecourse maintains that land for public use and local residents use the downs for everything from exercising dogs to flying model planes to running—there are running races on the downs—archery, hosted by local clubs, and even metal detecting, organised by groups. So, Epsom is indeed a model of how a racecourse can contribute more broadly and become a resource for the community.

Beyond the 11 race days that Epsom racecourse hosts each year, the Epsom training gallops form the backbone of the local racing ecosystem. That training centre, which is owned and maintained by the racecourse, draws trainers to the area, with 170 horses across 10 different yards. Those independent yards are local businesses that provide year-round employment and they buy in from local suppliers. Each trainer has between five and 50 horses, and it is estimated that over 100 people are directly employed in those yards, with even more jobs being supported indirectly. That training centre is a critical asset for Epsom and the surrounding area, and those trainers are there because of the facilities on the downs. Without consistent racing, prize money or a vibrant industry, those yards would simply struggle. The local economy benefits year-round from the employment, the use of local services and businesses, and the sense of vibrancy that those yards create.

Furthermore, the racecourse is home to over 250 non-racing events throughout the year, as many other Members have mentioned, supporting local businesses and community groups. It hosts business meetings, exhibitions, dancing competitions and pigeon shows. Recently, there were celebrations to mark the 80th anniversary of the D-day landings. The count at which I was elected was also held there. The racecourse facilities bring investment into Epsom from outside, while also offering a really versatile space for the community to use as needed. The excitement of the Derby is important, but the industry's real strength lies in the ecosystem that it supports throughout the year. The Epsom training gallops attract trainers to local yards and sustain local jobs.

Unfortunately, on occasion festivities have got out of hand. Sadly, this year we saw residents in Langley Vale frustrated by antisocial behaviour, vandalism and even ball bearings being shot into their windows. Thankfully, follow-up conversations with the police, residents and the Jockey Club will mean that security arrangements will be tightened for next year.

I want to mention the unique structure of the Jockey Club, which owns Epsom and 13 other racecourses across the UK. It reinvests every penny it makes back into racing, so there are no external stakeholders taking a cut. The more Epsom Downs is supported, the more it contributes to societal investment, benefiting the local community and the sport as a whole. Prize money increases attract better horses, bigger crowds and more interest in the area, and that success ripples out, supporting jobs, local businesses and community initiatives. While Epsom Downs is best known for the Derby, the racecourse brings so much more than that to the community: it is a year-round focus of activity, a training centre for excellence and a cornerstone of our local economy and community. The horseracing industry there supports employment, attracts tourism and fosters a real sense of community pride. Whether it is through the world-class racing, the training gallops or the many events and opportunities available to locals, the industry remains an integral part of what makes Epsom special.

I agree with the six points that the hon. Member for West Suffolk made in his speech, particularly on the need to strike a balance to prevent problem gambling. I hope the Minister agrees that racecourses like Epsom should be supported to continue contributing to the local economy and community, by a review of the general funding model.

2.26 pm

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank and congratulate the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) on securing the debate. I also thank Sporting John, the most recent horse that I successfully bet on at Cheltenham. The fact that it was in November 2021 tells us something about my record of success.

This debate is on a subject of crucial importance to our country and of central importance to my constituency. The breadth of the contribution of the horseracing industry to our nation's economy and sporting and cultural life is undeniable. Indeed, as was mentioned, the world's oldest classic race took place around a century before the first FA cup final. The first Cheltenham gold cup took place in 1819, although I am told that it was very different in those days. The hon. Member set out the economic contribution of horseracing to the country, and I will not go over that. However, it would be a disservice to local areas like my constituency if we failed to do everything possible to secure the future of the sport in a way that is good for racecourses, spectators and the economy of those local areas.

Racecourses are understandably frustrated that agreements reached prior to the general election have effectively timed out; that is why it was important to hold this debate today. Racecourses rightly seek clarity on the new Government's position. On that note, I wholeheartedly back the hon. Member's call for reform to the levy, which is a crucial part of the solution. Our racecourses must be placed on a level playing field with their international competitors; reform of the levy can help us support that goal. Extending the levy to cover bets placed in this country on races taking place abroad would help our racecourses and those who rely on them to achieve long-term financial sustainability. Can the

Minister confirm that that is being considered alongside other reforms and the potential for uprating the levy to help racecourses?

Reforms to protect problem gamblers from the harm they encounter are long overdue, and it is good that there is cross-party consensus on the matter. Doing so in a way that protects racecourses is a key challenge for the Government, and I know Ministers will take that seriously. Can the Minister confirm that when the Government take much-needed action to address problem gambling, that will be done in a way that tackles the root cause by asking betting companies with the deepest pockets to bear the brunt of any changes, and not racecourses?

On local matters in Cheltenham, a study by the University of Gloucestershire found that the contribution of the 2022 Cheltenham festival to our local economy was a staggering £274 million over just four days. There are many other days of racing, which means the contribution to our town is significant. The festival helps our brilliant local hospitality industry. Many of its members tell me that they exist entirely on those four days; if they were not there, we would have far fewer excellent pubs, restaurants, nightclubs and bars. That industry has of course suffered so much in recent years. It also provides good jobs for local people.

I am a strong supporter of the racecourse and that will continue, but its positive impacts in Cheltenham do come with antisocial behaviour, which too often spills over into unacceptable behaviour, misogyny and practices that many local people find distasteful. It is to the racecourse's credit that it has campaigned proactively to try to bring an end to the things that local people find difficult.

The Love our Turf campaign is helping. As part of that, over the last two years I have declared a war on wee during race week. That is against the legions of men—it is always men—who feel it is appropriate to urinate publicly in our town centre, in broad daylight, on their way to the racecourse. The use of hydrophobic paint on town centre walls and extra public loos have helped to reduce reports of public urination. The racecourse's deployment of staff on routes to and from the town centre has also helped. But we must go further: the war on wee will be fought again this coming March.

On the subject of undesirable impacts, there is no demand for sexual entertainment venues in Cheltenham town centre for 51 weeks of the year, but during race week, the on-the-ground impact of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 appears to be that sexual entertainment venues can pop up in a local pub or bar with little reference to the local authority. That puts local councils in an invidious position. If they award a licence to an establishment, it is unpopular, divisive and unwanted by the local people, but if they do not, SEVs pop up in a seemingly haphazard way that places women at much greater risk of harm. The Minister probably cannot comment on that issue today, but I would be grateful if she raised it with appropriate colleagues.

I do not want to take away from the importance of the debate, but as the hon. Member for Cheltenham, I cannot stand up and support national hunt racing without raising these points of difficulty. It is not the racecourse's fault—local people in Cheltenham know that—but the fault of many different authorities that

need to get a grip. I thank the hon. Member for West Suffolk for giving me the opportunity to make that point, which does not take away from my support for the racecourse.

Another important matter, already raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glastonbury and Somerton (Sarah Dyke), is animal welfare. The industry takes it seriously, but that is often badly misrepresented by those who seek to undermine the good work being done. It is important to get on the record that the Jockey Club has made significant improvements that are worthy of praise, such as lowering the height of hurdles at Cheltenham in recent years. The industry will do more in the coming years; it is listening.

An industry worth £4.1 billion, which supports 85,000 jobs and brings so much joy to so many people from all walks of life, must be cherished. There is cross-party consensus in the Chamber today, and Minister will have heard that. I am pleased to lend support through my comments, just as I will lend support to my picks at the Countryside day at the November meeting in three weeks' time.

2.32 pm

Mr Louie French (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) for securing this debate. I congratulate him on being elected as one of the new co-chairs of the all-party parliamentary group on racing and bloodstock, alongside the hon. Member for Liverpool Walton (Dan Carden) who represents the fantastic Aintree racecourse, home of the grand national. For his information, my last winner was Silver Birch a long time ago; I cannot tell him who came second or third.

I look forward to working together to help to protect the future of British horseracing as a cultural and economic asset for the whole country. I know that is certainly the case in my hon. Friend's constituency, home to the famous Newmarket racecourse and many world-class yards, having visited not too long ago. He is quickly becoming the Member of Parliament not only for West Suffolk but for horseracing—a title that many will be jealous of, including myself.

Putting aside the cultural and sporting importance of horseracing for a moment, the industry is of considerable economic benefit to the United Kingdom, as we have heard with respect to Ascot, Kempton Park, Ludlow, Aintree, Epsom, Wolverhampton, Newmarket, Fakenham, Newcastle, Doncaster, Newbury, Windsor and Cheltenham. I apologise if I missed any that were mentioned, but it shows the breadth of contributions from across our great country.

According to the British Horseracing Authority, the racing industry has direct revenues in excess of £1.47 billion and makes a total contribution to the UK economy of £4.1 billion. In fact, it was the second largest sport behind football for attendance, employment and revenues generated annually. More than 5.5 million people attended the more than 1,500 individual race meetings across England, Scotland and Wales in 2019. While attendance has not quite recovered from the pandemic, in 2022, almost 5 million people attended racing events across our great country.

[Mr Louie French]

In pure economic terms, the value of the industry is clear, but it contributes much more to life in Britain than just tax revenues. It is a core part of British culture that we have successfully exported around the world. On my travels in years gone by, I had the pleasure of witnessing at first hand some of the amazing horseracing courses in other parts of the world—I would add that I paid for that myself before I was a Member in this place.

Horseracing is synonymous with having a flutter, and the gambling industry is a key supporter of horseracing, providing a lifeline through racing's income stream. Together, they are key to the non-financial benefits that I just mentioned. Research shows that 82% of betting shop customers visit their local shop at least once a week, and that 89% of those go on to visit other shops while on the high street. We have a clearer picture of loneliness in our society now than ever before, so we cannot take for granted the social contribution of horseracing, via high street betting shops and visits to the course.

Under the previous Conservative Government, we made the first major governmental contribution to the national conversation around loneliness and the importance of social connections. From my time working for a bookmaker when I was a student, I know that many people living in our communities rely on interactions with betting shop staff to keep them going. While the stakes gambled may not be high, I know many pensioners whose 10p lucky 15s are the highlight of their day—win or lose.

People who visit a betting shop or racecourse are helping to support the horseracing industry, with the horserace betting levy, sponsorship and media rights raising around £350 million for the sport overall. From the conversations that I have already had as the shadow Minister for Gambling, however, I know that there is an increasing tension in how the levy operates, which we have heard about already today.

I am sure that hon. Members present will already know that the horserace betting levy results in betting firms giving up 10% of their gross profits from horseracing back to the sport. That is on top of the 15% betting duty that the Betting and Gaming Council's members pay to the Exchequer. Those members are expected to contribute a record £150 million in levy payments for 2023-24—the third consecutive year that the levy contributions have increased.

Despite the increased payments from betting to racing, betting turnover is down 17% in the first three quarters of this financial year. To further demonstrate the decline in racing, it is estimated that, in 2007, 17% of people enjoyed betting on horseracing, but that fell to 10% in 2018. As we have heard, that is causing great concern among not only racecourses but Betting and Gaming Council members. I have even heard reports of some operators already withdrawing offers such as paying extra places on races or offering best odds guaranteed, and some members have gone as far as not offering prices on horseracing meetings altogether. That is not sustainable or good for racing.

The previous Conservative Government were committed to the long-term success of horseracing in Britain. In line with the statutory requirement that we set out

in 2017, we began the required review in April this year into the rate at which the levy is charged. Unfortunately, work on that has stopped dead in its tracks given the change in Government. Since the election, there has been a new appointment to the Horserace Betting Levy Board, with Anne Lambert appointed as interim chair, but otherwise the industry has been left in limbo by this new Government. On 29 July, Baroness Twycross, the new part-time Minister for Gambling, said in the other place:

“It is too soon for me to commit to the shape of future policy.”
—[Official Report, House of Lords, 29 July 2024; Vol. 839, c. 801.]

Well, as we enter the national hunt season, the industry needs clarity and it needs it soon, as we have heard from other hon. Members today.

What support will the Minister and her Department be offering to the horseracing industry, financial or otherwise, and will she help to negotiate the new level at which the horserace betting levy is to be set? Will she bring forward some of the reforms set out in the gambling White Paper, which will help to level the playing field and promote growth in the sector? What conversations has she had with Government colleagues to make sure that the sport is not damaged by sky-high tax rises in the upcoming Budget? What measures is she taking with industry to stop the growth of the black market, and to make sure that punters can continue to have a flutter freely and safely? What support is she offering horseracing to help grassroots development, equine research and participation in the sport?

Horseracing is vital for many reasons: its economic contribution to the Exchequer, its social and sporting contribution, and the community it provides in mostly rural areas. From raising a foal to the final furlong, horseracing is an essential part of life for people and places up and down our country, as we have heard today. The industry is about not just sport, but, vitally, maintaining and promoting horse welfare across the country.

The BHA's expenditure supports horse welfare; one of its goals is to drive high-quality care and support for the horse in racing. In total, the Horserace Betting Levy Board spends around £3.5 million annually on horse-related areas, such as educational research and a number of horse welfare projects. As we have heard already, the Jockey Club has also made changes over the years to ensure that the safety of horses is improved at our tracks. Moreover, the BHA is responsible for the safety of horses at races in Britain and works with animal welfare organisations, such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and World Horse Welfare, to keep racecourses as safe as possible for the horses. The cross-industry Horse Welfare Board also makes recommendations, including a multi-year strategy to improve welfare.

Earlier this year, alongside Great British Racing, the BHA launched a new campaign, HorsePWR, to promote the facts around welfare in horseracing and to challenge and correct inaccurate information in the public sphere. As the Horse Welfare Board's first five-year strategy comes to a close in the new year, I hope to work with the BHA as it begins to prepare the next one. For anyone listening who has not had the opportunity to visit their local yard, I highly recommend going to their nearest stables to see the fantastic passion and work that goes on. I also recommend a trip to the National Stud, which

is like visiting a five-star hotel—but visitors should make sure to take some Polo mints to keep the horses happy if they are allowed close to them.

From end to end, the equestrian economy is valued at nearly £8 billion, almost half of which is not the racing industry. Horseracing, as we have heard, is much more than just a sport; it is a true British pastime that has a permanent place in the hearts of many people across the country—me included—and it must continue to be supported by this Government as it was by the previous one. In closing, I urge the Government, after a slow start, to leave the stalls, gallop into action as if they were Kauto Star cruising up the Cheltenham hill, and give British horseracing the certainty and future it deserves to remain internationally competitive.

2.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I begin by referring to the Register of Members' Financial Interests, having taken part in a charity bet earlier this year and attended Donny races this time last year. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) on securing this important debate on the future of and support for horseracing. I congratulate him and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Walton (Dan Carden) on being elected co-chairs of the all-party group; the Department looks forward to working with them.

We have heard from hon. Members on both sides of the House, and the shadow Minister did an excellent job of listing all the places, so I will not repeat them. Instead, I will speak about the issue in broad terms before addressing some of the specific points made by the hon. Member for West Suffolk and others.

His Majesty's Government recognise the significant contribution that racing makes to British culture and its particular importance to the British economy. As has been rightly mentioned, it plays a central role in the livelihood of many different communities. I am well aware from my time as the shadow Minister for Gambling of the strength of support on both sides of the House for horseracing, and of the concern around its finances. In February, I took part in a Westminster Hall debate on that subject, prompted by a petition signed by more than 100,000 people. Horseracing is a powerhouse industry that supports employment across racecourses, training yards, breeding operations and related sectors, and is respected at home and abroad.

Horseracing is the second-biggest sport in the UK in terms of attendance. According to the British Horseracing Authority, racing is worth more than £4 billion annually to the economy in direct, indirect and associated expenditure. British racing and breeding enjoy a reputation as a global leader and is promoted worldwide as part of the "GREAT Britain & Northern Ireland" campaign, recognising the cultural and economic importance of horseracing to the UK and the role it plays as a soft power asset.

I will outline the measures that the Government are taking to protect horseracing and its valuable economic and cultural contribution. I will also take this opportunity to highlight the importance of the horserace betting levy, which has been mentioned a number of times. Given the long-standing acknowledgment of the symbiotic

relationship between racing and betting, racing is the only sport with a direct levy that is overseen by the Government. The levy is therefore our most direct lever for supporting the sport, but it needs to reflect the common interests of both sides of the relationship.

The Horserace Betting Levy Board collects the levy, as Members know, and applies the money raised for one or more of the following purposes: supporting breeds of horses; the advancement or encouragement of veterinary science and education; and the improvement of horseracing. The largest proportion of the levy is used to support prize money; in fact, prize money is a means of injecting funds into the wider racing ecosystem through the employment of trainers, jockeys, work riders and a whole host of people in over 500 training yards who are involved in caring for horses and putting on race days.

The ability of prize money to cover the costs of training is a key consideration for owners deciding to enter and remain in the industry. This is seen in the board's recent announcements that it has budgeted to contribute £72.7 million to prize money for racing fixtures in 2025—an increase of £2.2 million on 2024 and around £13 million more than each of the pre-covid years of 2018 and 2019.

The horserace betting levy has evolved in step with the betting industry since it was introduced in the 1960s. In 2017, the previous Government extended the levy to online bookmakers and fixed the rate at 10% so that it no longer had to be negotiated each year. The 2017 reforms almost doubled the amount of levy collected, from £49.8 million to £95 million, and it has continued to perform well, collecting £105 million in 2023-24.

I place on the record my thanks to the Horserace Betting Levy Board, which continues to do an excellent job, especially in difficult circumstances following the sad death of the chair Paul Darling in August this year. I understand it was his memorial this week, and I send my thoughts to his family. The Government will continue to work with the levy board and the wider industry to maximise the benefits of the levy and ensure that it continues to deliver for the sector.

The previous Government undertook a review that concluded in April, and I recognise the significant work undertaken by both the racing and betting industries to secure a sustainable future for the sport. I am aware that, as part of that review, the British Horseracing Authority presented its case that there is a significant gap in its funding, stating that it is unable to compete with jurisdictions such as Ireland and France. The Minister for Gambling has met representatives from both the horseracing and betting industries, has encouraged a voluntary deal that fairly reflects the relationship between racing and betting, and will write to both parties soon. I understand that both parties agreed the value of a growth fund for the sport, and we look forward to hearing about progress on that.

It is fair to say that racing and betting should maximise income from other sources, as the levy represents just 6% of income, with far greater proportions earned from owners, breeders, racegoers, media rights deals and sponsorship. The Government welcome recent changes to the fixture list that are designed to grow the sport, engage new and existing customers and bring an additional £90 million to racing by 2028. I was also encouraged to see horseracing showcased in the recent TV documentaries "Horsepower" and "Champions: Full Gallop".

[Stephanie Peacock]

Let me address the specific points raised by the hon. Member for West Suffolk. Several other Members made similar points. First, as I have hopefully made clear in my speech so far, I absolutely agree that British horseracing is an international success story. I am delighted to put my support for it on the record. As I said, I was at Donny races last year. Indeed, the year before that I was at York races with my good friend, the late great Jim Andrews, who was my agent. That was one of the last days we spent together before he sadly passed away—I pay tribute to him—and I have very fond memories of York races for that reason. I know of the huge contribution that horseracing makes not just to our economy but to communities up and down the country.

On the hon. Gentleman's second and third questions, in the absence of any current legislative opportunity to impose changes to the levy, the Government are inviting the betting and racing industries to resume negotiations on a voluntary deal. We think that is the best and fastest option to get additional money flowing to the sport. I share the hon. Gentleman's hope that we will not go back to square one, and that the parties will reflect on areas where there was agreement.

I do not think the previous negotiations were publicised at the time, but they have been discussed in detail today. I believe they resulted in an offer of an additional 1.5% from the betting industry, which racing agreed was reasonable. There was further agreement that the majority of those additional funds should be targeted towards a growth fund to generate interest in the sport. The Minister for Gambling is happy to continue dialogue with both parties, and if racing would like to hold its own independent review, the Government would welcome that.

The hon. Gentleman's fourth question was about reforming the scope of the levy to include international races, which a number of Members discussed. There are strong arguments on both sides, but we should focus on what is achievable in the short-to-medium term. Although it is true that racing in other jurisdictions benefits from British racing in a way that is not reciprocated, the funding mechanisms in Ireland and France operate more centralised, state-led systems, and there are fewer opportunities for the commercial deals that we have in the United Kingdom.

On the hon. Gentleman's fifth question, he might be new to this place but he is an experienced and seasoned actor or character—I am trying to be diplomatic—in the Westminster and Whitehall world. He tempts me, but he knows that I cannot comment on plans for the upcoming Budget.

The hon. Gentleman's sixth question was about addressing problem gambling proportionally. He will have heard the answer that the Secretary of State gave him in the Chamber last week. I think that, as the hon. Member for Glastonbury and Somerton (Sarah Dyke) said, it is incredibly important to strike a balance when dealing with problem gambling. Nearly half the population gambled in the past four weeks, so although it is of course important that we provide support to tackle problem gambling, we must do so in a balanced way.

A number of hon. Members raised frictionless checks. As they will know, the Gambling Commission is leading the pilot work on financial risk checks. We will be

watching those pilots with interest, but I have heard Members' concerns and will reflect them to the Minister for Gambling.

I will make representations to my colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on animal welfare and the number of vets. I will ask the Minister for Gambling to write to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson) on the question he asked.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French), made an important point about loneliness. I have visited most of the betting shops in my constituency of Barnsley South, and I have seen at first hand the difference they make in helping to combat loneliness. As the Minister responsible for loneliness, I take that seriously. I say gently to him that we do not have a part-time Gambling Minister; we have a Gambling Minister who sits in the other place. I have answered a number of questions about the Government's broad support, but I am happy to facilitate a meeting or a letter from the Gambling Minister to him.

The Government remain committed to supporting British horseracing. We believe it is vital to our economy, and it brings joy to many people. I know the Gambling Minister will look forward to continuing to engage with stakeholders in this area. This debate has highlighted the huge benefit that racing has for communities up and down the country.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Does Nick Timothy wish to say a few words to sum up?

2.52 pm

Nick Timothy: Unfortunately for you, Sir Edward, I would like that very much.

I thank everybody who participated in this really constructive debate. We have learned a lot—and not just about the dubious music tastes of my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Lincoln Jopp). I took the hint from the hon. Member for Liverpool Walton (Dan Carden), and I will extend an invitation to all hon. Members who participated in the debate to come and see the delights that Newmarket has to offer.

There was strong agreement from Members from all parties on the six issues I raised. I will not repeat them, but I want to say something in response to the Minister's answer, for which I am grateful. I note and appreciate the warmth of her words and those of the Secretary of State in the main Chamber last Thursday. I appreciate that it is early days for the Government, and that Ministers often need time to familiarise themselves with the challenges, but I gently say that Labour Members are in government now; they are not shadow Ministers. Being in government means that they have power, and it may not be enough to convene conversations between interested parties and hope that we might reach voluntary agreements. In the end, Ministers often need to decide.

On each of the points made by the Minister, I encourage her and the Secretary of State to go a little further. It is easy for us all to agree on the ends, but when we agree on the ends, we have to determine the means. Sometimes that will involve making decisions that some of the interested parties might not like to hear. Sometimes people assume that the racing and gambling industries' interests are coterminous, but they are not. Therefore, I invite Ministers to intervene on such issues.

Specifically on including overseas races in the levy, as on other issues, there was a high degree of consensus among all those who contributed to the debate. Obviously, an opportunity is coming up—I do not know whether the Budget has been put to bed, but a Finance Bill will follow, and that is the easiest change in the world to make. From a Government perspective, it is cost-free, and it would make sense for British racing. The Minister noted the difference in structures and financing of racing in countries such as Ireland and France, but the debate has exposed the extent to which the industries in those countries stand in an advantageous position compared with ours. I press the Minister once more on that.

I thank everyone for participating in the debate and you, Sir Edward, for your excellent skills in the Chair.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): It has been a pleasure to chair this debate. I am only sorry that no one mentioned the best racecourse in the country—Market Rasen.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Government support for the horseracing industry.

2.57 pm

Sitting suspended.

Secondary Ticketing Market

[ANDREW ROSINDELL *in the Chair*]

3 pm

Emma Foody (Cramlington and Killingworth) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the secondary ticketing market.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Rosindell. I am delighted to see so many other Members who have long campaigned on this issue, including my north-east colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Gateshead South (Mrs Hodgson), and I look forward to her contribution. I also thank organisations such as the FanFair Alliance for their hard work on this matter, and the Co-operative party for its End the Ticket Price Rip-off campaign.

Live sport, music and entertainment brings joy to millions of people every single week. Whether it is watching their favourite team or going to a gig, concert or play, people save up for events, wait in online or telephone queues and eagerly anticipate games and shows. I am sure that that is something just about everyone in this country has experienced, and we can all think back to our favourite game, gig, concert or play. They are memorable events that we remember for decades—moments shared with friends, family or partners that last a lifetime. Members need not worry—I will not go around the room and ask everyone about their first gig or their favourite one, or about that live sporting fixture that lives with them forever.

Growing up, my friends and I would save our pocket money or our paper round money, and we would queue up at local music shops such as Pet Sounds to get tickets to gigs, generally at the local universities. As true millennials, we got to see loads of our favourite punk bands—NOFX, Bowling for Soup, and Spunge being just a few. For those who think that punk is just a phase, I am looking forward to the Tour of the Setting Sun farewell tour by Sum 41 next week.

These are formative moments and cherished memories, but for everyone who gets to enjoy them, there are those who have missed out—those who were not able to secure tickets and make those memories. Far too often, those consumers are then left at the mercy of what is the topic of today's debate—the secondary ticketing market. The issue profoundly affects music and sport fans, event-goers and the integrity of our live entertainment industry, but it appears to be inadequately addressed by current regulatory frameworks. People understand that they will not always get a ticket to the show, gig or game, but they feel a real sense of injustice at the scale of secondary ticketing platforms, with tickets often appearing just moments after people have attempted to purchase them. While allowing a space for those tickets to be resold is important, it is also important that that is not to the detriment of consumers.

The industry is vast, with one in five tickets ending up on secondary platforms, so the need for education and measures to protect consumers is becoming increasingly clear. Recent findings from O2 show that consumers lose an estimated £145 million each year due to inflated resale prices, which are pricing many out of the events and experiences they love. A study by ITV News and

the FanFair Alliance found that over two thirds of resale tickets for 174 festivals and outdoor events were being offered by just three traders, who collectively sought to profit by almost £1 million.

Earlier this year, it was reported that two prolific touts were jailed after buying tickets for high-profile gigs and reselling them on secondary sites for up to 500% of their original cost, with the scheme being worth more than £6.5 million. Worryingly, with technology, the issue is becoming more and more prevalent. In just six weeks, O2 prevented 50,000 suspected bots from accessing its Priority platform, with those tickets almost guaranteed to end up on resale sites and other people losing out. I will touch a little later on the practice of ticket harvesting, and while some progress has been made to prevent it, new technologies and techniques continue to circumvent the measures in place.

With that as a backdrop, is it any wonder that research from the FanFair Alliance found that 80% of respondents believe that secondary ticketing services are unfairly exploiting fans? Practices such as drip-feeding, surge pricing and strategic holdbacks create a precarious environment for consumers, and concerns have been raised about practices that manipulate supply and demand, driving up prices and creating artificial scarcity. Shockingly, between 30% and 50% of tickets may be withheld from public sale, leading to heightened frustration among genuine fans who simply want to attend events. As the cost of attending events increases, it is ultimately fans who are missing out. We cannot allow a situation where genuine fans are priced out of culture, art and entertainment because of these practices. We are already at a stage where too many fans opt out of trying to attend events, dispirited by the existing landscape, with little chance of seeing their team, group or artist at what would be the normal asking price. Again, at the heart of this is people—consumers—who are missing out. Due to enhanced costs, they cannot attend the gig or event they have dreamed of.

What do consumers have to navigate at the moment? As I have said, ticket harvesting, surge pricing and a concerning transparency deficit. Ticket harvesting—where individuals or groups use automated software and bots to acquire large quantities of tickets during primary sale—is preventing fans from accessing culture at an industrial scale. As mentioned earlier, O2 indicated that it prevented 50,000 suspected bots from accessing its Priority platform in just six weeks. Similarly, FanFair found platforms where people bragged about the extent of their exploits. Members of a Discord group were able to purchase up to 1,700 tickets to an upcoming tour next year, with the tickets then being sold at enhanced prices, and fans paying the price. Those alarming statistics highlight the scale of the problem.

We have all heard what this can lead to. Whether it is tickets to major concerts, Eurovision or other events, I am sure everyone has seen and heard the stories. The latest hot tickets go live, and within minutes they are listed on secondary platforms at significantly inflated prices. To give one example, after the swift sell-out of Eurovision tickets in 2023, tickets resold for upwards of £9,000—more than 20 times their initial price. That kind of price gouging creates an environment where only the wealthiest fans can afford to attend popular events, alienating loyal supporters and pricing them out of culture.

Turning now to transparency in the market, consumers deserve clear and accurate information regarding who is selling tickets, how many are available and the pricing structures involved. One of the most pressing issues is the information gap that exists on secondary ticketing platforms. When consumers purchase tickets, they often receive insufficient details regarding their authenticity, the identity of the seller and the potential risks involved. Enhanced transparency is crucial to enable fans to make informed decisions. At the moment, it is unclear what exactly the secondary ticket market is, with research showing that 62% of music fans purchasing from resale platforms do not realise they are buying from individual sellers, creating confusion for many. In the best-case scenarios, we hear of fans having to meet people in car parks for handovers of tickets; at worst, the tickets do not exist.

Greater transparency would play a pivotal role in educating consumers about the risks of ticketing, and especially the practice of speculative selling, where tickets are listed that do not exist or are not available. That practice can lead to dire consequences, with fans thinking they have secured tickets, only to find that they have been misled. Investigations have uncovered instances where tickets worth more than £1 million were speculatively advertised online. Despite consumers being assured that protections are in place, it appears that some sellers remain able to circumvent protections, with the consumer paying the price and experiencing the double whammy of missing out and losing out financially.

Fans, whether at sports events, gigs or other events, should be at the heart of events, yet current practices lead to disillusion among fans and a disconnect with those they support and the sector more widely. Inflated prices leave loyal fans priced out of attending live events they once enjoyed, with the prohibitive cost of attending eroding the connection between fans and artists. Trust among fans is another casualty; when fans feel they are being exploited, their trust in both the industry and the teams or artists involved is eroded. Anger at missing out can be directed at those acts or teams, with allegations that they are complicit in a system that excludes ordinary fans, when this is largely through no fault of their own.

We have seen many recent examples where fans have expressed upset at the initial difficulty of getting a ticket and then at the surge pricing and instant relisting on secondary platforms. When tickets are resold at an inflated price, that does not benefit the artist or the venue. Instead, the profits are siphoned off, removing crucial funding from cultural communities. We know that artists rely on ticket sales as a significant portion of their income, especially in an era when traditional revenue streams such as album sales have dwindled due to streaming services. The success of a tour can hinge on the ability to sell tickets at a fair price, and unfair practices undermine the economic viability of live performances. So this is about protecting not just consumers, but entertainment more widely and making it more accessible.

So what is currently in place to protect consumers and the sector? Well, there is regulation and enforcement from a number of organisations: the Competition and Markets Authority, the Advertising Standards Authority, trading standards and, in some cases, the police. The CMA published a comprehensive report in 2021 that outlined recommendations aimed at curbing detrimental

practices in the ticketing market. Among them was a call for stronger measures against ticket resellers who exploit fans with excessive prices. The CMA's investigation revealed that a significant portion of tickets listed were being sold at inflated prices on secondary platforms.

The previous Government were hesitant to implement all the CMA's recommendations, which included further proposals. However, there have been recent changes in regulations in this area, with the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024, and we have taken a significant step forward. There has been an expansion of the CMA's investigation and enforcement powers, allowing for direct action against non-compliant reselling platforms. Additionally, the Act will enable the CMA to enforce existing rules, addressing a long-standing concern over the lack of transparency and ensuring that consumers have access to clear and accurate information. The previous Government could have gone further, but held back from embracing some of the reforms, which could have further strengthened consumer protections. I am pleased that the new Labour Government have already confirmed that a new consultation will take place and that we will revisit the recommendations.

As a proud Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament, I am delighted that the party has launched a new consumer campaign on this issue. The End the Ticket Price Rip-off campaign highlights the fact that, whether it is dynamic pricing way above face value or fans being frozen out of culture, the party movement has always had consumers at the heart of it, standing up for consumers and helping to deliver everything from the Consumer Protection Act 1987 to the Weights and Measures Act 1985. I really welcome the latest campaign, alongside a petition that has already been signed by thousands calling for strong powers to stop fans being taken advantage of and to protect them from being exploited by touts and resale sites.

I know that the Government are setting up the consultation as we speak and that it will involve not only DCMS but the Department for Business and Trade. I hope that it provides a real opportunity to look at all options to take action that can fundamentally transform the ticketing landscape for fans, artists and the integrity of the market and to enhance consumer protection, ensure fair access to tickets and mitigate the current issues faced.

Campaigners have raised concerns about whether the current regulatory framework is being enforced. Following high-profile cases, the CMA has opened investigations, but the problem is far more prevalent. Will the Minister comment on how we can better use current legislation to provide protections to consumers? The Co-operative party has been campaigning for much tougher enforcement action against platforms hosting ticket touts. Where websites continuously exploit fans, could the use of fines and the removal of websites entirely be considered to strengthen the protection of fans?

Much as the Co-operative party has long been a movement for the consumer, access to arts and culture is a Labour value. It is why our trade union movement adopted the bread and roses slogan from the American suffrage movement. Life should not be just about the basics—food, housing and wages—but about the roses too. For too many at the moment, culture is becoming inaccessible because of a trade that relies on the exploitation of enjoyment, buying up excessive numbers of tickets

[Emma Foody]

before real fans have a chance, and reselling them at extortionate prices. I am sure that the Minister agrees that culture enriches lives, that it should be open to people and that fans should not be priced out due to a secondary ticket market. Can he reassure me that that will be at the heart of what we do as part of the consultation?

To conclude, although this matter may not be at the top of the list of things impacting on people across the country, it is important in demonstrating our values. Culture should be available to all and not just the privileged few. Live entertainment should not be in the purview only of those who are able and willing to pay extortionate prices. People already save up for the cost price to access events; they should not be made to pay multiples of that. A system that allows ticket harvesting, surge pricing and tickets being resold at multiple times their original value excludes people from the enjoyment of a gig, sporting event or show. Those actions freeze people out of enjoyment and take away their chance of having the special, memorable moments that live entertainment can bring, whether that is music or sport.

As the great Newcastle United manager Bobby Robson once said of football and our beloved Newcastle United,

“What is a club in any case? Not the buildings or the directors or the people who are paid to represent it. It’s not the television contracts, get-out clauses, marketing departments or executive boxes. It’s the noise, the passion, the feeling of belonging, the pride in your city. It’s a small boy clambering up stadium steps for the very first time, gripping his father’s hand, gawping at that hallowed stretch of turf beneath and, without being able to do a thing about it, falling in love.”

Everyone deserves that opportunity to fall in love. I hope we can work to protect fans and end the ticket rip-off.

3.15 pm

Marie Goldman (Chelmsford) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Cramlington and Killingworth (Emma Foody) for securing this important debate. She said secondary ticketing might not be at the top of everyone’s list, but it is incredibly important. It is one of those things that we do not know anything about until we become victims of it. I became a victim of it: I bought tickets to a concert in good faith. I then thought my parents might like to come along so I bought a second set of tickets. When we got to the venue, it turned out that my parents’ tickets had been duplicated. The other people had already got into the venue, so their tickets were invalid. The venue sorted it out and thankfully my parents got to see the concert, as did I. But that was 12 years ago at Sting’s Back to Bass tour at the Hammersmith Apollo in 2012, and frankly very little has changed since then. If anything, I would say the situation has got worse for consumers because we are seeing more sophisticated technology with the advent of bots that easily scrape up tickets from across websites.

It is not just the technology but the secondary ticketing platforms that employ the unscrupulous methods in the first place. I would also throw into the mix the primary ticketing platforms, which often release tickets in a way that is not transparent for the consumer and makes it difficult for people to understand where they can buy tickets. The rush on a Friday morning, when tickets still tend to be released, means people scramble for tickets, which pushes the price up and up. It makes it very difficult

for consumers to understand what the best way to buy tickets is, and there is a lot of misinformation out there on the market.

The hon. Member talked about music and other cultural events, and rightly so—I completely agree with her on that—but it is important to recognise that this is not just about music and culture. It is also about sports, although we could say sports are part of culture as well. A lot of people argue that it is all just supply and demand: “People wouldn’t pay 20 times the face value if the tickets weren’t worth that.” But there is a very good reason why many sporting activities want to keep prices down: they want to keep the fans and players of the future—in child form—coming along with their parents and growing a love for the game. Rugby, for example, is keen on enticing families to come and watch games because they know that the children who come with their families are the players and fans of the future. They are looking at longevity—something that does not always exist in the music market. It is important to remember that this is not just about fans: it is about a long-term view of what our live events industry needs.

It is not just individuals reselling tickets. The police’s Operation Podium during the 2012 Olympics uncovered the fact that lots of organised crime networks were profiting from ticket reselling, raking in millions upon millions of pounds. It is a very serious, industrial-scale business for organised crime gangs.

Ticket reselling is not just a British problem. We have seen over many years that it happens elsewhere. I have heard of train tickets in India and hospital appointments in China being bought and sold in this way. It is a multibillion-pound industry, but we have the opportunity at least to change the relevant legislation to try to make things better in this country. It has taken far too long to get to this point. We need to give the CMA more powers and we need to give more funding to National Trading Standards.

3.20 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Gateshead South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth (Emma Foody) for securing this important debate. I am glad to hear that she is as passionate as I am about sorting out this broken market. I am happy to see the Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism in his place. We have been on quite a journey together to get to this point and I very much look forward to him fixing all these wrongs in due course.

A lot has happened in the campaign to regulate the secondary ticketing market since I first introduced my private Member’s Bill on the topic back in 2010, which was before the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Marie Goldman) suffered the problems she did in 2012. The problem would have been sorted if the then Member for Shipley had not talked out my private Member’s Bill. However, because of constant lobbying by yours truly and the growing scourge of parasitic touts becoming increasingly sophisticated and ruthless, the new Labour Government have decided to act, as we promised we would in our manifesto.

We now have the watershed opportunity to create the change we desperately need. Over many years in this place we have tried to regulate the market. We have

tweaked legislation, first with the Consumer Rights Act 2015, to bring in more transparency because it was said that that was what was needed. But that did not work. Then, with the successful Ban the Bots campaign, we secured an amendment to the Digital Economy Bill in 2017. However, that did not work either: we know that the use of bots and the profits of those using bots for sales are exploding. For a recent Sabrina Carpenter ticket pre-sale of just 10,000 tickets, there were 380,000 bots in the queue attempting to harvest them.

Research published last month by O2, which sells 1 million tickets per year through its priority scheme, estimates that touts cost British music fans an extra £145 million a year, but I suspect that is just the tip of the iceberg. That money is taken from the back pockets of UK audiences and deposited into the bank accounts of offshore retail platforms and the touts who supply their inventory.

Despite uncontrolled touting taking place on an industrial scale, with tickets resold through sites such as Viagogo—there is that name on my lips again—prosecutions were few and far between under the last Government. Led by National Trading Standards, the precedent-setting convictions of just two groups of ticket touts worth millions of pounds each should have opened the floodgates to more action against those who flout the law and use platforms like Viagogo to put profits before fans, but sadly they have not, because resources have run dry. There has not been a single prosecution under the Breaching of Limits on Ticket Sales Regulations 2018 and nor have there been any prosecutions for using bots under the Digital Economy Act 2017, despite our securing the Ban the Bots amendment.

The details of the prosecutions are extraordinary, with touts fraudulently acquiring tens of thousands of tickets and then reselling them through websites such as Viagogo and GetMeIn—which does not exist any more—that were not compliant with UK consumer law. In both cases, it was strongly suggested that the resale platforms were complicit in the touts' illegal activities.

Incredibly, although the touts were prosecuted and jailed, the resale platforms faced no such sanctions. They kept their cumulative 25% service fees from the illegal transactions—if we do the numbers, we see that means millions of pounds—and they continue to profit from further illicit trading. Where are all the illegal proceeds of crime? Why have they never been recovered?

As the CMA highlighted in 2021, this remains an unregulated market where stronger laws are desperately needed to protect audiences. As stated in the 2016 Waterson review, changes must include properly funding National Trading Standards, which, despite having a budget of only just under £15 million and so much more than just ticket abuse to look at, is the only body to have successfully prosecuted touts. Sadly, despite the mountains of evidence that campaigners such as Adam from FanFair Alliance and myself have provided the CMA with, it has carried out no such prosecutions and is in desperate need of clearer ministerial oversight. I hope that the Minister takes note of that point in particular.

We can see that legislation to outlaw resale for profit or to cap resale prices works in other countries. This is a golden opportunity to ensure that UK audiences receive similar protections and enjoy a capped, consumer-friendly and ethical resale market that works in their interests. Companies such as Viagogo pretend to be legitimate

businesses, but the resales are not from fan to fan: they are absolutely dependent on touts committing criminal offences to harvest tickets on an industrial scale then resell them through the website. Citing research from FanFair Alliance just last month, which looked at all the Viagogo listings for 28 shows over the past year at Liverpool's main mid-size venue, the 1,200-capacity O2 Academy, I can tell hon. Members that only one ticket was listed by a consumer.

This very morning, Sam Fender shows went on sale—we all know him from my region—including a gig in Newcastle's Utilita arena. Coming from the north-east, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth and I do, we know that Sam's shows are highly sought after. It is a balloted event, with four tickets per person and only for local postcodes, to try to restrict it and ensure that north-eastern fans get to go. But guess what? There is already a Dubai-based business selling 54 tickets in a single listing. On what site? Viagogo.

As I have stressed time and again, Viagogo has never been penalised in the UK, despite regularly flouting UK legislation, and it has shown repeatedly that it cannot be trusted to mark its own homework. Listen to this: it was fined 7 million Australian dollars for misleading consumers, €20 million for breaking the law in Italy and €400,000 in France for breaking the law around rugby world cup tickets, but it has never been fined a penny here.

Capping ticket resales is a common-sense, cost-free benefit for fans across the country. In fact, cracking down on fraud, which is the most common crime in the UK, could be a net benefit for the country through the proceeds of crime. Although the two cannot be linked precisely, Ireland saw a large drop in fraud after it implemented a version of—guess what?—my private Member's Bill. For the upcoming Oasis world tour, the only shows for which tickets are not being touted on Viagogo, StubHub and Gigsberg are the two at Croke Park in Dublin.

Although long-term impact reports are still under way, the Irish Government's official post-enactment report on the Sale of Tickets (Cultural, Entertainment, Recreational and Sporting Events) Act 2021—essentially my private Member's Bill—concludes:

"This is a positive endorsement of the operation of the Act and means that the objectives of the Act are being met whereby genuine fans can attend events at affordable prices."

That is what we all seek and what artists and sporting events want to happen when they price their tickets. They know that tickets are worth more, but they do not want to rip off their own fans: they want grassroots sport and the players of the future to be able to attend.

My private Member's Bill argued for capping resales at face value plus 10%. The 10% exists to account for booking and postage fees. I have never wanted any fans to be out of pocket, not even for the booking fees. I have only ever believed that we need to take out of the reselling of tickets any opportunity to profit, to stop them becoming a commodity that is sold to the highest bidder.

I was happy to see, therefore, Michael Rapino, the chief executive officer of Live Nation, which owns Ticketmaster, urge Governments in a recent interview with Bloomberg to regulate the business by capping resale. He said that resale prices are 20% above face value, and:

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

“You shouldn’t have a middleman that has nothing invested in the business make any money from it”—

hallelujah! I have been saying that for years.

A 20% cap, though, is still too high, because it leaves room for touts to operate by still harvesting large numbers of tickets to make large amounts of money. That extra 10%, if someone buys enough tickets, will make them a lot of money, especially if dynamic pricing is used as well. But that is recognition from the top of the industry that change is desperately needed—Michael Rapino never said anything like that before we got into government three short months ago.

Furthermore, disagreement over what constitutes face value must also be addressed, given Ticketmaster’s roll-out of dynamic pricing. In February, which was before the recent Oasis debacle, Live Nation unveiled a 36% increase in its annual revenues, to £22.7 billion, and Rapino said:

“Outside of the US, we’re in the first inning... We’re just rolling this out around the world. So that’s the great growth opportunity, obviously.”

Remember, where did they get their money? Fans—off the back of fans, regular people just wanting to see their favourite artist and to take part in the culture.

I am so pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth made all those points about what it is that makes our heart glad and what it is we want to do in our spare time. We want to see our favourite artist or attend our favourite sporting event, which is why people are so willing to press “Buy” when they see that crazy price. Something within us drives us to that, but culture and enjoyment should be accessible to all of us, no matter how deep or not deep our pockets are.

I am so glad that the Government immediately agreed to include dynamic pricing in their autumn review of ticket resales. I will continue to engage actively with them on this issue and the wider issues in the secondary ticketing market. We must take action to protect fans, venues, artists and athletes. Existing legislation is not good enough. For years we have said, “If we could only enforce what we have,” but we have tried that and it is just not working. I have been campaigning on this issue for more than 15 years. I have worked closely with industry experts and I presented Parliament with the solution back in 2010, with my private Member’s Bill—it is still the only solution. I therefore look forward to this Government making it, or a revision of it, law very soon.

3.33 pm

Jack Abbott (Ipswich) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth (Emma Foody) for securing such an important debate. She invited us to share the details of our first gig. Mine was when I was taken to hear Soul II Soul at the Notting Hill carnival when I was little, which was cool. In fact, on the day I was due to be born, my mum decided to see Nina Simone instead, which is also cool. Unfortunately, I have not lived up to that musical heritage, because I have been to see three out of seven members of S Club 7 and two fifths of 5ive. To be honest, that day inflation pricing was not the issue; it was whether we were going to get our money back at all—after we had seen them.

In all seriousness, buying tickets under false pretences and selling them on at hugely inflated prices means that fans face a choice: they either stump up or they miss out. It is therefore not hyperbole to say that ticket touts are ripping the heart out of live music.

Cracking down on ticket touting is important to music venues, too. Driving prices for gigs higher and higher means that genuine fans cannot access live music, and that has implications for small grassroots music venues as well as big arenas. I can proudly say that my constituency of Ipswich boasts a phenomenally impressive music scene, but if fans are consistently frozen out of live music and the arts more broadly and see them as something they can no longer afford or access, it is grassroots venues and entertainers that will suffer the most.

Although our most famous grassroots music venue, The Smokehouse, right in the heart of our town, has nurtured the next generation of local talent, it has been close to closure. During the covid-19 pandemic, the financial pressures became so overbearing that it had to be saved by £12,000 of crowdfunding from local residents and grants from the local Ipswich borough council and Arts Council England. Research from the Music Venue Trust earlier this year shows that two grassroots music venues close every week, leaving holes in the cultural fabric of the cities and towns they once brought so much joy to.

Our county of Suffolk is famous for being the home of Ed Sheeran—apologies—who is a phenomenal success. We are proud of the strides we have made in Ipswich over the past few years. I give a big shout-out to all those behind the Brighten the Corners music festival, who have an insatiable thirst for going bigger and better every single year. Yet with 2024 set to be the worst year on record for grassroots music venue closures, I cannot help but wonder whether Suffolk’s next Ed Sheeran will be denied their chance to shine.

It is high time to face up to these challenges. That is why I am proud, as a Labour and Co-operative MP, that our movement has been campaigning hard to ensure grassroots music venues have the opportunity to be owned and operated by the community. Community-owned assets can keep their profits local, reinvesting any money made into the project and its successes. Because such assets are rooted in their communities, they provide not just a physical space for gigs but other opportunities for communities too. Some community-owned music venues provide training and development for young people, teaching them about music technology, sound design and stage management, and setting them up for proper careers. We should actively support that groundbreaking model for the live music sector as a route to keep our beloved venues open.

At its heart, our work to crack down on ticket touts is about fairness and protecting consumers and fans. Scams and rip-offs are becoming increasingly common and normalised. That affects not just the live music industry but everything from football to car insurance. The odds are increasingly stacked against ordinary people and the grassroots industry in favour not just of big corporations, which are far more shielded from the problems I have outlined, but of ticket touts and scammers. We must fix that.

I welcome the new Labour Government's commitment to make arts and culture more accessible to ordinary people, from tackling ticket touts to broadening the curriculum in schools and expanding access to the arts across the board. Finding a way to stop prolific ticket touts and their often illegal practices is a first step in the right direction, but it must be a springboard for change, spurring on further action to make arts and culture truly affordable and accessible for consumers.

I thank the many Members in the Chamber who have been campaigning on this issue for many years, and the fantastic organisations that have been mentioned. With the new Labour Government's commitment to take action on this issue, we have a real opportunity to put fans back at the heart of live music.

3.38 pm

Jo Platt (Leigh and Atherton) (Lab/Co-op): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth (Emma Foody) for securing this debate so that we can discuss subjects that resonate deeply with our constituents. I wholeheartedly align with her position, which reflects my commitment as a longstanding Co-operative party member. The values we uphold—community, fairness and inclusivity—are essential as we confront the pressing issue of ticket touting.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Gateshead South (Mrs Hodgson) for her hard work over the past 15 years, which has been nothing short of phenomenal. I am sure the Minister is hearing the collective enthusiasm for cracking down on this practice.

The impact of unfair ticket pricing on ordinary individuals cannot be overstated. There are many barriers to accessing cultural experiences for communities in Leigh and Atherton. One of the most significant is affordability. Many are excluded from our vibrant cultural sector due to soaring ticket prices, which have become an obstacle rather than a gateway to enjoyment. If we are to make culture accessible, we must start with fair pricing practices.

Even cinema tickets, which were once a modest indulgence, have become unaffordable for many families. In response we have seen some remarkable achievements. Leigh Film Society is a fantastic Co-operative-inspired organisation that strives to screen films that are socially inclusive and affordable, prioritising accessibility for all. Run entirely by dedicated volunteers, that initiative recognises the inaccessibility of cinema tickets and is committed to broadening cultural access in our community. They now have a deal with the National Theatre whereby they can screen National Theatre Live. Bringing that to Leigh is incredible for our constituents.

The demand for live music in the UK is thriving. We must ensure that it remains accessible to everyone. Significant reforms in ticket pricing are essential. The Music Venue Trust is championing the cause of grassroots venues and advocating for a fair distribution of funding within the cultural sector. These venues are not just places for entertainment; they are community hubs that foster creativity and bring people together. While this debate is centred on ticket touting, we must not lose sight of the need to protect and enhance grassroots venues, which play a crucial role in communities like

Leigh and Atherton. By supporting such venues, we can ensure that the cultural landscape remains diverse and vibrant.

I fully support my hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth in her calls to reform ticket pricing practices. Together, we can create an environment where ordinary people can participate in our rich cultural life without fear of being priced out. Let us commit to supporting grassroots groups and organisations that enrich our communities.

3.42 pm

Anneliese Midgley (Knowsley) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth (Emma Foody) for obtaining the debate. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Gateshead South (Mrs Hodgson) for all the work she has done on this matter. The issues I want to address are dynamic ticket or surge pricing and the queuing system for major, once-in-a-lifetime concerts, which my hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth referenced in her opening remark and which other Members have spoken about.

I have a deep-rooted connection to the music industry. In my younger days, I worked as a promoter and DJ in Liverpool. I was a music journalist and did press for bands when Britpop was at its height, and I have been privileged to spend many years surrounded by some of our nation's best musicians. If we are sharing stories about our first gigs, for mine I queued up—in simpler times—outside the Empire Theatre when I was eight with my dad to buy tickets for Cliff Richard. We were allowed to get six. When we got to the show and he came on stage, I burst into tears and asked my mum where the man with the leg and the lip was; I thought I was going to see Elvis, who had been dead seven years.

Music is not just entertainment. It brings people together. It lifts the soul, and lifetimes of relationships are formed because of people's shared love of music. Live performances are a huge part of that. The ticket prices surge and the queuing system recently made headline news with the Oasis reunion concerts. Tickets were sold by the primary ticketing company well beyond the price they were advertised at. A reunion that was greeted with such joy quickly turned into misery for many, as people realised when they got to the checkout that the price they had budgeted for—a price that they felt they could afford—was no longer the price. Instead, a price that was two, three or even four times more was quoted. After hours and hours of waiting, with their hearts racing and the timer ticking down, they had a few minutes to decide whether or not they wanted the tickets to see their favourite band—a band they would have only a once-in-a-lifetime chance of seeing.

The writer and musician John Robb recently wrote:

"The ticket buying systems and companies are...exploiting people's excitement in the worst possible way."

When prices are inflated with little or no transparency, that becomes a barrier that shuts out fans who work hard, save up and simply want to see their favourite bands live. Based on recent testimonies of several musicians such as Paul Heaton, it is not just the fans who are kept in the dark but often the artists too. Many artists are disconnected from the commercial side of their business

[Anneliese Midgley]

and do not always have the knowledge to protect their fans before it is too late. Greater transparency on surge pricing is essential both for artists and for fans. It is not fair for fans to queue up for hours expecting a face-value ticket price, only to be met with an over-inflated bill when it is time to pay.

Exacerbating the situation with the Oasis reunion was the queuing system, about which we all heard countless stories. One of my constituents got up at the crack of dawn to get in the queue for Oasis tickets, and at 9 am she was number 7,000 in the queue on the website. She was made up, thinking she was definitely going to get the tickets. When she got to the purchase page, she spent half an hour trying to place available tickets into her basket. Finally, the system kicked her out when she tried to pay, and she was put at number 180,000 in the queue. She waited all day until the news came that no tickets were left. Similar stories were all over people's WhatsApp groups and social media feeds that day, so it was not a one-off IT glitch or problem. It is just not fair.

We cannot ignore the wider issue of the secondary market. Tickets are being sold at exorbitant prices, further driving up costs for consumers. The recommendations made by the Competition and Markets Authority in 2021, particularly around speculative selling, remain unaddressed. These issues deserve serious consideration, as they place further strain on fans who are already facing inflated prices at the primary level.

In closing, I welcome the measures introduced by the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act to give the Competition and Markets Authority a few more powers to tackle the secondary market, but it needs more, as recommended in the private Member's Bill from my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Gateshead South. We must also act on dynamic pricing and the queuing lottery. We need a system that works for fans, artists and venues alike. Transparency must be at the heart of dynamic pricing, and we must address the broader issues within the ticketing ecosystem. Live music should be a shared experience and affordable for all. I look forward to continuing to engage with the Government on this issue.

3.48 pm

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cramlington and Killingworth (Emma Foody) on securing this important debate. I will put it on the table: the last gig I went to was Jason Donovan at Chepstow castle, and I think the next one on my agenda is also Jason Donovan, at Cheltenham town hall. For that, I have to thank my wife.

From personal experience, I know that it can lead to huge frustration and an inclination to do whatever it takes to get in if someone is denied the ticket they want. Fans often feel they have no choice. For fans of sports, music and festivals, there is nothing quite as disappointing as missing out on the tickets we want for that one event of the year that we want to attend. In some cases, it is 10, 20 or even 30 events, because we know that fans are fans. The one thing they want to do is get through the front door and see the thing they love.

Sadly, there are too many unscrupulous organisations that prey on good-natured dedication to a band, team or regular event. These unscrupulous organisations and individuals are getting away with it. It is an extreme example of market failure. When honest, hard-working fans miss out or are forced to pay hundreds of pounds over the odds because secondary ticketing platforms and touts sweep up the market, the sense of unfairness is very real. The UK's secondary ticketing market had an estimated annual worth of £1 billion in 2019, with ticket touts mass-buying tickets—the “harvesting” we heard of earlier. They are doing that for sporting and cultural events, then selling tickets on at massively inflated prices.

Mrs Hodgson: The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech. When fans are forced to pay way over the odds, they are not able to then go to 10, 20 or 30 other concerts or sporting events, because they may have spent their budget for the year on that one special event that they really wanted to go to. Does he recognise that this issue robs the fans of those multiple opportunities?

Max Wilkinson: Of course, and fans want to be there, in the room or the stadium, as often as they possibly can. It enriches their cultural enjoyment, and it is really unfortunate when they end up only able to go to one match a season, or one gig a year, because they have to pay 10 times the price in some cases.

This problem contributes to the unacceptable and extraordinary statistic that an estimated half of Britons have at some point been priced out of the market for tickets to events that they want to attend. When I read that, I did wonder whether it was true, but apparently it is, which is absolutely extraordinary. That is simply unfair. The fact that this subject is being debated today, and that the Government have signalled their intent to make things fairer, is definitely to be welcomed.

Liberal Democrats have, for some time, been calling for greater protection of fans who are exploited by ticket touts. That means that we want to see the implementation of the Competition and Markets Authority's recommendations to crack down on illegal ticket resale—and it was mentioned earlier that the authority itself might take a more expansive role.

We are calling for the prohibition of platforms that allow sellers to list more tickets for an event than the seller is able to procure legally from the primary market. That practice is clearly exploitative, misleading and wrong. The Liberal Democrats are calling for platforms to be strictly liable for incorrect information about tickets listed on their websites. Dodgy tickets that are not what they seem mislead the public, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Marie Goldman) told us earlier.

We also believe that all secondary ticketing sites must be forced to hold a licence to operate in the UK. Many of us who have been going to sporting events for some time are familiar with the person standing outside the music venue or stadium who says “Any spare tickets?” as crowds walk past. The unlicensed nature of this market means that some secondary ticket operators are little more than that, but they are fronted by an official-looking website. Licensing will bring them into line or put them out of business, which is what they deserve.

The Liberal Democrats are calling for a ban on the use of surge pricing by ticket platforms. It cannot be right that people pay a significantly higher price for the same product based on the fact that many others are seeking the same ticket at the same time. That is not an example of a liberal market that helps consumers; it is predatory behaviour. That said, it is clearly desirable for sellers to retain the ability to give early-bird discounts or late deals on undersold events. Those are examples of variable prices that work for consumers.

The Liberal Democrats are also calling for a reform to transaction fees, with the aim of placing a cap on the amount that can be added to ticket prices. How can it be right that a ticket listed for £50 or £60 can, by the time it gets to the checkout, end up costing £80 or £90? That is another example of dishonest and predatory behaviour.

We believe that the changes we are calling for would make it very difficult for professional sellers to sell tickets that have been procured unlawfully. They would also make it more difficult for the professional sellers to sell through secondary ticketing platforms in breach of the law. The changes would help event organisers too: their terms often prohibit or restrict resale to identify and cancel tickets, but sometimes those rules cannot be enforced.

Attending gigs, sporting events and festivals is core to the enjoyment that so many of us take in our leisure time. This issue is central to people's ability to be happy and healthy, and to enjoy their lives. We must do all we can to stop the widespread abuse that causes so much frustration to so many.

I finish by saying that there is a suspicion that ticketing companies could solve this whole issue tomorrow, using technology that is currently available, but that choices have been made not to do so. That is why a crackdown is needed.

3.54 pm

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cramlington and Killingworth (Emma Foody), and I hope she enjoys her nostalgic tour through all the concerts she plans to go to. For what it is worth, as we are sharing, one of my first gigs was Faithless, which I am quite proud of, although it does not quite stack up when I say that my second one was Tom Jones. Still, I enjoyed both hugely.

I was sorry to hear the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Marie Goldman) talk about her parents becoming victims. There is some joke about Sting and getting the Police involved, but I will leave that for the moment.

I thank the hon. Member for Washington and Gateshead South (Mrs Hodgson) for her dedication and her expertise on this issue. We all know, as I have learned in the last five years, that we have to plod and plod in this place to keep getting heard. The fact that we are having another debate and that there will be a consultation is all credit to her.

Like the hon. Member for Ipswich (Jack Abbott), I too have seen three of S Club 7. My sighting was at a stag do with my brother in Newport. I hope that the hon. Member was not there—if he was, I hope he does not share the pictures.

As the hon. Member for Leigh and Atherton (Jo Platt) noted, grassroots venues are so important. The UK is a centre for the creative industries, and that is the testbed; that is why we have world-class talent coming out, and we certainly do not want to lose that.

The hon. Member for Knowsley (Anneliese Midgley) brings a huge amount of expertise. I think she said she was a DJ, so I am looking forward to her doing the cross-party celebration of “Mistletoe and Wine”—there is a good Cliff Richard reference.

The issue of secondary ticketing and dynamic ticket pricing has affected many of our constituents, as we have heard today. It certainly seems that when Oasis came up with their masterplan to reform, the ticket promoters did not foresee the issue of dynamic pricing causing so many headlines and unfortunately detracting from the exciting news of Oasis reforming.

It is important to separate the secondary ticket market from the specific issue of dynamic ticket pricing. Unlike the primary market, in which tickets are sold at their original face value and the price is set by the artists, event organisers or box office, the secondary ticket market relates to tickets resold after their original sale. Prices for these tickets are often inflated and sometimes go for at least double the face value. We have heard the term price gouging, which particularly applies here.

Dynamic ticket pricing is, as the Minister will be aware, a pricing strategy used by a lot of sectors, including hotels, taxis and airlines, to name but a few. Dynamic ticket pricing can bring significant benefits for consumers when prices are lowered—for example, early bird tickets or late tickets, as we heard from the hon. Member for Chelmsford.

I appreciate that the Competition and Markets Authority has published a call for evidence on the use of dynamic ticket pricing for Oasis. I hope the Minister will agree that in the case of Oasis ticket sales the issue seems to be that fans may not have been provided with the necessary information up front and had not been given any clear information about what was going on. Above all, transparency is really important.

I hope the Minister will touch on how drip-pricing is slightly different and how that affects the live events sector. As we have heard, that relates to hidden costs. A customer should be able to see the full price they are paying up front and not have hidden unnecessary costs.

Mrs Hodgson: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Evans: The hon. Lady has upgraded me, but of course—on that basis.

Mrs Hodgson: The shadow Minister—sorry. He pointed out that with dynamic pricing the price can go up but also come down. That might happen when it is Uber, airline prices or hotel rooms, but at yesterday's meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on ticket abuse we heard from experts in the room, FanFair Alliance and Reg Walker, that that never happens with regard to ticketing. They never come down. The only way is up.

Dr Evans: I bow to the hon. Lady's expertise. I hope that will be teased out when we know the terms of reference for the consultation. These are exactly the problems that we need to look at. We can all see that there can be

[Dr Luke Evans]

a benefit for the market if dynamic pricing is used for cheaper theatre tickets, but if it is not used in the correct way, how do we enforce that? “How” is the hardest part. We have heard a lot about the problem, but how we solve it, with advancing technology, is what is really going to make the difference.

That takes me back to the point about the need to have information up front, so that people are not misled in the sales process. Clarity is key. I know the Minister is keen to quote the example of Dua Lipa, but I did my own research on ticket face value. My team and I came across a ticket on Viagogo that was priced at £250 but marked up to £5,167.

We can clearly see that that profit is not going where it should, which is upsetting for fans and frustrating for venues and, perhaps most importantly, angers the artists. Through no fault of their own, they are then labelled as a problem because they are pulled into the secondary market. As many hon. Members will know, and as we have heard, there was particular frustration about the use of computer-powered software. As we heard from the hon. Member for Cramlington and Killingworth, we all welcomed the last Government taking action to strengthen the law on ticket information requirements and introducing a criminal offence for the use of automated software to buy more tickets online.

I often think that it is wise to learn from other hon. Members in this place. With that in mind, I looked to see what the Minister had previously said on the topic, given his long-standing interest. I noticed that in April, when the then Government announced a review into the market, he castigated them and said:

“The idea of a review at the dog end of a Parliament and at the end of the regime is absolutely pathetic”.—[*Official Report*, 30 April 2024; Vol. 749, c. 187.]

He continued by saying that Labour

“will bring these measures in and go further”.—[*Official Report*, 30 April 2024; Vol. 749, c. 187.]

So I have to admit that it is a surprise to see that the new Government’s plan, which they thought about for 14 years, is to introduce a consultation. In our exchange in the Chamber last week, the Minister quoted Bucks Fizz. He said,

“the previous Government had embraced Bucks Fizz...”

“Don’t let your indecision take you from behind.”—[*Official Report*, 17 October 2024; Vol. 754, c. 966.]

I am pleased to see him being decisive by choosing to do exactly what the last Government did. He is so decisive, in fact, that when he was asked this week, he said:

“That is why we will be launching a consultation on the secondary ticket market soon—the piece of paper in front of me actually says ‘in the autumn’, but I am never quite sure when that is, so I am going with ‘soon’.”—[*Official Report*, 17 October 2024; Vol. 754, c. 969.]

I ask the Minister not to look back in anger at the last Government—after all, the Conservatives were caught beneath a landslide by a Labour champagne supernova. He is in the Government, and it is the Government’s job to get this right.

I have several questions for the Minister. When will the Government launch their consultation, not the one by the CMA? What is the scope of the consultation and what are its terms of reference—for example, will it

include the role of search engines that signpost customers to touts, which is a real problem? When does it aim to conclude? Wider still, how does the private Member’s Bill presented by the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) fit into this? Is it a Government handout Bill and does it have Government support?

Finally, no one in the House wants to see the public or the artist ripped off, as the hon. Member for Knowsley (Anneliese Midgley) pointed out, so can the Minister clarify how the following fits into Labour’s vision for tackling the secondary market? The Prime Minister, then the Leader of the Opposition, stated that

“a Labour government will cap resale prices so fans can see the acts that they love at a fair price.”

Is that Labour policy? What is a “fair price” and for whom, and how does that translate into artists being paid for their talents? Furthermore, I hope that the Minister will forensically analyse the successes and weaknesses of the legislation that has been implemented in Ireland and is coming forward in Australia, with no fear or favour, to ensure that we get a fit with whatever is brought forward.

In closing, live events make a significant contribution to the UK economy, as many Ministers will know from their summers of concerts and sporting events. Indeed, it is tempting to mention the Prime Minister’s favourite country pop singer and her recent Eras tour, which provided an economic boost to this country of almost £1 billion. The Conservatives want the live events sector to continue to thrive, and to ensure that the ticket market is fair for consumers and well-priced. As the Opposition are looking forward to seeing the consultation, one could say that we are ready for it. I hope the Minister will announce further details not only “soon” but imminently.

4.4 pm

The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant): It is a great delight to see you in your seat, Mr Rosindell, not least because we have been knocking around these parts as MPs for about the same time. It pays to hang on in there, doesn’t it? It is a great delight to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth (Emma Foody) on securing this debate. This is an innovation that I have started in the last few debates that we have had here: I am going to try to answer the questions that hon. Members have put to the Minister as much as I possibly can.

Dr Evans: Hear, hear!

Chris Bryant: Hang on. In the words of Shania Twain, “That don’t impress me much”.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth asked what we can do under the current legislation. It is a frustration, certainly for this Minister—I am not sure that previous Ministers felt it—that although several different bodies could bring forward prosecutions, the number of prosecutions has been so few. I fully understand why trading standards has struggled, because for the last 14 years, local authorities have had difficult budgets and sometimes it has not had the resources that it needs to take forward these issues.

It is not for me to directly tell trading standards or the CMA when to take action—we believe in the separation of powers, so that would be completely inappropriate

—but the more that the prosecuting authorities feel able to act in this sphere, the better. If they want to come to me and say that they do not have the powers or the resources that they need, I am happy to hear that and we can act on that basis, but it is frustrating that I cannot tell them to act in individual cases.

Dr Luke Evans: Will the Minister give way?

Chris Bryant: I will not, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind, because I will try to answer all the questions. I will come on to his questions later.

One key matter that we will have to get right—if and when we bring forward legislation in this field—is enforcement, because there is no point bringing forward new laws if we cannot enforce them. We made manifesto commitments during the general election that we are absolutely determined to implement. As for when they will be implemented in legislation, we have had one King's Speech; there will be another one coming along. I do not want to tell the Leader of the House precisely who will have what Bills at what time, because I might not stay in my post if I keep doing that, but if there is a Bill at some point, we will have to ensure that we sort out the enforcement issue. That is one element on which we will be consulting.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth said that this issue is not at the top of the list of Government priorities. Whenever I post about it on X, people say, “Bryant, get on with doing the things that really matter to your constituents.” Well, this is one of those issues. The Government can do more than one thing at the same time. This is part of a panoply of measures that we need to implement to ensure that we put fans back at the heart of music, live events and sport. It is part of a wider Government strategy to rejig the economy so that it works for all of us. As my hon. Friend quoted:

“What is a club in any case?...It's the noise, the passion, the feeling of belonging”.

It is fundamentally about the fans. They are the people who have created the value, and it is despicable that they are not able to benefit from it.

The hon. Member for Chelmsford (Marie Goldman) made the point that things have got worse since 2012. I think she is right, which is why it was a bit cheeky of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Hinckley and Bosworth (Dr Evans), to pretend that they had not been in government for 14 years, and to actually praise the previous Government for taking no action in this area. We are determined to take the necessary action, and I hope that the hon. Member for Chelmsford and her party will support those measures.

My hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Gateshead South (Mrs Hodgson) used the word “parasite” at one point. On the “Today” programme, someone was saying that leeches have had great difficulty reproducing of late, but that they have discovered a new way. I do not want to overstate this metaphor, but we could argue that what we see in the secondary market is a form of leeching off the creative endeavours and the fan-led passion of so many others.

I will give some more examples. “Vampire” is my favourite of Olivia Rodrigo's songs. We can get tickets for her concert in Manchester on 1 July next year on StubHub for £1,506, with a face value of £200. If we go

to Viagogo, the price is £2,573 for exactly the same event—almost identical tickets, just a few rows in. That ticket's face value, which we find only once we have gone two thirds of the way through the process with Viagogo, is £50. That is a shocking 5,146% increase. We can buy tickets for James Blunt—everybody knows I am not a great fan of his and he is no great fan of mine—that have a face value of £105 for £327 on StubHub.

It is not just about music: the England versus South Africa autumn international rugby tickets for 16 November, with a face value of £145, cost £889 on Viagogo. We should tell the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who I think is the world's greatest Bruce Springsteen fan, that tickets with a face value of £150 are selling on Gigsberg for £1,044.08. Tickets for the world darts championship being held at Alexandra Palace on 30 December this year, with a face value of £55, are £248 on Gigsberg. I could go on, because this is an endless daily source of—frankly—racketeering based on a fundamental unfairness, and that is what we want to put right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Jack Abbott) and I have talked about several issues in relation to the creative industries in his constituency. He made the point about Ed Sheeran, whom I think has made Framlingham castle more famous for him than for Queen Mary, which is quite an accomplishment after so many hundreds of years. That is also part of our tourism industry, as people want to go to Framlingham castle to see the place that “Castle on the Hill” was written about, so we need to capitalise on that. But we cannot if none of the money ends up going back into the creative industries or even into the local economy, and simply goes off into a black hole.

Mrs Hodgson: I do not want this debate to end without mentioning Ed Sheeran and how much he has done to try to tackle the scourge of ticket touting. Lots of other artists, such as Iron Maiden, Arctic Monkeys, Mumford & Sons and many others have tried, but Ed Sheeran went above and beyond by cancelling tickets when they had been resold. Taylor Swift never did that because she did not want to break the hearts of all her fans, but Ed Sheeran has been a real warrior in that regard.

Chris Bryant: Absolutely; that is a well-made point. Indeed, several other artists are moving in the same direction and I encourage more artists to go down that route. In the end, we need to get to a place where the face value is the face value and where other people are not racketeering on the back of that. Sometimes, the artist gets it in the neck because people think they have enabled it to happen, but that is profoundly unfair.

Incidentally, my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Gateshead South also referred to Sam Fender. I am afraid that when Sam Fender was on at St James's Park, I was watching P!nk at the Stadium of Light. Interestingly, having two massive gigs on at the same time had a dramatic effect on the local economy in the north-east, which is really important. There are issues for the whole visitor economy that need to be looked at, and I had an interesting conversation with all the local authorities and the new mayor, thinking about how we can make sure that the visitor economy works for everybody when such big events are going on at the same time. Part of

[Chris Bryant]

that has to be about making sure that the money that is currently going out of the door and never ending up in the local economy does end up there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Anneliese Midgley)—she is a great friend and we have known each other a long time—spoke about going to see Cliff Richard. I once saw Cliff Richard live, but it was at a wedding and we did not have to pay. He did not sing “Congratulations”, which we thought was going to come along at any moment. My hon. Friend made a point about sudden changes in prices just as we get to the checkout. Of course, we would be absolutely furious if that happened in Sainsbury’s, Tesco or Morrisons. Why should we be any less furious when it happens on a website?

I was looking at tickets on StubHub earlier, when suddenly it said, “Your price is locked in.” Well, I thought that was the price. What do they mean when they say it is locked in? This is crazy; it is a deliberate attempt to make us stick and keep on buying the ticket, even when we have realised that we are buying something for 5,146% of its original face-value price, because that is the point at which we learn that that is the face value. This is completely wrong; it is not the market working in the interests of humanity, but humanity having to serve the market in an inappropriate way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh and Atherton (Jo Platt) made some really significant points. Many of us are making identical points, but that strengthens the argument that we need to take action in this space, and we are absolutely determined to do so. We will do it in a responsible way, and we want to make sure that every single element of the legislation that we eventually bring forward works, does what it says on the tin and is able to be enforced. That is why we will launch a consultation in the very near future, and I very much hope that many hon. Members will want to take part in the discussion about precisely how that consultation ends up being framed.

I think this debate is the second or third outing the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson) and I have had against each other. One cannot just blame one’s partner for one’s musical choices. That is like the moment in Genesis when Adam says,

“The woman beguiled me and I did eat”

after eating the forbidden fruit. I am not sure that Jason Donovan is the forbidden fruit, but if the hon. Member likes Jason Donovan, he should just own up to it. It is fine; we will not think any the less of him for going to see Jason Donovan all the time.

The hon. Member basically read out the list of things from the last debate that I said we wanted to do, so I am delighted that he agrees with me or that we agree with him. When it comes to the legislation and the consultation process, I very much hope that he will want to feed in. If there are things that we need to amend, just to make sure that we have got them right, we will do that.

The hon. Member for Hinckley and Bosworth started off extremely badly, because he basically dissed Tom Jones, who is from Pontypridd—it’s not unusual, but I do not think it is very well advised. He asked a series of questions. He asked, “When?” I have already said that it will be soon. It will be in the autumn, and I reckon that

the autumn is already upon us, so it will be soon or imminent—he can choose any word he likes, but it will be soon. Patience is a virtue.

The hon. Member asked whether the private Member’s Bill being advanced by one of my colleagues is a handout Bill. No, it is not a handout Bill; it is a Bill advanced by a private Member. He also asked whether there will be a cap on prices. We already said during the general election that that is our intended direction of travel. It is a moot point precisely what level that cap should be set at, because I do not want to completely ban people from selling tickets. If someone has bought four tickets but suddenly only two people can go, because somebody is ill or they have to change the dates, it is perfectly legitimate that they should be able to sell the tickets on. They might also want to be able to recoup not only the cost of the tickets themselves but some additional costs. That is one of the things we want to consult on, and what would be a suitable cap. I note the point that has been made about a level of 20%, which some people think is too high. Some people think that 10% would be too high; some people think that it would be too low. We need to make sure we get the level right. And of course we will analyse the situation in Ireland.

As we have all been announcing what gigs we have been to this year, let me say that, in addition to P!nk, who I have been to see three times now:

“What about us?”

What about all the plans that ended in disaster?”

I went to see Depeche Mode in Cologne—the Germans just couldn’t get enough. And on Saturday night, I went to see Bronski Beat, on the 40th anniversary of the album “Age of Consent” coming out. That goes to the heart of why music can be so important: there must be hundreds of thousands of people in this country who remember when “Age of Consent” came out 40 years ago and how it completely transformed their understanding of themselves and who they could be in life. Being able to go to a live gig to celebrate that with lots of other people is completely transformative, and that is what I want to be available for as many people in this country as possible at a sensible, safe and sane price, rather than people being excluded because some people have much deeper pockets than others.

For me, to use a Welsh term—if it is okay with the hon. Member for Hinckley and Bosworth for me to use a Welsh term and to refer to Welsh artists—this is about *chwarae teg*, or fair play. Fair play is all I am looking for in this market. First, we need transparency on price along the whole process. When a ticket comes up in the secondary market, people should be able to know what the face value of that ticket is from the beginning and what the deal is. Secondly, we need genuine equality at that 9 o’clock moment when everybody goes online to start bidding for tickets. The hoovering-up of tickets brings the word “hoover” into disrepute. It was striking that all the Coldplay tickets had gone in 40 minutes and yet, even before all of them had gone, tickets were being sold for £2,916 on the secondary market. That is clear evidence that something is awry with the way the system works.

Also, where there is an excessive increase in the secondary market, as we have referred to, that is just wholly inappropriate. It prices people out and, as many Members have said, it does not mean that any of the money goes back into the creative industries or the local economy, which is highly problematic.

I want openness in dynamic pricing. People should be able to understand from the very beginning if that is the process they are entering into. Originally, we were going to consult only on what precise measures we should bring forward in relation to the secondary market, but we are now looking at dynamic pricing. As several Members have said, there are versions of dynamic pricing that do work, and we do not want to ban those. I would argue that the early-bird tickets available for the Rhondda arts festival in my constituency—I suppose I should declare an interest—are a perfectly legitimate part of the whole equation. They sometimes bring money into venues early on, and we do not want to ban that.

We are not looking at dynamic pricing in the whole of the economy, but simply in relation to live events. Because that was not a manifesto commitment before the general election, we will be doing a call for evidence. If people have evidence of where the dynamic pricing model is not working and is counterproductive to the market, please get in touch.

I praise some of the action taken by some of the artists in the industry, which has been referred to. It looks like that is everything—no, there is one thing more I want to say.

Dr Evans: So close.

Chris Bryant: And yet so far. Change is coming. I say to all the people I have referred to—Gigsberg, Viagogo, StubHub, Ticketmaster and all the rest—that change is coming, so they should start getting ready for it, because that is what we are determined to deliver.

4.22 pm

Emma Foody: I thank the Minister for his response, and I look forward to working with him to take forward this crucial issue. I thank all hon. Members across the Chamber for their contributions—the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Hinckley and Bosworth (Dr Evans); my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Gateshead South (Mrs Hodgson); and everyone else. The amount of concern and shared endeavour on this matter is hugely welcome.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the secondary ticketing market.

4.23 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 24 October 2024

CABINET OFFICE

UK Biological Security Strategy

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Pat McFadden):

I want to update the House on the implementation of the 2023 UK biological security strategy. The strategy's ambition is to ensure that, by 2030, the UK is resilient to a spectrum of biological threats and a world leader in responsible innovation.

In adopting the strategy, this Government have reaffirmed the UK's commitment to improving our preparedness for future pandemics and infectious disease outbreaks, countering proliferation of biological weapons and mitigating the risks of biological accidents and incidents, prioritising a holistic approach to developing national capabilities to shore up our defences, and learning and applying lessons from covid-19.

Over the past year, the strategy has delivered impact across short, medium and longer-term commitments, including:

- Delivering system-wide leadership across the UK including by establishing a lead Minister, senior responsible owner and a dedicated team in the Cabinet Office;

- Enhancing the UK's early warning capabilities, including a prototype biothreats radar and pilots for a new national biosurveillance network;

- A new UK Biosecurity Leadership Council, bringing Government together with business and academic leaders, developing responsible innovation practices and policies with the biotech sector;

- Publishing voluntary screening guidance for providers and users of synthetic nucleic acid to guide use for legitimate purposes, while also mitigating risks of malicious or accidental misuse;

- A new UK-wide Microbial Forensics Consortium to develop new tools and capabilities to attribute biological incidents and deter the use of biological weapons;

- Funding for the international biosecurity programme which supports international projects to enhance global biosafety and biosecurity, reducing deliberate and naturally occurring biological risks to the UK;

- Building new standing capabilities to carry out sensitive testing of biological risks in AI models;

- Establishing a chief scientific advisers group dedicated to chemical, biological and radiological security to provide holistic, expert advice to underpin policy development and delivery;

- Launching the US-UK strategic dialogue on biological security, reflecting our shared ambition and approach to protect against a growing and diverse spectrum of biological threats.

To get ahead of future threats, we need to continue to innovate to understand, prevent, detect and respond to biological threats. We will ensure that we have the capabilities we need to protect the public from a spectrum of biological threats, no matter how they occur and no matter who or what they affect.

[HCWS161]

Interim Compensation Payments for Victims of Infected Blood

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): In May, the infected blood inquiry produced its final report, and the country heard the full extent to which thousands of men, women, and children had their lives overturned by the use of infected blood and blood products in the NHS. The infected blood scandal is a shameful mark on our national history. I pay tribute to the courage and determination of every single person who has suffered because of the use of infected blood and to those who have taken tireless action to ensure their community is heard. Every death that results from the infected blood scandal is a tragedy, and this Government are committed to acting on the findings of the infected blood inquiry to ensure swift resolution for all of those impacted.

The principal recommendation from the infected blood inquiry was that the Government compensation scheme for victims of infected blood should be established "now". The infected blood compensation scheme was legally established for people who are infected and claiming compensation through the core route in regulations laid on 23 August. We expect the Infected Blood Compensation Authority to begin making payments to people who are infected by the end of this year, and last week the Infected Blood Compensation Authority reached out to the very first claimants under the scheme. However, there is still more to do. Subject to parliamentary approval, the Government are aiming for a second set of regulations to be in force by 31 March 2025. This will support our shared aim to begin payments to people who are affected in 2025.

The Government also recognise that people have waited far too long for compensation payments. That's why interim payments are crucial for supporting people until the Infected Blood Compensation Authority is up and running. In October 2022, interim payments of £100,000 were made to living infected beneficiaries or bereaved partners registered with the infected blood support schemes. In June this year, further interim payments of £210,000 were made to living infected victims of infected blood. Through these interim payments, over £1 billion has been paid to people who are infected or their bereaved partners.

The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 placed a statutory duty on the Government to deliver interim payments of £100,000 to estates for deaths not yet recognised through financial compensation. This followed the recommendation in Sir Robert Francis' compensation framework study that interim payments should be made

"to recognise the deaths of people to date unrecognised and thereby alleviate immediate suffering"

and achieves the spirit of recommendation 12 of the infected blood inquiry's second interim report in the most practicable way.

On 26 July, I informed the House that the applications for interim payments due to be made to estates of deceased infected persons were scheduled to open in October, and that further details were to follow. Today, I can announce that the process under which estates can apply for interim compensation payments has now opened. For many people, this is the first substantial compensation

payment they will benefit from to recognise the lives of people they have lost as a result of the use of infected blood and blood products.

This is a £100,000 interim payment, and as with any compensation payment related to infected blood, it will be exempt from income tax, capital gains tax and inheritance tax and disregarded from means tested benefit assessments.

As with the previous interim payments, these payments will be delivered through the existing infected blood support schemes. These payments are to be made to the estates of deceased infected persons, where interim payments have not already been received, in those cases where the deceased infected person was registered with an existing or predecessor scheme on or before 17 April 2024.

Those who were not registered with an existing or predecessor scheme on or before this date may still be eligible for compensation. For these cases, estate representatives will need to apply to claim compensation with the Infected Blood Compensation Authority, once applications open. I will provide a further update on this in due course.

Where an interim compensation payment has already been made directly to the infected person, to their bereaved partner, or their estate, an estate will be ineligible for this interim payment.

Only the personal representative of the estate is able to make the application. Applicants will need a grant of probate, letters of administration, or a grant of confirmation—specific to Scotland—to evidence entitlement to claim interim compensation on behalf of the estate. To assist the legal process of obtaining this evidence as quickly as possible—for those that do not already have it—applicants can claim back their exact legal costs up to £1,500.

The application form is available to download online at gov.uk, together with full guidance on how to apply. Applicants may request a hard copy of the application form from the UK infected blood support scheme operating in the nation of the UK where the deceased infected person was infected. The completed form and supporting documents should be sent to the relevant infected blood support scheme.

[HCWS164]

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Internet Television Equipment Regulations 2024

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): The Media Act 2024, which received Royal Assent on 24 May, introduces a new online prominence regime. The regime will require particular TV platforms, referred to in the Act as “regulated television selection services”, to give prominence to designated public service broadcaster services—referred to as “designated internet programme services”.

Today the Government have laid the first statutory instrument that will start the implementation process of the new regime.

In particular, these regulations specify which categories of TV devices are to be considered as “internet television equipment” for the purposes of this new prominence framework. This is the first step required to start the designation process.

The next step is for a further set of regulations to be developed, following advice from Ofcom, and establishing which television selection services—used in conjunction with internet television equipment—should be regulated under the new prominence regime.

The purpose of this approach is to ensure that regulation is both targeted and proportionate, and, in particular, that only those devices used by a significant number of UK viewers as a main way of accessing TV will be captured.

The regulations laid today specify smart TVs and streaming devices, including set-top boxes and streaming sticks, as internet television equipment.

However, the Government recognise that, as viewing habits change and new technology emerges, the devices considered internet television equipment may change in the future. Therefore, we will review the list a year after implementation to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

The Internet Television Equipment Regulations 2024 have been published and can be viewed online at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2024/1056/contents/made>

An accompanying policy statement can be viewed online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prominence-specifying-internet-television-equipment-a-policy-statement>

[HCWS166]

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Sudan

The Minister for Development (Anneliese Dodds): I would like to update the House on the situation in Sudan since the outbreak of conflict between the Sudanese armed forces and the Rapid Support Forces in April last year. Eighteen months on, this senseless war has triggered a humanitarian catastrophe and led to the world’s largest displacement crisis.

More than 24 million people—over half of Sudan’s population—are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. In August, a determination was made that famine existed in the Zamzam camp for internally displaced people, where 500,000 people live. Famine is also likely to exist elsewhere across Sudan. This is just the third time such a determination has been made in the 21st century. The situation has been exacerbated by deliberate efforts by the warring parties to obstruct aid reaching those who need it the most. Health systems have been decimated and disease outbreaks continue to spread unchecked.

On 6 September 2024, the UN-mandated fact-finding mission in Sudan released its inaugural report, highlighting the unprecedented scale of atrocities committed by the warring parties against civilians, in particular in Darfur. Women and girls are subject to rape and sexual violence. Houses are being burnt to the ground. People’s livelihoods are being destroyed.

Over 10 million people have been forced to flee their homes, with many seeking refuge in neighbouring countries facing their own crises, such as Chad and South Sudan.

In August I visited South Sudan, where I saw at first hand the harrowing consequences of the conflict. I spoke to many of the refugees and returnees who had fled

violence in Sudan and heard how the UK can work to better respond to the obvious regional implications of the conflict.

The UK continues to work relentlessly to ensure that the international community does not turn its back on Sudan.

On 9 September 2024, in our role as one of the co-leaders of the UN Human Rights Council core group on Sudan, the UK led the adoption of a resolution to extend the work of the independent fact-finding mission on Sudan. This mission is critical to documenting, reporting and investigating evidence of human rights abuses and war crimes by all parties, and ensuring that those responsible for unimaginable suffering are held accountable.

In collaboration with our international partners, the UK was able to successfully extend the vote margin in favour of this critical mission. It is notable that a greater number of African states supported the extension of the mission this year. This underlines the growing global consensus that the situation in Sudan requires sustained international attention. We are committed to ensuring that the fact-finding mission gains the access it needs to Sudan to investigate properly, and continues to provide the evidence needed to bring justice to the victims of this brutal conflict.

On 26 September 2024, as world leaders gathered in New York for the UN General Assembly, the Minister for Africa hosted an event with his Dutch and Swiss counterparts to discuss the alarming rates of conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan and the inadequacy of current responses. This event spotlighted the situation for women and girls on the ground, ensured a platform for Sudanese civil society figures, explored the gaps in the ongoing response to CRSV in detail, considered the role of the international community in supporting and facilitating local and women-led efforts, and highlighted the urgent need for accountability.

In response to the obstruction of aid by the warring parties, the UK has convened international partners to build pressure on the warring parties to increase aid routes both into Sudan and across lines of conflict. At the UN General Assembly, I made the UK's position clear: starvation as a method of warfare is a war crime. On 18 October 2024, the UK led a joint statement with 10 other donors to condemn the obstruction of humanitarian efforts and to call upon the warring parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

The UK remains a committed donor to Sudan and has spent £113.5 million this financial year in response to the conflict in Sudan and the resultant regional refugee crisis. This includes our bilateral official development assistance to Sudan, which stands at £97 million, together with our support to Sudanese refugees in the neighbouring countries of Chad, South Sudan and Libya.

Looking ahead, the UK will assume the presidency of the United Nations Security Council in November 2024. During our presidency, we will convene UNSC members for a debate on Sudan. This will focus on translating the United Nations Secretary-General's recommendations on protecting civilians, as requested in UNSC resolution 2736, into tangible action.

As the Prime Minister noted in his UNGA remarks, the situation in Sudan remains one of the world's most pressing humanitarian emergencies.

The UK's response remains robust and unwavering. We will continue to work through the United Nations, the Human Rights Council and other international forums to push for peace, accountability and humanitarian relief. The people of Sudan deserve a future free from violence and oppression, and we are committed to supporting them in their pursuit of peace, dignity and justice.

[HCWS165]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Windrush

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): The Windrush scandal saw Windrush and Commonwealth communities who have the right to live in this country victimised because they were unable to prove that right, through no fault of their own. However, the justice and change that victims deserved have not been delivered, and some are still waiting for the compensation that they are due.

I want to update the House on the Government's progress in fulfilling our manifesto commitment to the Windrush generation, ensuring that they receive the support they deserve quickly and efficiently. Additionally, we are reigniting the vital transformation work from Wendy Williams' Windrush lessons learned review, in order to embed lasting changes in how the Department serves all communities.

We are establishing a Windrush commissioner, an independent advocate for all those affected. This role will oversee the compensation scheme's delivery and the implementation of the Windrush lessons learned review, and will act as a trusted voice for families and communities, driving improvements and promoting lasting change.

As promised, we have re-established a Windrush unit in the Home Office, reporting to the departmental ethics adviser and dedicated to driving forward the action needed to ensure that what happened to the Windrush generation can never happen again to any part of our society. The new unit stands ready to support the Windrush commissioner when they are appointed.

This renewed work and the recruitment of a dedicated Windrush commissioner must drive enduring change that matters to the Windrush community and has wider impact across the whole Department and across Government.

Regarding the Windrush compensation scheme, during the lead-up to the general election, we frequently heard from the community and stakeholders that the application process is too complicated and the available support for making a claim is inadequate. This is discouraging some people from seeking the compensation they deserve. To address this, we are injecting a £1.5 million spend into a program of grant funding for organisations to provide essential advocacy and support for applicants who need additional help with the application process, ensuring that claimants feel supported. For many, filing a claim is intimidating and requires them to revisit past traumas. By sharing their experiences with impartial community members, we want to make this process as supportive as possible. This assistance will be offered alongside but separate from existing claims support, giving claimants flexibility and choice regarding the type of help they want and where they can access it.

We are also rapidly reviewing the issue of private and occupational pensions losses which has caused real frustration and concern.

Finally, this Government are determined to hear at first hand and to learn from the Windrush generation and their families. We know that for some the hurt and trauma is too much. But, as we look to turn the page and embark on the reset we promised in opposition, we want those who want and are able to tell their story to be heard.

Only by hearing and reflecting on the impact that policy making had and continues to have on their and their families' lives can the Government ensure that we never let such an injustice happen again.

[HCWS167]

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Phone-paid Services Authority: Transfer to Ofcom

The Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms (Chris Bryant): Premium-rate services will be familiar to anyone who watches prime-time Saturday night television, enters competitions on the radio or donates to charity via their phone. Premium-rate services are provided where goods or services are charged to one's telephone bill and include premium-rate phone calls, for example, to directory enquiries.

Premium-rate services are used by millions of people, but the ability to simply text or make a call and be charged a potentially significant sum for such a small act makes these services prone to abuse, and therefore requires proportionate regulation.

The Phone-paid Services Authority, under different names including the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of the Telephone Information Services and Phonepay Plus, has been the regulator of the premium-rate services sector since 1986. It has been largely successful in discharging its duties and establishing a compliant and productive market. However—like much of the telecoms landscape—the premium-rate services sector and the role of the regulator have changed since the mid-1980s.

Where once the PSA's focus was largely on setting standards for the providers of premium-rate services, such as information lines and chat lines, the scope of the regulator's remit has grown significantly. Consumers are now also able to pay for subscription streaming services, purchase apps and give money to charity via text message, with the charges being added to their phone bills. The sector has evolved and continues to evolve, and so must its regulation if consumers are to remain protected into the future.

The Government will be laying the Regulation of Premium Rate Services Order 2024 (SI 2024/1046), a statutory instrument to confer the regulatory functions of the kind exercised until now by the PSA on Ofcom. This decision reflects the continued commitment to streamlining regulatory oversight, enhancing consumer protections and ensuring the efficiency and coherence of our regulatory framework.

The transfer of regulatory responsibility will lead to the closure of the PSA, which is a private company, and Ofcom's assumption of direct day-to-day regulatory oversight of the premium-rate services sector. To ensure consistency, the Regulation of Premium Rate Services Order 2024 largely replicates the existing code of practice, currently on its 15th version, which governs the sector. However, the order makes a number of minor changes, including extending requirements to all PRS providers to take steps to identify and mitigate risks posed by their services to those who are vulnerable.

To ensure that the specialist and dedicated staff of the PSA are retained and able to continue in their work, the Government will be laying the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (Transfer of Staff to the Office of Communications) Regulations 2024 (SI 2024/1047), a statutory instrument to ensure that the employment of the staff continues, and they are not disadvantaged by the transfer. PSA employees have been consulted about the transfer.

We recognise the significant contributions made by the PSA in safeguarding consumers to date. However, the time has come for a more integrated approach, and we believe this consolidation is the right step to ensure that the regulatory framework is fit for purpose in the digital age.

I will provide further updates to the House as we progress with this transition. We remain committed to ensuring a smooth handover and maintaining the highest standards for consumer protection throughout the process.

[HCWS163]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Office for Nuclear Regulation Annual Report and Accounts

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Andrew Western): Later today I will lay before this House the Office for Nuclear Regulation's annual report and accounts for 2023-24. This document will also be published on the ONR website.

I can confirm, in accordance with paragraph 25(3) of schedule 7 to the Energy Act 2013, that there have been no exclusions to the published document on the grounds of national security.

[HCWS162]

Written Correction

Thursday 24 October 2024

Ministerial Correction

NORTHERN IRELAND

Promoting Business and Growth

The following extract is from Northern Ireland questions on 23 October 2024.

Fleur Anderson: The Ballymena bus manufacturer, Wrightbus, recently signed a deal worth £100 billion to supply more than 1,000 buses to Go-Ahead.

[*Official Report*, 23 October 2024; Vol. 755, c. 261.]

Written correction submitted by the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson):

Fleur Anderson: The Ballymena bus manufacturer, Wrightbus, recently signed a deal worth **£500 million** to supply more than 1,000 buses to Go-Ahead.

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