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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Tuesday 29 October 2024

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Living Standards

1. **Joe Morris** (Hexham) (Lab): What steps she plans to take to help improve living standards. [900917]

5. **Ms Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): What steps she plans to take to help improve living standards. [900922]

13. **Kirsteen Sullivan** (Bathgate and Linlithgow) (Lab/Co-op): What steps she plans to take to help improve living standards. [900930]

24. **Ms Polly Billington** (East Thanet) (Lab): What steps she plans to take to help improve living standards. [900941]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves): This is likely to be the last time that the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Jeremy Hunt), is up against me at the Dispatch Box. We have had the privilege of these exchanges for just over two years now, and I have a huge amount of respect for him. He steered our country through a very difficult time after the mini-Budget, and I wish him well in whatever he chooses to do next.

If UK living standards, as measured by real household disposable income per capita, had grown by the same amount between 2010 and 2023 as they did between 1997 and 2010, the amount would have been over £4,000 higher in 2023. We are committed to boosting economic growth to turn that around. Although it will have been welcome news for millions of families that inflation is now below 2%, there is still more to do. Earlier this month, we delivered our first international investment summit, announcing over £60 billion of investment and unlocking nearly 38,000 jobs in the UK, all focused on creating and spreading opportunities to lift living standard.

Joe Morris: The Conservatives oversaw a living standards disaster. In places such as Hexham, Prudhoe and Throckley in my constituency, people saw hardly any improvements to their incomes in over 14 years. Surely the clearest sign of whether government is working is whether working

people feel better off. Does the Chancellor agree that papering over Tory failure is not enough, and that in tomorrow's Budget we must reset the foundations of our economy?

Rachel Reeves: My hon. Friend is right: the previous Parliament was the worst ever recorded for living standards. Tomorrow's Budget is an opportunity to fix that and turn the page so that we can start delivering for families in Hexham and all around the country.

Ms Rimmer: The bottom 50% of the population owned less than 5% of wealth in 2021, while the top 10% stacked up 57% of it—up from 52.5% in 1995. In our communities, the less well-off are struggling with energy prices and other costs. What will the Government do to ensure that the gap closes?

Rachel Reeves: We have already announced the child poverty taskforce, which is working to publish a comprehensive strategy to tackle child poverty. We will publish that strategy in spring next year. We have also provided £500 million, including the Barnett impact, to extend the household support fund in England until the end of March next year, which will help the most vulnerable households to cover the costs of essentials such as food, energy and water.

Kirsteen Sullivan: Shamefully, under the last Conservative Government, the need for food banks soared to levels even higher than during the pandemic. Recent research shows that in my Bathgate and Linlithgow constituency, the number of food parcels distributed has risen by 77% over the past five years, and that in 2022-23, 27% of children were living in poverty after housing costs. What steps are the Government taking to reduce the need for food banks in the context of child poverty?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for her question and congratulate her on her great work on the Co-op's food justice policy. As she knows, we are right behind her in our commitment to raise living standards across the country. We made a manifesto commitment to update the remit of the Low Pay Commission so that, for the first time ever, it will take into account the cost of living when making recommendations about the minimum wage.

Ms Billington: As my right hon. Friend will be aware, coastal communities such as mine struggle with a low-pay, low-skill economy. Does she acknowledge the importance of the minimum wage in tackling this problem and supporting our communities and local economies?

Rachel Reeves: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is why we will ensure that the Low Pay Commission takes into account the cost of living, and why we will close the gap between the youth rate of minimum wage and the overall rate, so that all adults can be paid a fair wage for their work.

Dame Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): The living standards of a 90-year-old pensioner on a £13,500 income are falling sharply this winter as a result of the Chancellor's decision to take away the winter fuel allowance. Tomorrow, she has the chance to increase the threshold. Will she take it?

Rachel Reeves: As the hon. Lady knows, because of our commitment to the triple lock, the basic state pension and the new state pension will continue to rise. This winter, the new state pension is worth £900 more than it was a year ago, and it is likely to rise by a further £450 next April. Indeed, during the course of this Parliament, because of the triple lock, the new state pension is likely to be worth £1,700 more—much more than the value of the winter fuel payment.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): I am sure that the Treasury was pleased to receive £1.5 billion in a windfall tax from Octopus Energy. Would the Chancellor consider using that money to reinstate the winter fuel allowance for one year until the Treasury has had the opportunity to find a better system of means-testing, so that my vulnerable residents and pensioners in Chichester are not falling off a cliff edge this winter?

Rachel Reeves: I can understand the hon. Member's concern, but of course, that £1.5 billion was already baked into the forecast—it is not new money to spend on initiatives. As she knows, we inherited a £22 billion black hole in the public finances; we will set out the detail of that at the Budget tomorrow, but because of that, we have had to make very difficult choices. Even in those difficult circumstances, though, we have protected the winter fuel payment for the most vulnerable pensioners who are on pension credit. We have also boosted the uptake of pension credit, so that people get the support they are entitled to.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): Residents of Joseph Rowntree's St Ellens Court all gathered recently to tell me about the devastating impact that the cut in the winter fuel payment will have on their living standards, and people in Withernsea gathered Saturday last to demonstrate against it. Tomorrow, the Chancellor can do the right thing; will she?

Rachel Reeves: I am sure the right hon. Gentleman told them about the £22 billion gap in the public finances that his Government left, which has required the difficult decisions this Government have had to make to clean up the mess left by the Conservative party.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): With the promised £300 cut in energy bills not materialising, the winter fuel payment scrapped for pensioners, and now the bus cap lifted for working people—whatever definition of that term the Chancellor is using today—can she honestly say that living standards will improve for everybody under this Government?

Rachel Reeves: On the bus price cap specifically, the hon. Member will know that the previous Government put no money in to extend that cap. We have put money in to ensure that the bus price cap remains at an affordable level for people, unlike the previous Government, who just had short-term gimmicks.

Pension Credit: Processing of Applications

2. Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): What estimate she has made with Cabinet colleagues of the additional funding needed to process pension credit applications within target timescales. [900918]

The Parliamentary Secretary, His Majesty's Treasury (Emma Reynolds): The Department for Work and Pensions has deployed 500 additional staff to process pension credit applications as quickly as possible, and I encourage all pensioners who might be eligible to apply by 21 December. As the hon. Gentleman knows, that benefit can be backdated by three months, and can passport pensioners to other benefits.

Dr Evans: I am very grateful for the Minister's answer. I put in a written question to find out how long this would take, and almost one in four people who apply for pension credit are waiting longer than 50 working days for their application to be picked up, which takes us past Christmas and into the new year. That is before the 150% increase in applications referred to in the data released by the Government, so although I am pleased to hear that there are 500 more staff, could we hear how much extra funding is going in immediately to make sure those applications are processed this side of Christmas? Otherwise, pensioners are really going to struggle.

Emma Reynolds: I am very pleased to say that there has been a 152% increase in the number of pensioners who are applying for pension credit. That is good news, and is a result of the pension credit awareness campaign that we have been running since early September. We are putting in place all the resources we can to process claims as quickly as possible.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Nigel Huddleston (Droitwich and Evesham) (Con): We on the Conservative Benches are deeply concerned about all those who will lose their winter fuel payments under Labour. Some pensioners will keep the winter fuel payment if they claim pension credit, but we know that some will not apply or will have difficulty applying. Can the Minister confirm how many people the Treasury assumes are eligible for pension credit but will not claim it, therefore losing their winter fuel payment, and what is the Treasury doing to close that gap?

Emma Reynolds: As the hon. Gentleman will understand, the estimates of how many people might be eligible for pension credit are an imperfect science—they are based on a survey. Means-testing what is a very complex benefit, as all means-tested benefits are, requires an assessment of not only people's income but their savings; it is about pensioner household units, too, so it is a complex set of procedures. All I can say is that I am glad we are targeting support at those most in need, something that was outlined in the 2017 Conservative party manifesto, which stated:

"we will means-test Winter Fuel Payments, focusing assistance on the least well-off pensioners, who are most at risk of fuel poverty."

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): As the newly appointed Treasury spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats, this is my first opportunity to welcome the Chancellor and Ministers to their places. Notwithstanding that, on the winter fuel payment, the Government need to think again. I recently spoke with representatives of Citizens Advice in St Albans, who are deeply concerned that letters from the Department for Work and Pensions will

be sent out only in December to people that it believes are eligible, meaning that many people may lose out. We have urged the Government to either reverse the cut and make it taxable or look at, for example, raising the pension credit limit. Could the Government confirm whether they are going to look again at any of the measures that we have suggested?

Emma Reynolds: I welcome the hon. Lady to her place. I reassure her that we are writing to all pensioners—I do not know where she got that misinformation from—about the change in policy. For the first time, we are also writing to all pensioners in receipt of housing benefit to encourage them to claim for pension credit.

We have also made a steadfast commitment to the triple lock, which will mean that the new full state pension will be worth around £1,700 more over this Parliament. We have extended the household support fund, which local authorities can use to help people who are on low incomes and struggling with their fuel bills. We have also ensured that the warm home discount scheme will provide £150 for low-income households, including pensioners.

Economic Investment and Growth

3. **Josh Simons** (Makerfield) (Lab): What steps she is taking to increase long-term investment in the economy. [900920]

10. **Ms Julie Minns** (Carlisle) (Lab): What progress she has made on increasing economic growth. [900927]

11. **Dave Robertson** (Lichfield) (Lab): What progress she has made on increasing economic growth. [900928]

14. **Ben Coleman** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Lab): What progress she has made on increasing economic growth. [900931]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves): The Government's growth mission will counteract 14 years of sluggish economic growth, kick-starting a decade of national renewal. We have wasted no time in getting to work: we have already launched the national wealth fund, introduced reforms to the planning system, and hosted the international investment summit, securing more than £63 billion of investments across the United Kingdom. Work continues, and I look forward to updating the House on our next steps for growth in tomorrow's Budget.

Josh Simons: As co-chair of the Labour Growth Group, I welcome the Chancellor's decision to unleash a revolution in investment in Britain, but the capital we must invest in is not just physical but digital. For years, Conservative Members cut capital investment in technology, depressing productivity and leaving workers with less money in their pocket. What steps is the Chancellor taking to boost long-term investment, especially in digital and technology?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for his excellent work as co-chair of the Labour Growth Group. I know that he is passionate about how we can use data to boost productivity and improve public services, and he

is working with Wigan council and his local NHS trust to build data-driven tools to better deliver preventive healthcare.

The Government recognise that attracting private investment into digital and technology is crucial for driving growth, which is why we have already prioritised them in the modern industrial strategy to ensure that we are creating the right conditions for investment. Since the Government took office, we have been pleased to welcome more than £25 billion of investment into UK data centres, helping to create thousands of jobs and meet the growing demand for data, artificial intelligence and machine learning.

Ms Minns: Does the Chancellor agree that a modern NHS that is fit for the future is essential to our country's economic growth? Will she find time to visit the new Pears Cumbria School of Medicine when it opens in Carlisle next year?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I absolutely recognise the important role of the NHS and the health of our nation in getting people back to work and in boosting the economy. That is why in tomorrow's Budget we will set out further detail of how we will increase the number of elective appointments per week, delivering one of the Government's first steps in office to reduce waiting times in the NHS.

I was delighted to meet Professor Hugh Brady from Imperial College London at the international investment summit. He shared the detail of important plans to partner with the University of Cumbria to help the next generation of medical professionals in my hon. Friend's constituency and to address staffing shortfalls and healthcare needs in the area. I commend her work in this important area.

Dave Robertson: High streets in Lichfield and Burntwood in my constituency were let down as, for 14 years, the Conservative party fiddled while our high street economies burned. Can the Chancellor assure me that regenerating high streets, as the physical manifestation of how well our economy is doing, is a priority for this Treasury?

Rachel Reeves: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place, and he is doing a great job for the people of Lichfield. This Government are committed to delivering a decade of national renewal and ensuring that growth and prosperity are felt everywhere in our country. We will work in partnership with businesses and local communities to rejuvenate our high streets, which are the lifeblood of our local communities, including those in Lichfield and Burntwood. As part of this, we plan to introduce new powers to help fill vacant properties through high street rental auctions. We know that this is such an important issue for so many of our constituencies.

Ben Coleman: Thousands of my constituents in Chelsea and Fulham come from European Union countries, and they are all passionate about the UK economy doing well. Does the Chancellor agree that, for the UK to achieve its full economic growth potential, we need to deepen our trading links with the European Union? If she does, will she say how the Treasury is working with other Government Departments to achieve this?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. Since taking office, this Government have been working to reset our relationship with our European friends and neighbours. The Prime Minister recently met the President of the European Commission and agreed to strengthen the UK-EU relationship to address global challenges such as the economic headwinds, geopolitical competition, irregular migration, climate change and energy prices. Improving our relationships will be good for business and good for consumers.

Harriet Cross (Gordon and Buchan) (Con): I am not going to ask the Chancellor to pre-empt tomorrow's Budget, although I might actually have some luck if I did, based on current form. Instead, can she confirm to me that she fully appreciates how important agricultural property relief and business property relief are to the farmers and family businesses that do so much to grow local economies across the country?

Rachel Reeves: I recognise the importance of being able to pass on to the next generation the assets people have built up, and we will be setting out more details on all of our tax policies in the Budget tomorrow.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): Shared prosperity funding has been used by local authorities such as Fife council to drive economic growth, particularly through support for small businesses. That funding is due to end in April 2025. Can we get a commitment from the Government that funding for these kinds of schemes will continue?

Rachel Reeves: We will set out more details in the Budget tomorrow, including the consequential that will go to the Scottish Government.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Investment requires a measure of optimism, not the collapse in business confidence that the Chancellor has engineered. She would have done better to stress some of the positives that she inherited, wouldn't she?

Rachel Reeves: It is good to have an explanation of how to do my job from one of the Conservative Members who crashed our economy. Some £63.5 billion of investment into the UK was announced at our international investment summit—investment in life sciences, investment in data centres and digital, investment in clean energy—because businesses have confidence that this Government are bringing stability back to our economy and working with businesses to seize the opportunities. I am really excited about doing that in all parts of our country and working with business to do so.

Dave Doogan (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): Can the Chancellor tell us, to the nearest £10 billion, how much extra would be available for long-term investment were it not for the fire sale of UK Government bonds by the Bank of England, costing the taxpayer dearly?

Rachel Reeves: I started my career as an economist at the Bank of England, and unlike Conservative Members, I think it is incredibly important to recognise the independence of our economic institutions, including the Bank of England and, indeed, the Office for Budget Responsibility.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): Small businesses are the engine of our economy, but many of them are penalised for investing in their businesses because of the broken business rates system. Will the Chancellor ensure that investment is exempted from business rates, and will she ensure that the Budget tomorrow is the final Budget in which business rates are a permanent feature?

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, and I too welcome her to her place.

Small businesses and high street businesses are the lifeblood of all of our communities, including hers in St Albans, and it is important that we support them. In our manifesto, we committed to reform of our business rates system. I will be setting out more details in the Budget yesterday tomorrow, as well as a business tax road map, which will give businesses certainty about the tax environment they will be working with for the next five years.

Northern Powerhouse

4. **Mr Tom Morrison** (Cheadle) (LD): What fiscal steps she is taking to encourage investment in the northern powerhouse. [900921]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Darren Jones): Investment—[*Interruption.*] I am delighted to be welcomed by those on the Opposition Benches, and am pleased to see them in their place as well. Investment is a key part of the Government's growth mission, alongside stability and reform. By ensuring adherence to robust fiscal rules and respect for our economic institutions, we are building the confidence needed to deliver greater investment across the country.

Mr Morrison: I thank the Minister for that response. A key part of the northern powerhouse agenda was investment in our rail infrastructure, and residents in my constituency were excited that Cheadle train station finally got planning approval recently. However, recent talk of cuts to infrastructure investment has caused concern. Can the Minister assure us that Cheadle train station is safe and will go ahead?

Darren Jones: The Government are fully committed to ensuring that investment in all parts of the UK, including the north of England, creates growth and impact for working people. The north of England is home to crucial levers to achieve this, as evidenced by our recent announcements on Teesside and Merseyside, which will create thousands of jobs and secure long-term futures. The detail of individual projects will be confirmed in due course.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The creation of the national wealth fund, and the record success of the £63 billion of investment announced at the investment summit, comes on top of investments that Ministers have just announced in carbon capture in the north-west. Those are examples of the success—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a very good Member who has been here a long time. Please try to look at me occasionally; it would be helpful.

Bill Esterson: The successful investments announced are a great example of this Government delivering jobs and economic growth, in the north of England and across the country. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is in stark contrast to the abysmal record of the Conservative party in its 14 years in government?

Darren Jones: My hon. Friend rightly points out that this country faces a choice: investment or decline. As we saw at the general election, it chose investment, and that is what the Government will deliver.

Economic Productivity

6. **Kevin Bonavia** (Stevenage) (Lab): What steps she is taking to increase economic productivity. [900923]

20. **Sonia Kumar** (Dudley) (Lab): What steps she is taking to increase economic productivity in the Black Country. [900937]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Tulip Siddiq): Increasing economic productivity is a key mission in the Labour Government's growth agenda. After 14 years of weak productivity, depressed living standards and unfunded spending commitments, we are adamant about bringing our country into an upward trajectory, using the national wealth fund and the significant planning reforms that we are bringing together to ensure a decade of national renewal for our country.

Kevin Bonavia: Across the UK, the hospitality sector generates £93 billion per year. In my constituency, there are many examples of local entrepreneurs, including on the old town's High Street and in our neighbourhood centres, who provide an excellent service for residents and visitors alike. What can my hon. Friend do to help our hospitality services grow in Stevenage and across the UK?

Tulip Siddiq: I am fully aware of the assets of my hon. Friend's constituency, including the neighbourhood centres that he mentions, and the surrounding villages, which host amazing music festivals. I recognise the contribution of the hospitality sector in Stevenage to the UK economy, and I know he is a great champion of the borough business club. I am confident that our Government's growth mission will ensure that hospitality businesses in Stevenage continue to grow. The Government look forward to working with organisations such as UKHospitality to facilitate that.

Sonia Kumar: "Invest 2035: the UK's modern industrial strategy" identifies advanced manufacturing as a growth-driving sector. Manufacturing in Dudley accounts for 40.4% of jobs; that is double the national average. What steps are the Government taking to support and revitalise the manufacturing sector in Dudley, given its historical significance to the local economy, and its potential contribution to the UK's overall industrial strategy?

Tulip Siddiq: As my hon. Friend rightly says, we identified advanced manufacturing as a growth-driving sector in the recently published industrial strategy Green Paper. I know how important manufacturing centres such as the Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre are to Dudley and the UK economy. We are committed

to supporting advanced manufacturing through the industrial strategy, which, alongside sector plans, will be developed in partnership with businesses and stakeholders ahead of publication in spring 2025. I hope that she will contribute to that. Jobs will be at the heart of our industrial strategy, backed by employment rights that are fit for a modern economy.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): Investing in transport infrastructure will boost productivity, so is the Chancellor listening to Members from across the east of England and across the House, and will she back the Ely junction rail upgrade, which delivers benefits of £5 for every £1 invested?

Tulip Siddiq: As the hon. Member will know, the Chancellor listens carefully to everything that is said in the Chamber, and I am sure that she has noted what he has said.

Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV): We in Northern Ireland were told that, as a result of having dual access to the EU market and the United Kingdom market, we would see an increase in inward investment and economic productivity. Recently, Invest NI has had to admit that there has been no uptick in investment, because access to the EU market is counteracted by barriers from the GB market—that is clear. Do the Government now recognise that that was a mis-sold proposition?

Tulip Siddiq: I think we were mis-sold a lot of things by the previous Government, if that is what the hon. Member is talking about. I remind him that we had the investment summit recently, where we secured £63 billion of private investment, creating more than 38,000 jobs. That is more than double what the previous Government secured in 2023.

Energy Bills: Support for Households

7. **Mr Will Forster** (Woking) (LD): What fiscal steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help support households with energy bills. [900924]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (James Murray): Household energy bills have fallen by 30% since their peak, and are now around £800 lower for a typical household. This Government are committed to improving the quality and sustainability of our housing stock through our warm home plan, further details of which will be set out through the spending review. That will be vital in making sure that the UK is more energy-resilient, in lowering household bills and in meeting our 2050 net zero commitment.

Mr Forster: Given that many constituents of mine in Woking and across the country live in fuel poverty and are fearful of losing their winter fuel allowance, does the Minister or the Chancellor agree that targeted support for low-income families and households should be included in tomorrow's Budget or in the warm home plan, so that no one has to decide between eating and heating this winter?

James Murray: The hon. Gentleman can see our commitment to supporting vulnerable households with the cost of energy and food in our extension of the

household support fund, at a cost of half a billion pounds, from the end of September to the end of March. That will allow local authorities to help low-income families with the cost of essentials, such as food and energy.

Dr Jeevun Sandher (Loughborough) (Lab): This nation experienced the highest rise in energy bills of all G7 countries after Putin invaded Ukraine, because the Conservatives left us dependent on natural gas and with the worst-insulated homes in western Europe. Can the Minister assure me that we will invest in the clean energy and home insulation that we need to lower energy bills for good?

James Murray: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that while it is essential that we tackle high energy bills now, it is also essential that we invest for the future to bring energy bills down for good. Critical to that is investing in our housing stock, as I have mentioned, but also, through GB Energy, in sustainable energy sources to make sure we improve our energy security and bring bills down for families across the country.

Sustainable Public Finances

8. **John Grady** (Glasgow East) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help ensure sustainable public finances. [900925]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves): In July, a Treasury assessment of public spending showed that this Government inherited a £22 billion black hole in the public finances. I took immediate action—[*Interruption.*] Those on the Opposition Benches may not like it, but it is true. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I cannot hear the Chancellor, and I will hear the Chancellor.

Rachel Reeves: There are not many Conservative Members, but they still make quite a lot of noise.

I took immediate action by identifying savings and making reforms to the spending and fiscal framework to ensure that never again can a Government be allowed to make unfunded commitments, and to leave their successors with a massive black hole, as the Leader of the Opposition and the previous Chancellor did. As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said to the House yesterday, the Budget will confirm the detail of the robust fiscal rules—this was set out in our manifesto—and will set out tax and spending plans, alongside an updated forecast from the independent Office for Budget Responsibility.

John Grady: Does my right hon. Friend agree that being honest and transparent about the state of public finances is the right thing to do, and that having a long-term plan to fix the foundations of our economy and the public finances is preferable to the short-term, chaotic approach taken by the SNP in Scotland, which has led to three consecutive years of emergency in-year budget cuts?

Rachel Reeves: This Government are committed to sustainable public finances, unlike two of the Opposition parties. A stable economy built on stable public finances

is a key foundation for growth, which is why Labour is on the Government Benches, and the SNP and the Tories are on the Opposition Benches. The robust fiscal rules set out in our manifesto will put the public finances on a sustainable path, so that we can move the budget into balance, with day-to-day costs being met by revenues, and get debt falling as a share of our economy. Given our challenging inheritance, that will require difficult choices, but this Government will make them to fix the foundations of our economy.

Josh Babarinde (Eastbourne) (LD): The last Government left Eastbourne borough council in a position in which it spends 49p in every pound it collects in council tax on temporary accommodation. We need a solution, because that is not sustainable for councils or families. Will the Chancellor commit to supporting councils with the cost of temporary accommodation, and to investing in preventing homelessness in the first place?

Rachel Reeves: The hon. Member is absolutely right: the number of people housed in temporary accommodation is a scandal, and the amount that costs taxpayers in Eastbourne and around the country is a double scandal. We made a commitment in our manifesto to building 1.5 million homes during this Parliament. Conservative Members oppose that, but we are determined to do it, because that is the way to bring down the cost of temporary accommodation and ensure that all families have a safe and secure roof over their heads.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend is right about the challenge it will be for the Government to balance the public finances. A stiff target of 2% in-year efficiency savings has been set for Departments. What is she doing to make sure that the target is robustly applied, and that Departments do not game it by putting off decisions, which will end up costing more?

Rachel Reeves: I thank the Chair of the Treasury Committee for that question. She is absolutely right that in our July statement, we set a 2% productivity target, not just for the Department of Health and Social Care, as the previous Government did, but for all Departments. Ministers are absolutely determined to deliver against those targets, because that is the way to ensure that we have resources for the frontline public services—our schools, hospitals and police—that we all rely on.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): Under the last Government, the Chancellor said that interest rates and gilt yields were driven by Government policy. Will the Chancellor guarantee that neither will rise higher than they did under the Conservatives?

Rachel Reeves: The last Government crashed the economy with a mini-Budget and sent interest rates and mortgage rates soaring, putting huge pressure on the costs borne by families and businesses. We will set out our Budget tomorrow, including robust fiscal rules on paying for day-to-day spending through tax receipts and borrowing only to invest, whereas the previous Government borrowed for day-to-day spending, which is why we are in the mess we are in today.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): Last Wednesday, in Washington, the Chancellor announced changes to the debt rules to allow Labour to borrow more. However, published Treasury advice says that increasing borrowing risks interest rates staying higher for longer. Does the Chancellor agree with her Treasury civil servants?

Rachel Reeves: Last week, when I was in Washington, I was very pleased to hear the International Monetary Fund say how important it is that countries, including the UK, borrow to invest in their capital infrastructure. Under the plans we inherited from the previous Government, capital spending as a share of GDP is due to fall from 2.6% to 1.7%. If those decisions were to go forward, it would mean plans delayed and cancelled. We will set out our plans tomorrow in the Budget, but it is crucial that we have rules ensuring that we pay for day-to-day spending through tax receipts, and that we borrow only to invest, unlike the previous Government.

Investor Confidence

9. **Tim Roca** (Macclesfield) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the potential impact of recent fiscal events on investor confidence in the UK. [900926]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves): The Conservative party oversaw years of chaos, which cost not only families but businesses. The Government are committed to delivering the economic stability needed for investor confidence. Our commitment to a credible Budget, strong institutions and robust fiscal rules are at the heart of that plan. Earlier this month, we announced a record-breaking £63.5 billion of investment at our international investment summit. That shows that the UK can attract investment from around the world, to boost jobs and growth here in Britain, through serious, stable Government policy.

Tim Roca: When does the Chancellor think that the Conservative party lost its fiscal credibility? Was it with the Liz Truss mini-Budget? [Interruption.] Was it when national debt rose from 65% to nearly 100% of GDP? Or was it when they made the farcical promise to abolish national insurance?

Mr Speaker: Order. Who wants to go for that cup of tea? Normally this happens at Prime Minister's questions; I do not want it starting in Treasury questions.

Rachel Reeves: All of the above. That is why my hon. Friend is in his place and Conservative Members are on the Opposition Benches.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): If the Chancellor wants to increase investor confidence, the thing to do is help small and medium-sized enterprises. Tomorrow she will have the opportunity to do that. What will be done to help them? In Northern Ireland, 85% of businesses employ 10 or fewer employees. If she helps the SMEs in Northern Ireland, that will increase employment.

Rachel Reeves: I know that the hon. Gentleman is a proud supporter of businesses big and small in his constituency and across Northern Ireland. I will set out

more detail in tomorrow's Budget, including on business rates, but I recognise how important it is for us to support small businesses, so that they can grow and create jobs right across the United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Gareth Davies (Grantham and Bourne) (Con): Clearly, the Chancellor is desperately trying to raise old ghosts, along with debt and taxes, but her own broken promises are coming back to haunt her and are frightening investors. It does not have to be Halloween for socialists to spook British business. Why does she think that business confidence has fallen faster in the past three months than at any point since the pandemic?

Rachel Reeves: I would judge this Government on their record: we secured £63.5 billion of investment right across the United Kingdom, creating nearly 40,000 jobs in constituencies up and down our country—good jobs that pay decent wages. That is more than twice the investment that the previous Government secured at their international investment summit. That shows how important it is to return stability to economy and work in partnership with businesses—something that the Conservative party might want to learn a lesson from.

Cost of Living: Support for Pensioners

12. **Luke Taylor** (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): What fiscal steps she is taking to support pensioners with the cost of living. [900929]

The Parliamentary Secretary, His Majesty's Treasury (Emma Reynolds): More than 12 million pensioners will be protected by this Government's commitment to the triple lock, with the new full state pension expected to increase by around £1,700 over the course of this Parliament. Pensioners also benefit from free eye test, free NHS prescriptions and free bus passes.

Luke Taylor: We know that no impact assessment was carried out prior to the decision to cut the winter fuel payment, but was any consideration given to the burden that the daunting application form places on the elderly, and the extra burden on charities such as Age UK, which advise them on completing it? Evidence of that daunting burden is the 60% limit to uptake over the past decade. Will she work with her colleagues to simplify the application process, ease the burden on those who are losing the winter fuel payment, and help them receive the broad benefits that pension credit provides?

Mr Speaker: I think the Minister got it in the first two minutes, never mind the last three.

Emma Reynolds: The Government did an equality analysis on the change, which was published in September. I recommend that the hon. Gentleman take a look at it. It was such a long question that I have forgotten what he asked. On application forms—

Mr Speaker: Order. Let's move on.

Luke Taylor *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. What is the hon. Gentleman standing for? I hope he is not. I call Blake Stephenson.

Taxes on Working People

15. **Blake Stephenson** (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): What taxes she classes as taxes on working people. [900932]

16. **Mr James Frith** (Bury North) (Lab): What steps she is taking to minimise taxes on working people. [900933]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (James Murray): As hon. Members know, any changes to tax policy will be set out in tomorrow's Budget. Members will also know that our approach to fixing the foundations of the economy will be one that protects working people. This Labour Government will honour our commitment to protect working people by not increasing national insurance, basic, higher or additional rates of income tax, or VAT.

Blake Stephenson: The Government have got into an absolute pickle over the definition of working people. People deserve certainty. In Mid Bedfordshire, we are proud of the hard work of the owners of nearly 5,000 small businesses. They are working people creating jobs and growing our economy, and all while providing for their families. They are lying awake at night worrying about yet higher taxes. Will the Chancellor give them a peaceful night's sleep ahead of tomorrow's Budget and confirm that she will honour her manifesto commitment not to raise taxes on them?

James Murray: I do not think I am pre-empting anything tomorrow by confirming that the Chancellor will absolutely stick to our commitment not to raise taxes on working people through national insurance, the basic, higher or additional rates of income tax, or VAT. And I might add that what people and businesses in the hon. Gentleman's constituency might want is stability in the economy, a Government who support investment in the economy, and a Government who will get the economy growing and make people across Britain better off.

Mr Frith: In Bury North, child poverty rates are at 43%, densely populated in three of our nine wards: Bury East, Redvales and Moorside. Does the Minister agree with me that minimising tax rises for working people is just the starting point, and that tackling the crippling level of impoverishment for those in work requires a laser focus and intervention from this mission-driven Government?

James Murray: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that, while keeping taxes on working people as low as possible is crucial, the way to make people better off in the long run is through boosting public and private investment, and delivering sustained economic growth. That is the focus of this Labour Government, and that will guide the choices we make.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con): During the election campaign, I held a press conference at which I outlined the glaring funding gaps in Labour's plans and the taxes they might raise to pay for them. One of those taxes was employer national insurance contributions. The right

hon. Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones)—now Chief Secretary to the Treasury—responded at the time by arguing that this was a list of things that “Labour isn't doing.” Is it correct that raising employer national insurance contributions is something Labour isn't doing?

James Murray: The right hon. Member will have to wait for the Budget tomorrow. She was a Minister not that long ago, so she might still remember that the Budget is the time when such announcements are made. Let me restate our commitment, so it is crystal clear, that we will protect working people by not increasing national insurance, income tax or VAT. Might I add, very briefly, that I note the Conservatives suddenly have a new-found interest in the livelihoods of working people? It is a shame, frankly, that they never prioritised that during their 14 years in office, during which, time and again, they made working people pay for their mistakes.

Public Spending: Value for Money

17. **Anna Dixon** (Shipley) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help ensure value for money in public spending. [900934]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Darren Jones): The Government have launched a multi-year spending review to set out our long-term plans for public spending and to ensure that every pound of taxpayers' money is spent effectively. The first phase of the spending review is due to report this week, alongside the Budget, and phase 2 will begin shortly after the Budget.

Anna Dixon: I thank my right hon. Friend for his response. Recent National Audit Office reports have revealed the extent of the Tories' economic mismanagement over the past 14 years. That has put capital projects such as Bingley pool in my constituency at risk. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I will ensure that taxpayers' money delivers value. Will the Minister assure me and my constituents that tomorrow's Budget will be based on an honest assessment of the public finances, so that this Government can deliver on their promises?

Darren Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. I can confirm that the Budget tomorrow will be an honest assessment of the mess left to this country by the Conservative party, but crucially our plans for clearing up the mess and then delivering the change we promised.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Given that, I assume, everyone in the Chamber has eaten at some point today, do we think that backing Britain's farmers is a good use of public money, and given that there is a £2.4 billion budget for British farming, which the last Government underspent foolishly, recklessly and carelessly, will the Chief Secretary guarantee that at the very least the farming budget will be protected so that our farmers can carry on looking after our nature and feeding us?

Darren Jones: Actually, I did not have breakfast today, so I am looking forward to lunch, and I therefore welcome that short question from the hon. Member. This Government are committed to farming and rural

affairs, and to the production of the food that they provide for us, which is important for security of supply as well as, in due course, for my lunch.

Topical Questions

T1. [900942] **Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford) (Ind): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves): Tomorrow I will present my first Budget. It will be a Budget that fixes the foundations of our economy and delivers on the promise of change. It will turn the page on low growth and will be the start of a new chapter towards making Britain better off. It will mean more pounds in people's pockets, an NHS that is there when they need it, and businesses creating wealth and opportunity for all.

Rebecca Long Bailey: I commend the Chancellor for recently outlining investment in social housing, but in the interim the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has stated that the previous Government's decision to freeze local housing allowance rates will push 80,000 private renters on housing benefit, including 30,000 children, into deep poverty during this Parliament. Will the Chancellor now consider unfreezing the allowance and relinking it to the actual cost of local rents, so that those families can keep their heads above water?

Rachel Reeves: My hon. Friend makes a really important point, which I think is familiar to all of us in our communities, about the cost of housing outstretching people's incomes. In our manifesto we committed to building 1.5 million new homes, including social housing, which is so important and can give security to people who would otherwise be left in insecure housing in the private rented sector.

Mr Speaker: As this is his farewell question time, let us now come to the shadow Chancellor.

Jeremy Hunt (Godalming and Ash) (Con): This are indeed our final exchanges in the House, so before tomorrow's fireworks I wish the Chancellor well for the future in her role. There has been a lot of common ground between us. For example, before the election she said that raising employers' national insurance was a jobs tax that would take money out of people's pockets. I very much agree with her on that; does she agree with herself?

Rachel Reeves: The right hon. Gentleman knows better than almost anyone else that there was a £22 billion black hole in the public finances. That will require difficult decisions, but even in those circumstances we will do everything in our power to protect the incomes of ordinary working people, so we are committed to ensuring that no working people will see higher taxes in their payslips after the Budget.

Jeremy Hunt: We all know why the Chancellor is inventing this fictitious black hole. Thirty times this year, before the election, she promised not to raise tax, and now she is planning to present the biggest tax-raising Budget in history. More consensually, however, as this is our final exchange, I welcome her announcement last week of a £2.3 billion loan for Ukraine. Does she agree

that the strongest signal of resolve that we can send to Putin is a commitment to spending 2.5% of GDP on defence, and does she understand why so many people are worried by the fact that she has yet to do so?

Rachel Reeves: I have always respected the right hon. Gentleman, but I think it is important for us not to deny the seriousness of the situation that we face with the black hole in the public finances. Combined with the lashing out at independent economic institutions, it suggests that he has more in common with Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng than perhaps we thought. I watched my party lurch towards an ideological extreme and deny reality, and we spent years in opposition as a result. The shadow Chancellor risks taking his party down the same path.

T2. [900943] **Adam Jogee** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): My constituency's beer and pub sector makes a significant contribution to the economy, both locally and nationally. Our 76 pubs and two breweries generate £23 million in tax receipts each year. Will the Chancellor work with the sector to unlock its growth potential, in Newcastle-under-Lyme and across our country?

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (James Murray): I know that Newcastle-under-Lyme and, indeed, the whole county of Staffordshire have a proud brewing tradition, and my hon. Friend will be an excellent champion of breweries in his constituency. Supporting pubs and breweries is very important for me as a Minister. Indeed, on my first day in the Treasury's Darlington economic campus, I visited Durham brewery—it was a work visit—where I heard from the Society of Independent Brewers and associates about the huge contribution that breweries make to British society. Further details will be set out by the Chancellor tomorrow.

T4. [900945] **Mr Tom Morrison** (Cheadle) (LD): The Chancellor recently announced an extra £550 million for the school rebuilding programme. Can she now confirm that all the schools on that programme, including Bramhall high school, are fully funded and will get their repairs soon?

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I went to school in the '80s and '90s, and I was taught in portacabins because there was not enough room in my school. I know how important it is that children are taught in proper facilities. We will set out more details of our capital investments at the Budget tomorrow.

T3. [900944] **Damien Egan** (Bristol North East) (Lab): I would like to ask a question that comes out of local government. One of the frustrations that I found after 14 years in local government was that short-term cuts can often end up costing more in the long run—an example that always comes to mind is youth services. What does the Chancellor make of the Local Government Association's call for spending on prevention to be routinely considered in both Treasury and departmental spending decisions, and for better tracking of long-term outcomes?

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Darren Jones): My hon. Friend is right to point out the opportunities for improvement. As the Chancellor set out in her

July statement, prevention will be at the heart of this Government's new approach to public service reform. That will be set out in the spending review in the coming months.

T5. [900946] **Helen Maguire** (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): Many households are facing homelessness due to increasing household costs. What support can the Chancellor provide to them?

Rachel Reeves: Building the homes that our country needs is a top priority for this Government. In our manifesto, we committed to build 1.5 million homes in this Parliament, including social housing, so that people have access to secure and affordable accommodation and that every family have a roof over their heads. We will set out more details on all of this in the Budget tomorrow.

T7. [900948] **Mr Paul Foster** (South Ribble) (Lab): Prior to being elected to this place, I was the leader of South Ribble borough council in Lancashire, where we continually struggled to set meaningful budgets due to the fragmented, short-term policies of the previous Tory Government. Will Ministers please assure me that the proposals being considered in tomorrow's Budget will see an end to the fragmented annual public sector funding allocations and a reintroduction of meaningful, forward-thinking, multi-year settlements?

Darren Jones: The Government recognise the significant pressures that all councils are facing. We are looking at consolidating funding streams for local authorities into the local government finance settlement, and we will work towards implementing our commitment to a multi-year financial settlement.

T6. [900947] **Ben Maguire** (North Cornwall) (LD): During my SEND summit in Bodmin on Saturday, teachers and parents revealed the shocking extent of our broken special educational needs system in North Cornwall and across the county. Thousands are struggling to get the support to which they are entitled. What are Treasury Ministers doing to ensure that local councils and schools are properly resourced to deliver an effective SEND system, so that families finally get the support they need and deserve?

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. This is an issue that resonates right across the House, with so many of us hearing terrible stories at our surgeries about the lack of support for some of the most vulnerable children in society. I know that it is a priority for the Education Secretary too, and we will set out more detail on departmental settlements in the Budget tomorrow.

T8. [900949] **Sam Carling** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Lab): There are over 50 pubs and breweries in my constituency, supporting more than 1,500 jobs and contributing millions of pounds to our economy. Whether it is the Mulberry Tree Farm in Hampton or the Windmill in Orton Waterville, these are valued businesses that have earned their place in our local community. Does the Chancellor agree that they deserve to be supported, and that this Labour Government will give hospitality the tools it needs to thrive?

James Murray: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is absolutely right to say that pubs make an enormous contribution to our society and economy. The current alcohol duty system supports pubs through draught relief, which ensures that eligible products served on draught are charged less duty. The Government are committed to delivering a fairer business rates system for high streets, including hospitality. Any decisions on future tax policy will be announced by the Chancellor at a fiscal event, the next of which is tomorrow.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Eighty-two per cent of those who have seen Labour take away their winter fuel payment are either below the poverty line or within £55 a week of it. How can the Government justify this, when they are not even allowing a freedom of information request from the *Financial Times* to be responded to? They are hiding the figures from the people.

The Parliamentary Secretary, His Majesty's Treasury (Emma Reynolds): We are not hiding the figures. If I had had the chance, I would have said that 455,000 pensioners are paying the higher rate of tax and that 39,300 are paying the additional rate. Many wealthy pensioners have said to me that they do not need the winter fuel payment—[*Interruption.*] The right hon. Gentleman says that, but there are a number of—

Mr Speaker: Order. I think the Minister has answered the question. I call Emma Foody.

T9. [900950] **Emma Foody** (Cramlington and Killingworth) (Lab/Co-op): Residents in my constituency are still feeling the pinch in their pockets and pay packets from Liz Truss's disastrous mini-Budget. It is vital that this Government fix the foundations of our economy to deliver proper public services and a rise in living standards. Can the Chancellor tell me how she will deliver this for the north-east and for people across the country?

Rachel Reeves: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the disastrous impacts of the Conservative mini-Budget just over two years ago, which is still having an impact on people's lives as they pay higher mortgage bills. This Government have committed to return sustainability to the economy and to working with business to reform our planning system, our pensions system and our skills system. We have already brought in £63.5 billion of private sector investment to grow our economy in all parts of the country and deliver the jobs and better wages that constituents in Cramlington and right across the country need to see.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): Small business owners are working people, and they are some of the hardest-working people that I know. The Labour party struggled to define them over the weekend, but does the Chancellor agree that any rise in fuel duty, which the Conservatives froze or cut for 14 years, would be a tax on those hard-working people or those hard-working small business owners?

Rachel Reeves: The previous Government factored into their forecasts an increase in fuel duty this year. I will set out our plans in the Budget tomorrow.

T10. [900951] **Matt Rodda** (Reading Central) (Lab): Can the Minister update the House on how the Government will help to secure better returns for pensioners while also unlocking the opportunities for pension savings to help generate growth?

Emma Reynolds: The Chancellor launched the landmark pensions review in July, which I am leading and which is looking at measures to drive more UK pension investment into the UK economy, boosting growth but also improving pension savers' outcomes. I know that there is interest in this agenda across the House.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): Countryside Alliance research shows that rural households spend up to £800 a year more on fuel than urban households, so further to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden and Solihull East (Saqib Bhatti), will the Chancellor protect rural communities in the Budget tomorrow?

Emma Reynolds: The hon. Gentleman is urging me to comment on the Budget, but he will have to wait until tomorrow.

Neil Duncan-Jordan (Poole) (Lab): This Government have inherited a Britain that is now the most unequal country in the G7 bar America. The UK's 50 richest families own 50% of the country's wealth, and our tax system exacerbates this inequality with unfair loopholes that benefit those who have wealth rather than those who go to work. What steps—

Mr Speaker: Order—[*Interruption.*] No, these are topical questions and I decide.

James Murray: My hon. Friend will have to wait for the Budget tomorrow, but he will know that we have committed to closing some loopholes, including VAT on private schools, the non-dom loophole and cracking down on tax avoidance.

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): In South Devon, the average house price is now 14 times the average salary, at £425,000. What measures is the Chancellor taking to ensure that rural and coastal areas, such as the South Hams, which face huge digital and transport connectivity problems, will be included in measures to boost economic growth?

Rachel Reeves: Our commitment to build 1.5 million homes is about ensuring that all our constituents get the chance to have a roof over their head, including in rural areas, with more social housing as well so that people can have a secure tenancy. The hon. Lady is also right to raise the issue of digital connectivity, and we will be setting out more details on infrastructure investment in the Budget tomorrow.

Katrina Murray (Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch) (Lab): “Buy now, pay later” is attractive to young people who are trying to survive on zero-hours contracts with irregular hours. What assurances can the Chancellor give me that the coming regulations will protect this group from problematic debt?

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Tulip Siddiq): The proposed regulations will drive high standards of conduct among “buy now, pay later” firms, ensuring that consumers receive clear information and have access to strong protections. Our proposals will also allow the Financial Conduct Authority to require “buy now, pay later” firms to carry out affordability checks, ensuring that firms lend only to borrowers who can afford to repay.

Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con): During the last election campaign, Labour candidates across Somerset said that a Labour Government would cut energy bills by £300. Will the Chancellor set out the timescale for fulfilling that promise?

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and I note the number of Labour MPs we now have in Somerset and across the south-west of England. We will set out more detail in the Budget tomorrow, but our commitment to investing in home-grown energy will boost our energy security, create good jobs here in Britain and begin to reduce people's bills, as will our programme to better insulate homes, which the previous Government failed to do.

Danny Beales (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Lab): A hundred councils in England have come together to call for five key changes to unlock much-needed investment in new council homes. They will welcome the news of £500 million of additional grant and changes to the right-to-buy rules, but one issue they also raise is housing revenue account debt and finance. Will Treasury Ministers look specifically at debt allocations and how HRA debt is accounted for, to unlock much-needed investment in council homes?

Darren Jones: Councils' housing revenue accounts are a significant part of local authority finances, and it is therefore not right to exclude them from our fiscal rules, but I reassure my hon. Friend that this Government's commitment to deliver 1.5 million new homes will be delivered.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): However “working people” is defined, does the Chancellor not accept that people on low incomes and part-time employees who earn up to £300 a week should be exempt from paying income tax?

Rachel Reeves: We will set out details of our tax policy in the Budget tomorrow, but this Government have made a commitment to working people that we will not increase their income tax, their national insurance or the value added tax they pay.

Ministerial Code: Policy Announcements

Mr Speaker: I have noted the media reporting an assertion from Downing Street that the pre-announcement of Budget measures is entirely routine. For the avoidance of doubt, I am always happy for Ministers to come to the House to make announcements in the run-up to a Budget. This discourtesy arises when those announcements are made elsewhere.

12.37 pm

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on whether Ministers disclosing policies to the media before the Budget are in contravention of the ministerial code's statement that the most important announcements of Government policy should be made, in the first instance, in Parliament.

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): Mr Speaker, I reassure you that what you said yesterday, and indeed what you said a moment ago, has been heard not just by me but across Government.

The Government take their obligations to this House very seriously. Yesterday, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury made a statement to the House on the fiscal rules, in which he made it clear that details will be announced to the House in the Chancellor's Budget statement tomorrow, alongside an economic and fiscal forecast produced by the independent Office for Budget Responsibility. Treasury Ministers have also answered questions in the House this morning.

The Chancellor will come before the House tomorrow to set out in detail the Government's Budget to fix the foundations of our economy, and the House will then have a further four days of debate on the measures announced in that Budget. Throughout it all, Members of this House will see a Government who are committed to fixing the foundations to deliver the change our country so desperately needs. This Labour Government will invest in Britain's future so that we can rebuild the national health service and our country, while ensuring that working people do not face higher taxes in their payslips.

Laura Trott: The response from No. 10 yesterday, and Labour's whole argument, seems to be, "We did it because you guys did it." But I am old enough to remember a fresh-faced Prime Minister coming into Downing Street and promising change. Labour justifying its actions based on things that the Conservatives have done does not seem like the change we were promised, does it? We are learning the lessons of why we lost the election, but this Government seem to be taking lessons from the worst bits of our record. And not just ours—from the last Labour Government, too. It is like the greatest hits of Government mistakes being replayed in just 100 days.

Cronyism? Is it Blair? No, it is the fresh-faced Labour Government giving civil service jobs to donors. A gross betrayal of pensioners? Is it Brown? No, it is the new Chancellor deciding that those on £13,000 are rich and do not need their winter fuel payments. Rampant politicisation of our institutions? Was this not something Labour accused Boris Johnson of? No, it is the Chancellor again, who said this weekend that the ex-Prime Minister and ex-Chancellor will have to answer to the Office for

Budget Responsibility, despite the OBR saying that the report has nothing to do with previous Ministers and led *The Times* to argue that the OBR has been reduced "to the provisional wing of the Treasury press office."

Disrespectful statements emanating from No.10 about your decisions, Mr Speaker? Not the Conservative party, but the No. 10 press office, just yesterday. And potentially breaching the ministerial code with abandon about Budget leaks? Right again, it is this Government.

This Government's false piety has been breached comprehensively by the Downing Street passes scandal and crony appointments to the civil service, and their hypocrisy has been laid bare for all to see. Yet still they bleat on about the Tories like some broken spell they mutter over and over again in an attempt to conjure up the old magic, but it is not going to work. Labour is so obsessed with playing political games that its Members find themselves going over the Budget, simultaneously claiming that the Conservatives spent too much, but also spent too little. It is nonsense.

The question that I want to ask the Government today is who is going to take responsibility for the Budget leaks? What assessment have the Government made of whether this is a breach of the ministerial code?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: As I have said, I have the deepest respect for this House and its Members. The coming days will be very important to debate the Budget in full. I am sure right hon. and hon. Members will forgive me if I have a degree of cynicism about the Conservative party's new-found passion for parliamentary conventions, given the number of times it failed in its 14 years in office to update the House ahead of major announcements.

The truth is that Conservative Members are desperate to speak about anything other than the appalling mess in which they left our national finances. There are many groups of people who I would listen to on budget management, but certainly not Members of the party that crashed the economy. We would think they might have learned some lessons from attacking independent financial institutions, but they have not. The shadow Chancellor and the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury are attacking the Office for Budget Responsibility once again.

Families in my constituency and across the country are still paying higher rents and mortgage costs because of the mini-Budget two years ago that created and wreaked such havoc on our economy. Unlike the Conservative party, this Government will never play fast and loose with the nation's finances. Tomorrow we will see a Budget focused on investment, to get the economy moving again. This Government will take the long-term decisions needed to rebuild Britain and fix our schools, hospitals and our broken roads. The Conservatives have not changed. All they offer is decline and more austerity, with working people paying the price.

Mr James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): In Bury North, rents and mortgages are still sky high as a direct consequence of the economic legacy of the last Conservative Government. Does the Minister agree that it is no surprise that the Conservatives want to talk about anything other than their economic record?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I certainly do agree. I am sure it will come as a surprise to right hon. and hon. Members that one of the Conservative's former Chancellors decided to comment on the September 2022 fiasco. What did Kwasi Kwarteng say the other day? "Okay, my Budget wasn't perfect"—the master of understatement.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): It is a sad state of affairs when the run-up to the Budget of this new Government so closely resembles that of the previous Government, with consistent leaks and briefings to the media rather than announcements being made where they should be—in this House—so that Members can scrutinise them on behalf of their constituents. The previous Conservative Government did so much damage to trust in politics, including by consistently undermining the ministerial code. Will the Minister put things right and toughen up the status of the code by enshrining it in law?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: We have already said that the Prime Minister will publish an updated ministerial code shortly. There is a stark difference between this and the previous Administration. The approach of the previous one is probably best characterised as, "If you break the rules, try and change the rulebook," but we on the Labour Benches take the ministerial code seriously. That is why we want to ensure that it is fit for purpose, deals with problems such as the Tory freebie loophole and meets the high standards that the Prime Minister expects of all who have the privilege of serving in his Government.

Laurence Turner (Birmingham Northfield) (Lab): I am sure the whole House will welcome the constructive response from the Minister today. Will he confirm that the former Conservative Treasury Front-Bench team had to have paragraph 9.1 of the ministerial code drawn to their attention twice this year—in both April and May? It is do as they say, not do as they did.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Frankly, when I heard Conservative Members talk about ethics and standards in Government, I thought that irony had died.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Can we take it that the Government did not think that the Chancellor's announcement in America last week was important? I think most people in this House felt that it was. Therefore, if it was important, did the Chancellor break the ministerial code?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The Chief Secretary to the Treasury made a statement to the House yesterday. The entire Treasury team has been here answering questions today. The Chancellor will deliver a Budget tomorrow and we will have four days of debate on it. I doubt that the House has seen so much of the Treasury team since the Tories were forced to deliver two emergency Budgets in September 2022.

Louise Jones (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): My constituents in North East Derbyshire are still paying the price of the mini-Budget, with rises in their mortgages

and rents. Does the Minister agree that the Conservatives should be talking about that and holding themselves to account rather than throwing out chaff to distract everyone?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In the contribution of the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, one word was noticeably missing: sorry.

Dame Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): As Chair of the Procedure Committee in the previous Parliament, I made a point of making sure that when Ministers had breached the rules, it was clear to them that both the Committee and others were very unhappy. Will the Minister confirm that he will make sure that the revised ministerial code makes it clear that announcements need to be made to this place first, as has always been the case?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: With the greatest respect to the right hon. Lady, she will not have long to wait for the ministerial code. In my opening remarks to Mr Speaker, I indicated my respect for this House in regard to the matter that she is talking about.

Matthew Patrick (Wirral West) (Lab): The chutzpah from Conservative Members is quite incredible. Does the Minister agree that although they make a point today about process, they totally ignored the Office for Budget Responsibility ahead of the disastrous mini-Budget, which is still causing immense pain to my constituents?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Absolutely. It is no surprise that we have a Conservative party that wants to talk about process, but it will not take responsibility for the £22 billion black hole that it left in our finances.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Yesterday, Mr Speaker, you made the strongest statement of condemnation on a subject of this sort that I have heard from the Chair in 27 years in this House. The Minister is a decent chap and, for all I know, he may be a skilled cricketer, but he must admit that he is batting on a sticky wicket today. Does he understand that if his defence is just to say, "We did it because the previous party did it," nobody will ever break this cycle? His party has a big majority. It could just say sorry and resolve to do better in future.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I have a great deal of respect for the right hon. Gentleman. I am not a cricketer, as it happens, so I cannot comment on the condition of the wicket. With regard to Mr Speaker, I did initially set out in my remarks today my respect for what he said both yesterday and today, and my respect for Members of this House.

Fred Thomas (Plymouth Moor View) (Lab): I think we all understand that Conservative Members are desperate to talk about anything other than their record of 14 years of failure in government. We hear from hon. Friends and Opposition Members how those failures are affecting constituents every single day. My question is, what next? How will the Conservatives distract us next?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend is entirely right about the Conservative party's desire to distract from its record, whether it is the lockdown parties or

[Nick Thomas-Symonds]

the PPE VIP lane for contracts. This Government are appointing a covid corruption commissioner to get the public's money back.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber) (SNP): Those of us who have been in this place for some time will remember the outraged indignation of the now Government, when they were in opposition, every time the now Opposition pulled a stunt like this. The only constant is you, Mr Speaker, and your efforts to have whichever of them is in power treat this House and its Members with respect. Can the Minister not see that the Government displaying such arrogant contempt for the rules only feeds the public perception that one is as bad as the other? Rather than delivering the change it promised, the Labour party is really saying, "It's our turn now."

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The hon. Gentleman cannot possibly be saying that there is any comparison with breaching the rules during the covid pandemic. He really cannot; that is not a serious proposition. Nor is it a serious proposition to suggest that this is comparable with the money that was lost in the PPE VIP lane—it really is not.

Mark Ferguson (Gateshead Central and Whickham) (Lab): Despite the rumours being spread, including by the Conservative party, can my right hon. Friend confirm that not a single change to taxation has yet been announced, and that they will in fact be announced at the Budget tomorrow?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: As my hon. Friend says, the measures will be announced at tomorrow's Budget in the normal way, with the Office for Budget Responsibility's economic and fiscal forecast. The Conservative party may denigrate the Office for Budget Responsibility, but this Government respect our financial institutions.

Dame Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Can the Paymaster General confirm that the Chancellor receiving £7,500-worth of free clothes and declaring them as office support is a breach of the ministerial code?

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I must say, the Conservatives have learned absolutely nothing. They trashed ministerial standards and standards in this House when in government. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Shannon, you are meant to sit down again.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The Conservatives trashed standards in government. My suggestion to them is to reflect on the past 14 years.

Sam Carling (North West Cambridgeshire) (Lab): I am very grateful to several Conservative Members for admitting to quite a lot of the mistakes that they made in government. People in my constituency are still paying the price, in their mortgages and rents, for the disastrous Conservative economic record. Is it any wonder that the Conservatives are so desperate to speak about anything other than their disastrous record?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the Conservatives will talk about anything but their own record. Is it any wonder that they did not conduct a spending review before they called a general election? The reality is that they made unfunded spending commitments and then ran away.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): A remit of the new Modernisation Committee is to enhance the ability of Members of this House to hold the Government to account. In the light of the failure that has been exhibited over recent days, would the Minister be in favour of referring this issue to the Modernisation Committee?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I was not aware that financial mismanagement by the Conservative party was a matter for the Modernisation Committee, but it should certainly be referred to something.

Josh Simons (Makerfield) (Lab): Like others, I am surprised to hear that Conservative Members recently rediscovered their moral compass—the one that they lost perhaps when the former Prime Minister sent out the “bring your own bottle” invite to Downing Street, when he spent taxpayers' money jetting his girlfriend around the world, or when they unlawfully suspended this place. Perhaps the Minister agrees that there might be another motivation. Does the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott) want to keep her job next week?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Of course, we wish the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott) well for the reshuffle next week. As ever, my hon. Friend makes a very persuasive point. The Conservatives will talk about anything apart from their record.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): At 10 pm last night, the Government announced a £70 million increase in funding for radiotherapy. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for radiotherapy, I very much welcome that, but would it not have been better and right for the Government to make a statement to the House so that the policy could be properly scrutinised? That £70 million equals about 30 linear accelerators, but it will take 70 linear accelerators just to replace those that are going out of date this year. It will not meet the needs of people living in rural communities such as mine. We desperately need a satellite radiotherapy unit in Kendal so that people can get to treatment quickly. Will the Paymaster General put that lack of scrutiny right by arranging for a Health Minister to meet me and the rest of the all-party group, so that we can work closely to take forward those plans together?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I will certainly pass on that request to the relevant Health Minister. Putting aside the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about scrutiny, I am sure that he joins us in welcoming the focus on radiotherapy, and there will be a real desire to work on it with him across party lines.

Kevin Bonavia (Stevenage) (Lab): I was elected to keep the promises that we made in our manifesto. The Conservative party broke nearly every promise that it made in its 14 years in government. Does the Minister agree that it is only right for this Government to confirm that we will honour the pledges we made at the election?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am afraid that trust was one of the many things that the Conservative Government destroyed over 14 years, and this Government are determined to rebuild it.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): The Chancellor, the Education Secretary, the Health Secretary and the Work and Pensions Secretary have all made significant announcements to the media and not to the House. Will those breaches of the ministerial code be investigated? Why has the Prime Minister not yet published an updated version of the ministerial code—are the Government still working out whether it is right to accept suits and glasses?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: We have already said that the Prime Minister will update the ministerial code and publish it shortly to ensure that it is fit for purpose, deals with problems such as the Tory freebie loophole, as I have said, and meets the high standards that the Prime Minister expects.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): We hear a lot about “14 years of failure”, but it seems to me that this Government have had 14 years to learn how the ministerial code works. In reality, the announcement made by the Chancellor last week moved the markets: bond yields went up, which means that mortgages and people’s bills have gone up. The right thing for the Government to do is to apologise.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: First, we will see the impact of what the Chancellor announces tomorrow and in the days afterwards. The ministerial code will be published shortly. That stands in stark contrast to what the previous Government did. I watched from the Opposition Benches as they tried to tear up the entire rulebook to protect one of their friends—that is not something that we will do.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): After your statement yesterday, Mr Speaker, I think you will have been as disappointed as I was that when the Chancellor came to the Chamber for Treasury questions this morning, she failed to apologise for the serious and important announcements that she had made outside the House. Without deflecting any further by talking about the previous Government’s record, will the Minister promise now that the ministerial code, and the Speaker of this House, who represents us all, will be respected by the Government?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Of course this Government respect both Mr Speaker and the ministerial code, but I make no apology whatsoever for holding the Conservative party to account for its record.

Alan Gemmell (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): Conservative Members, in their faux outrage, have complete amnesia about their series of egregious failures in government, for which people in my constituency are still paying the price. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to consider the future that this Government can bring to the people of Central Ayrshire?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In recent weeks, we have had the investment summit, where this Government—an active Government—got pledges of £63 billion of investment into our

economy. That is already a much better record than that of the Conservative Government, under whom investment was in decline.

Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD): I declare an interest as a governor of the Royal Berkshire hospital, and a family member of mine has a shareholding in a health company. Yesterday, I asked the Chief Secretary to the Treasury whether he would commit to urgent funding for the Royal Berkshire hospital, and I was told very politely to wait for Wednesday’s Budget. Does the Minister agree that there is a democratic deficit when elected MPs cannot get an answer on issues that affect their constituents, but details of the Budget are, at the same time, being briefed to the press?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: There are a range of ways in which the hon. Gentleman can get answers for his constituents, from written parliamentary questions to securing a debate in Westminster Hall or an Adjournment debate. He does not have long to wait for the Budget, and he will have four days of debate afterwards to raise that point.

Jim Shannon: I say this very gently to the Minister, but it must be said: throughout his term, Mr Speaker has been painfully clear that there is a procedure for this House that we must all follow. Does the Minister not agree that this Government, who have come to power on a mandate to do things the right way, must pay respect to that convention? It is not in place simply due to tradition but to ensure that policy changes are heard and debated in this Chamber first, which is the purpose of this House, rather than heard and debated in TV studios throughout the country with a simple nod in the direction of the discourse of democracy.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I have huge respect for this House, to which the hon. Gentleman is a frequent contributor. The Government’s respect for the ministerial code, for Mr Speaker and for Members of this House is absolute.

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): Over the past few days, we have had multiple leaked definitions of what working people are. Will the Government place in the House of Commons Library a definition ready for tomorrow’s Budget, so we can all understand who they are talking about?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I can tell the hon. Gentleman about working people. Working people are the people who have been so appallingly let down by the Conservative party. They are the people who are paying extra costs in their mortgages and their rents every month; they are the people hit by the cost of living; they are the people left on record waiting lists by the Conservative party; and they are the people who this Government are determined to deliver for.

Mr Speaker: We now come to Paul Holmes.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker—there I was ready to defend your honour, Sir. Even after your ruling yesterday, the Government made more announcements on the BBC this morning concerning health services, so has the Paymaster General

[Paul Holmes]

asked his advisers at the Cabinet Office whether they think the Chancellor or any other Minister has broken the ministerial code? If he has not asked for that advice, why not?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Come on. The Conservative party, which showed zero respect for the ministerial code in office, trying to put questions like that is appalling—it is double standards. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I expect better of a senior Whip!

Sudan

1.2 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Sudan.

The Minister for Development (Anneliese Dodds): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for bringing this urgent question before the House and ensuring that we discuss the appalling situation that we currently see in Sudan. Since conflict erupted between the Sudanese armed forces and the Rapid Support Forces in April last year, Sudan has witnessed one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises. Humanitarian access continues to be deliberately blocked, and atrocities are being committed on a horrific scale.

The UK is at the forefront of responding to this crisis. Yesterday at the UN Security Council, the UK condemned the horrific escalation in violence in Al Jazirah state over recent days, with the Rapid Support Forces reportedly shooting indiscriminately at civilians and committing heinous acts of sexual violence. In September, as world leaders gathered for the UN General Assembly, the UK convened an event with partners to draw international attention to conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan. That followed my visit to South Sudan, where I spoke with some of those who have been impacted by this horrific violence. On 12 October, Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Edinburgh also visited the Chad-Sudan border to witness the impacts of the conflict in Sudan on women and girls and shine a light on the deteriorating situation.

On 9 October, as co-leader of the UN Human Rights Council's core group on Sudan, the UK led efforts to extend the mandate of the independent fact-finding mission on Sudan. That mission is vital for documenting human rights abuses. Most recently, on 18 October, the UK led a joint statement with 10 other donors condemning the obstruction of aid and calling on the warring parties to comply with obligations under international humanitarian law. I also want to underline that this year, the UK has provided £113.5 million in aid to support those who are fleeing violence in Sudan and those who have fled to neighbouring Chad, South Sudan and Libya.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

Mr Mitchell: The war in Sudan represents the largest humanitarian crisis, hunger crisis and displacement crisis in the world, but it has been almost entirely neglected because of the crises in the middle east and Ukraine. In the 18 months since hostilities erupted, tens of thousands have been killed and more than 10 million people have been displaced. Horrifically, 13 million face death by starvation this winter. We are witnessing a continuation of what the Janjaweed, the murderous militia now restyled as the RSF, started in Darfur 20 years ago. This is a deliberate strategy to destroy a population based on their identity—a crime against humanity. More than 1 million people in El Fasher in north Darfur are at immediate risk.

As a member of the troika and through many other actions, Britain has been active, but as the penholder on Sudan at the United Nations Security Council and with our deep historical connections to Sudan, the UK has a

special responsibility to accelerate international efforts to find a solution. Events are not moving far enough or fast enough. Where is the responsibility to protect—a policy endorsed by the whole United Nations—in this dreadful catastrophe? What steps is the Foreign Secretary taking to ensure the international community lives up to its obligation under the responsibility to protect framework?

We have seen how contentious issues on the global stage often spill over into domestic discourse, but the debate on Sudan has been muted: there are no protests in the streets and no mass public social media campaigns, and news coverage has been sporadic. Yesterday, the Government announced that they will be match-funding the Disasters Emergency Committee's middle east appeal. Can the Minister confirm today that she will do everything she can to support the launch of a DEC appeal on Sudan as soon as possible? The British public are one of the most generous, and I am certain that with greater awareness, many will dig deep to help, both in humanitarian terms and in calling for urgent international action. As Christmas approaches, from the comfort of our homes, we are going to witness the hideous spectre of mass starvation in a world of plenty. "Urgent" is an understatement: we must do more and act now.

Anneliese Dodds: The new Government are absolutely determined to not neglect this crisis. The right hon. Member has just used the word "hideous"; that truly is the case. I have spoken with some of those who came back into South Sudan from Sudan, including children—children who had effectively had to fend for themselves for many days, wading through flooded water, and were barely alive by the time they got to South Sudan. I heard from them about the need to ensure that the UK Government do all they can to stop this horrific conflict, in which the two sides are ultimately out for themselves and most definitely not for the people of Sudan, who are being held to ransom.

The right hon. Member rightly drew attention to the situation in El Fasher. He will know that keeping the Adré border crossing open is absolutely imperative. We should no longer see any restrictions on aid: that border must be kept open, and additional impediments should not be placed there. He talked about our special responsibility, which is certainly one that the new UK Government feel very strongly. We are doing all we can within the UN, as well as bilaterally, to ensure that the UK is providing leadership on this horrendous situation. The Foreign Secretary has raised it repeatedly in a whole range of different contexts, as have I, including bilaterally and multilaterally.

The right hon. Member referred to the links that the people of the UK have with Sudan. Although he rightly said that there have not been protests on the streets, there are Brits up and down our country who are working extraordinarily hard to support those in Sudan, particularly through mutual aid groups. Those are some of the bravest people I have ever spoken with: I have spoken to them online since I came into post, and also spoke with some of them in Addis Ababa. They really are incredible, providing support for their communities at a time of such need.

Lastly, the right hon. Gentleman rightly mentioned the DEC appeal for the middle east that we have worked with broadcasters on and matched to £10 million. Of course, any DEC appeal is determined by broadcasters, but we

will certainly do all we can to ensure that the support that the people of Sudan need is delivered in a far greater volume than currently.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend says that she is doing all she can at the UN and bilaterally, but this horrendous situation is unfolding day by day, with 10 million people displaced, 20,000 people killed and 33,000 people injured—and it is getting worse. Can she say exactly what she is doing and how she is deploying the UN General Assembly, particularly as we are the penholder, to bring this horrendous situation to a close?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for asking for more specific details. She is right to emphasise the magnitude of the crisis: it is the world's largest displacement crisis and now disturbingly, as we see, the world's largest crisis of food insecurity.

Specifically on the UN General Assembly, which my hon. Friend asked about, we ensured that the UK convened an event with partners to draw attention to conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan. I also worked with partners to hold a meeting on the Sudanese humanitarian situation, which we are rightly working on across our ministerial teams in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): Some 25 million people urgently need assistance in Sudan and more than 10 million have been displaced from their homes. Will the Minister affirm that attaining a ceasefire in Sudan is a diplomatic priority for the UK?

The UK is the penholder on Sudan at the UN Security Council and assumes the presidency of the council from Friday. Last night, I met the former civilian Prime Minister of Sudan, Dr Abdalla Hamdok, who is president of the broad civilian front Tagadum. He is pushing for safe zones for civilians. Will the UK sponsor a new Security Council resolution to designate no-fly areas for aircraft and Iranian drones, and to uphold responsibilities under resolution 2417? Will the Government increase the capacity of their mission in Sudan as a practical means of support? Will they also further increase UK humanitarian assistance, including support for the UN appeal for Sudan, which has received only half its target funding?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the incredibly important point. She is right to underline that we must see an end to the hostilities. As I mentioned in response to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), the two warring parties both appear to believe that they can win the war, so they are continuing hostilities. The impact of that on the civilian population is extreme: as we mentioned, there is the highest level of displacement and of food insecurity anywhere in the world. There must be an end to hostilities and the UK Government are doing all we can to advocate for that.

I am pleased to hear that the hon. Lady met the former leader of Sudan, Hamdok, from the transitional Government. I also met representatives of Tagadum, which is an important civil society organisation, when I was in Addis Ababa. Their voice must be heard, especially when it comes to the protection of refugees. We have

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seen so many attacks on refugees, internally displaced people in Sudan, and civilians. We will continue to argue against that.

The hon. Lady asked about our activity in Sudan. Richard Crowder is the newly appointed head of British Office Sudan and the UK special representative to Sudan. He is working incredibly hard on that, as are all the Ministers in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, as I mentioned.

Laura Kyrke-Smith (Aylesbury) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister for updating us on her work. The violence continues in part because the warring parties have their sponsors in the region, including Iran and the Gulf. What efforts are the Government making to work with those regional sponsors to encourage de-escalation and secure a ceasefire?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning that; she has considerable experience in the area of humanitarian need. We were extremely concerned by the situation that was revealed, for example, in the panel of experts' report in January 2024 about external engagement. I have said from the Dispatch Box before, and I will say again, that the only reason for another country to be engaged in Sudan is to help to provide humanitarian support. That is the only reason for external engagement, and we will continue to make that argument very strongly.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Both Front Benchers seem united in their passionate concern about this terrible conflict. Does the Minister agree that if this situation were happening in a conflict on the continent of Europe or in the middle east, it would be on our national news night after night? Why does she think our broadcasters give a second-order priority to such a terrible conflict?

Anneliese Dodds: The right hon. Gentleman asks an important question, and one that I have been struggling with too. Without dwelling on it, hearing from those who have been directly impacted by the crisis about the horrendous time that they have spent trying to escape the violence leads one to the conclusion that there must be more of a focus on the situation. The most appalling outcome would be if, some years hence, people were to look back and say, "Why did the international community not do more?" The Government are determined to use every lever—multilateral and bilateral—to try to force change and make sure that the people of Sudan are protected.

Alice Macdonald (Norwich North) (Lab/Co-op): A UN investigation found today that rape is widespread in Sudan. The accounts are horrific, yet as we have heard, the conflict is the world's forgotten war. How will the UK use its presidency of the UN Security Council in November to ensure that the crisis is no longer forgotten and that the world acts, including on sexual violence in conflict?

Anneliese Dodds: My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important issue; again, I know that she has experience in this area. The UK Government have repeatedly condemned atrocities and called out human rights violations, especially conflict-related sexual violence committed by parties to the conflict. We have called that out in the UN Human

Rights Council and the Security Council. We are also supporting fact-finding missions. I was pleased to secure the support of even more countries for the important UN fact-finding mission, because the voices of women, girls and indeed boys who are being subjected to sexual violence must be heard and there cannot be impunity for that.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): The brutality of violence in Sudan, and the disruption of agricultural systems and trade routes, have led to the extreme food insecurity that we have seen. Does the Minister share my admiration for the local emergency room organisations that are doing what they can to support local people? What will she do to ensure that international aid can get through to those actors on the ground? In the absence of international agencies or international forces, they are all that is there. What will she do to ensure that aid can continue to get across the border from Chad?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for referring to the emergency response rooms; I had a meeting with a number of people involved with those mechanisms. We are talking about ordinary Sudanese people who have taken extremely brave steps to make sure that they are supporting their local communities with desperately needed humanitarian aid—food, water and other supplies that they need right now. As a Co-operative party MP, I believe that they have shown the best of mutual aid, and incredible courage at the same time. The UK is working with the UN on that, because we need to make sure that those individuals are supported in their incredibly important work. On the subject of aid from Chad, we will continue to push to make sure that the Adré border crossing is kept open and that there are no bureaucratic and administrative obstacles to aid getting through from there.

Steve Race (Exeter) (Lab): What discussions have the Government had with regional actors to bring to bear pressure on the RSF and the SAF to make sure that humanitarian access to the country is allowed to prevent the severe starvation that is ongoing?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this. We have had discussions with a number of bilateral partners both in the region and outside it. In fact, I discussed this with the USAID administrator last week when I was at the World Bank annuals, but we have of course had a number of discussions with regional actors as well—particularly countries in the Gulf, but beyond that as well. We know that many of them have relationships with individuals in Sudan, and we are really pushing for those to be used so that we see the aid delivery that is so desperately needed.

Chris Law (Dundee Central) (SNP): The UN Secretary-General warned yesterday that "outside powers are fuelling the fire", and intensifying the nightmare of hunger and disease for millions of people in Sudan. The Minister has previously stated:

"The UK could not be clearer in our language."—[*Official Report*, 3 September 2024; Vol. 753, c. 166.]

She has said that those engaged in this conflict and enabling a proxy situation are exacerbating a humanitarian crisis. What precise actions are the UK Government taking to prevent this involvement and to stop arms reaching the conflict zones?

Anneliese Dodds: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for being of the same mind on how we need to see an end to external engagement and to see the warring parties coming to the negotiating table. There have been a number of efforts to achieve that, but sadly, we have not seen both parties engaging to the extent they should have done. They must engage, and we must also see civil society engaging. We need to make sure that every single country is pushing towards that end, which is ultimately the only thing that will prevent the suffering of the Sudanese people.

Steve Yemm (Mansfield) (Lab): What are the Government doing to ensure that the real picture of the impact on civilians in the region is well known, or better known, both domestically and in the international community?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this, because it really is important that we get as accurate a picture as possible of what is taking place, including of human rights violations. We are supporting the Centre for Information Resilience, a research body that is gathering open-source evidence about the ongoing fighting in Sudan. As I have mentioned, we have also pushed very hard to ensure there is support for the UN's fact-finding mission. I was very pleased to see African nations backing that—a number of different countries backed it—and we need to make sure that the neutral information-gathering approach is really intensified so that we get an accurate picture.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister very much for her response. It is clear to the House that the Minister is doing her best to try to find solutions to the questions we are asking. On the escalating violence in Sudan's Gezira state, recent attacks by the Rapid Support Forces have reportedly led to some 124 civilian deaths and widespread atrocities, including the targeting of ethnic and religious communities. In the light of the events that have led to the displacement of some 11 million people in Sudan, how are the Government working with international partners to safeguard the freedom of religious belief of those fleeing the religiously and ethnically motivated violence, and what immediate actions have been taken to ensure access to safe passage, humanitarian aid and protection for Sudanese civilians facing persecution, especially those from vulnerable religious communities?

Anneliese Dodds: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this incredibly important issue. One of the many tragic developments we see in Sudan at the moment is that, under the previous transitional Government to whom we referred a few moments ago, there was considerable progress on freedom of religion and belief. For example, apostasy was decriminalised and Christmas was made a national holiday for those who wish to celebrate it, so there was a lot of progress. We have not so far seen a significant increase in the specific targeting of or discrimination against any religious minorities for their beliefs, but we will keep that under very close review, and we are aware that the broader human rights situation has clearly been deteriorating very disturbingly.

Israel: UNRWA Ban

1.24 pm

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South and Walkden) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs if he will make a statement on what assessment he has made of legislation approved by the Israeli Knesset to ban UNRWA.

The Minister for Development (Anneliese Dodds): I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this critically important issue. Let me be clear: jeopardising the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and, in turn, its ability to carry out lifesaving work is unacceptable. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary stated clearly in this House yesterday, it is also “wholly counterproductive for Israel”. Removing UNRWA from the equation would make an already unacceptable humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories far worse. It would also, of course, undermine the work of the United Nations more widely.

We are working closely with our international partners to urge the Israeli Government to step back from the brink and ensure that the legislation passed yesterday in the Knesset does not stop UNRWA being able to carry out its vital role in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. UNRWA is indispensable in the provision of aid for Palestinians. No other agency can get aid into Gaza at the scale needed. All humanitarian actors depend on UNRWA's distribution network to get aid to those who need it most. That is why we restored funding to UNRWA as soon as possible, providing £21 million of funding. This is helping to provide emergency food, shelter and other support for 3 million people, as well as supporting UNRWA's wider work assisting 6 million Palestinian refugees across the region. Some £1 million of the UK's funding is helping the implementation of Catherine Colonna's reforms.

We expect UNRWA to uphold the highest standards of neutrality. As I have said, we are providing funding and support for its reform process to enable that. The Secretary-General and the commissioner-general of UNRWA took the allegations seriously, and acted decisively. They cannot now be used to justify cutting ties with UNRWA. That is why we and our international partners voiced our concern at the weekend about the legislation that the Knesset has now passed, and called on the Government of Israel to make sure that UNRWA's work can continue. The Prime Minister has been clear that the world

“will not tolerate any more excuses on humanitarian assistance”.

Israel must enable more aid to enter Gaza now and protect civilians. There can be no justification for denying civilians access to essential supplies. It is unacceptable that UK-funded humanitarian supplies have been unable to reach those in desperate need. Winter is coming, and the Palestinian people cannot wait. Israel's Foreign Minister Katz reassured the Foreign Secretary over the weekend that aid will get in, and we will continue to press Israel to meet those commitments.

Finally, the Foreign Secretary reported to this House yesterday that Foreign Minister Katz had told us that the Knesset passing the Bill did not necessarily mean it had to be implemented. We will continue to use every lever we have to put pressure on the Israeli Government

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not to implement the legislation. It is not in their own interests, and it is certainly not in the interests of the Palestinian people, or indeed of humanity.

Yasmin Qureshi: I thank the Minister for that response, and I also welcome the comments made by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary yesterday. However, our statements of concern will do nothing to help the lives of innocent Palestinians, who will be further devastated by this decision.

The Minister will know that the decision yesterday was backed by 90% of the Knesset. It will see UNRWA evicted from the premises it has held for over 70 years, and it will severely block its ability to provide essential services such as healthcare and education to millions of Palestinian refugees and others. It is a reckless move, and one that threatens to dismantle the backbone of the international humanitarian operation in Gaza, worsening an already catastrophic crisis. It will also deprive them of essential food, water, medical aid, education and protection, which is already being obstructed.

The decision will also have catastrophic consequences for millions of Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, where essential humanitarian aid is crucial both for the refugees and for the host communities. It is clear that these actions are part of a wider strategy to delegitimise UNRWA and to undermine the international legal framework protecting their rights—specifically, the right of return for Palestinian refugees who have been languishing in surrounding countries.

Does the Minister agree that the real intent is in part to undermine UNRWA's efforts to promote the status of Palestinian refugees, and to obstruct future political solutions? Can I also remind the Minister that the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to take all measures in its power to prevent the commission of all acts within the scope of article 2 of the genocide convention? By banning UNRWA's operation, Israel is disregarding the ICJ's provisional measure to ensure the delivery of lifesaving aid to Gaza.

My final question is this: we have seen the decimation that has taken place; is it not time to fulfil part 2 of the Balfour agreement? We have the state of Israel; should we not have now a state of Palestine?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments. I am aware that she has considerable direct experience of the importance of UN organisations from before she became a Member in this House. I agree that we must not see the undermining of UNRWA. It has a specific, long-standing role, provided within a clear framework that countries signed up to. It has a role not just in Gaza but in the west bank and the broader region. She is of course right that UNRWA is critical for the delivery of aid through the operations of other organisations as well. As Members would expect, I have discussed this not just with Commissioner-General Lazzarini and others under his leadership in UNRWA, including when I was in Jordan, but with other organisations that are active in Gaza. They are very clear that we should not see the undermining of UNRWA, and that ultimately it is critical for the delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Opposition spokesperson.

Dame Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): We are following developments in the Knesset carefully. We Conservative Members want more aid to reach innocent civilians in Gaza because the situation there is desperate, but we also recognise that UNRWA must rebuild the trust and confidence that it lost, following the deeply troubling allegations that staff were involved in the appalling 7 October attacks and the outcome of the subsequent investigation. Catherine Colonna's reforms need to be implemented in full, because we recognise that UNRWA has a good, indeed often critical, distribution network. Can the Minister update the House on the progress that UNRWA has made in implementing the Colonna reforms, and what measures have the Government put in place, since restoring funding to UNRWA, to monitor its neutrality?

More broadly, during our time in government, Israel made commitments that would increase the amount of aid reaching Gaza—for example, a commitment to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid through Ashdod and Erez, extend the opening hours of Kerem Shalom, increase the total number of aid trucks and allow more types of aid in. I would be grateful if the Minister updated the House on what discussions she has had with her Israeli colleagues about fulfilling those commitments, and indeed on what credible alternative plan Israel has developed.

Despite the pause in future funding to UNRWA implemented by the last Government, we remained absolutely committed to getting on with aid delivery. Among other measures that we took, we assisted over 5,800 children with severe malnourishment, and 853,000 children, adolescents and carers with the provision of wider emergency services. We also sent in many airdrops, and funded a field hospital that is treating thousands of patients. Will the Minister confirm that there are other ways to deliver aid without UNRWA, and that the UK stands ready to help in every way possible, with its extensive expertise, so that we reach the most vulnerable?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her comments. She raised a number of critical issues. I was pleased to see cross-party agreement on the desperate need for more aid to enter Gaza. Also, we agree, of course, that the Colonna reforms need to be implemented, and the new UK Government have been very clear that we will do what we can to ensure that. Indeed, £1 million of the support we provided to UNRWA is dedicated to ensuring that those reforms are implemented. We continue to monitor the situation actively. As the hon. Lady would expect, I have discussed this directly with the leadership of UNRWA, and I believe they are putting those measures in place. They have put many in place, including many that they had wished to put in place for a long time, but were unable to, for lack of funds. This is critically important.

The hon. Lady referred to comments made previously by Israel. Of course the Government of Israel stated that they would flood Gaza with aid; concerning, however, October might be the month with the lowest levels of aid going into Gaza since the start of the conflict. There really does need to be action to change that. There has been a very strong message on that from right across Government—of course from me, but also from the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister. We need to see a change here.

However, I would perhaps question some of the hon. Lady's final comments. All the organisations with which I have discussed these matters, with a wide range of perspectives on the delivery of aid, have stressed the critical role that UNRWA plays. It has an unrivalled ability to distribute the support that is so desperately needed, and is, if anything, even more important as we approach winter, which could be very difficult indeed for the people of Gaza unless we act.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): UNRWA staff are expected to uphold neutrality, and receive compulsory training on humanitarian principles. It shares staff names and ID numbers with host countries. It has its 1,300 buildings inspected quarterly, and it commissioned a report from a group led by a former Foreign Secretary of France, who concluded that UNRWA upholds the principle of humanitarian neutrality. While of course there are changes that can be made, does my right hon. Friend agree that the recommendations are relatively peripheral, and fundamentally UNRWA does deserve the trust of the international community?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for her comments, and all the work that her Select Committee is undertaking on these issues. We should state, as a new UK Government, that we were appalled by the allegations that those involved in the 7 October attacks on Israel might have included UNRWA staff. It was absolutely right that investigations took place within UNRWA to determine what happened, and that there was decisive action. That was fundamental, actually; it was incredibly important.

My right hon. Friend referred to Catherine Colonna's report. It underlines the need for neutrality, and I mentioned previously that the UK Government are determined to play our part in ensuring that the Colonna report is implemented, including by allocating £1 million to that end. We are very clear that the kind of change that we could see around the position on UNRWA recently cannot be linked to discussions around the Colonna report. Decisive action, which the UK Government supported, has been taken, and UNRWA is needed to support humanitarian aid right now in Gaza.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): We are deeply concerned about the Knesset vote to ban UNRWA. This comes at a time that could not be more desperate. One of the UN's most senior humanitarian officials warns:

"The entire population of north Gaza is at risk of dying."

We welcome the Government's continued support to UNRWA, including on implementing the recommendations of the Colonna report as quickly as possible. Can the Minister say what confidence she has in the assurance that the Foreign Secretary received from Foreign Minister Katz that the Israeli Government were not obliged to implement the Knesset decision? What precisely are the Government doing to achieve immediate access for humanitarian aid, and does the Minister agree that as well as words of

condemnation, the UK must set out the consequences for breaching international law? Will she consider sanctioning Ministers Ben-Gvir and Smotrich for inciting illegal settlers in the west bank to violence against Palestinians?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I believe we are of the same mind on the passing of the UNRWA Bills by Israel's Knesset. The Prime Minister has been very clear that the UK is gravely concerned about this. We believe the passing of those Bills risks making UNRWA's essential work for Palestinians impossible. It risks jeopardising the entire international humanitarian response in Gaza and the delivery of essential health and education services in the west bank, and we have joined with allies in making that very clear over the weekend and into the beginning of this weekend. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, that included the Foreign Secretary reiterating his deep concern to Israel's Foreign Minister Katz on 27 October; he made the UK's concerns on this very clear.

The hon. Member asked what immediate action we were taking on access to aid. We are using every lever we can identify to try to progress that access. I have mentioned our deep concern about the situation; we see far too few trucks entering Gaza with desperately needed supplies. That is particularly important now, in the run-up to winter. We will continue to work multilaterally and bilaterally to push forward on that.

Finally, the hon. Member mentioned the important subject of international humanitarian law. The new UK Government are resolutely committed to international humanitarian law. We keep our sanctions regime continuously under review. I will not comment on the specifics of it now, for reasons that he will understand. We have been clear that the actions of those engaged in promoting illegal settlements and violence towards Palestinians on the west bank are completely unacceptable. We have stated that many times and have made that clear. Finally, on whether there are implications from this position, I refer him to discussions we have had in the House on the arms export licensing control regime.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): My right hon. Friend said that we are at an end now, when it comes to Israeli excuses about why aid does not get in, but this is beyond excuses; this is potentially an act of deliberate policy to destroy the most effective aid route into Gaza. What are we actually going to do about it, if Israel continues to ignore our requests and pleas to it? I come back to the issue of sanctions. If Israeli Ministers decide to implement the Bill, are they not effectively engaging in an act of warfare by starvation? That is a breach of humanitarian law. Will we use sanctions against those Israeli Ministers who get involved in promoting this policy?

Anneliese Dodds: My hon. Friend raises important points. There is no doubt that there will be severe consequences if the work of UNRWA is obstructed. We have already talked about this issue. It is clear that only UNRWA has the reach required to get the aid needed to those in desperate need in Gaza. We do not believe that there is any justification for the position that has been taken. The UK Government have been clear about that, and we have articulated that not only bilaterally, but with our partners, immediately, over the weekend. The UK Government's position is clear. He will understand

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that no UK Government announce exactly what they are doing around sanctions. That is appropriate and correct. We will always keep our sanctions policies under review, as this House would expect.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Whether or not UNRWA is compromised, the fact remains that the Knesset, and quite possibly the Israeli Government, believe that it is, and without Israel, no aid gets through. What measures therefore need to be taken to improve aid resilience—in this conflict and others—so that we are not overly reliant on one agency? What plan B is the Minister working on to ensure that UK aid is channelled through alternative agencies?

Anneliese Dodds: The UK Government have been clear that UNRWA has a clearly mandated role in relation to not just Gaza, but the west bank and the broader region. It has had that role for many years. That has been clear in the international community. The role of the UN in general is incredibly important and internationally supported. It is critical that UNRWA's role is not undermined when it plays such an important part constitutionally, if I may say that, and internationally, as well as in the delivery of aid. We will do all we can to ensure that support reaches those who need it, but ultimately UNRWA is the body with the greatest reach, and that is needed now, given the extent of humanitarian need.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): The Israeli Government's banning of UNRWA shows blatant and cruel disregard for human life. Without access to necessities that only UNRWA can provide, such as food and medicine, thousands of innocent Palestinians are facing malnourishment, disease and death. Given that Netanyahu has shown no interest in supporting legitimate human rights organisations, no interest in a ceasefire and no interest in a two-state solution, I am grateful that our Government have given a clear commitment to recognising the state of Palestine. Will the Minister tell us when we can expect recognition of the state of Palestine and a pathway to getting to that point?

Anneliese Dodds: Briefly, this recent decision was taken by the Knesset, so it is a parliamentary decision, rather than one by the Israeli Government. We are concerned about its consequences, as we have been discussing. The UK Government believe that we must see a ceasefire. We need to see the release of hostages. We need to see the immediate delivery of aid and access to it throughout Gaza. That is incredibly important. We continue to believe and to advocate strongly for the two-state solution that is so desperately needed. That will provide the security and stability that is needed, both for Israelis and for Palestinians.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Israel is once again choosing to block aid to a civilian population that it is bombing. It is sinister and it is collective punishment. Can the Minister outline a single red line that Israel can cross that would lead her to question its status as an ally of the United Kingdom?

Anneliese Dodds: The new UK Government have been absolutely clear, as I have stated previously, that international humanitarian law must be upheld. I am

sure that the right hon. Member was in the House when we had those debates that talked, for example, about the fact that we need to ensure that the International Criminal Court's mandate is respected and that the role of the International Court of Justice is respected. He will, I am sure, have been present for debates on the UK Government's position on arms exports, where we believe it is important that international law is held to, and this Government has been delivering on that.

Afzal Khan (Manchester Rusholme) (Lab): The situation in northern Gaza is dire. I welcome the leading role that the Government have played in providing essential humanitarian aid for Gaza, including through the support packages for UNRWA, UNICEF, UK-Med, the World Health Organisation and the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal. Does the Minister agree that the ongoing Israeli restrictions on the flow of essential aid are completely unacceptable and should be lifted immediately?

Anneliese Dodds: We believe that any restriction on aid is unacceptable. It is incredibly important that we see access to the water and sanitation services that are desperately needed, as well as to food and shelter, which are particularly important as winter approaches. My hon. Friend is right to mention the situation in northern Gaza, which is particularly concerning. The UK Government will continue to do all that we can to advocate for more aid getting into Gaza.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): With 90% of the Knesset voting for the Bill yesterday, it is surely naive to suggest that it will not be enacted. Therefore, other preparations need to be made. Despite the strong urgings of the United States, the United Kingdom, the EU and others, the Israeli Parliament voted for the Bill, knowing full well the collective international view of that proposal. Do the Government now realise that the Israeli Government, and indeed Parliament, is effectively diplomatically flying solo when it comes to these issues? If, as we all believe, no other agency can step in at pace and at scale to deliver the aid that is clearly needed, then, as was said by the leader of the SNP—an unlikely bedfellow for me—the right hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), is this not now verging on the definition of collective punishment? The Government can no longer just either wring their hands or urge.

Anneliese Dodds: We are very clear that UNRWA has an essential role, not only because of its reach and depth, but because it has that clear UN mandate in Gaza, the west bank and the wider region—indeed, I have discussed this issue with counterparts from Lebanon too. It is important that we do not see UNRWA undermined; that is critical for the UK Government. As the hon. Gentleman rightly mentioned, we have joined allies in expressing our deep concern. We will continue to push hard on this issue because we understand what the consequences will be if UNRWA does not have the continued ability to operate. We know what the impact will be on not only those in humanitarian need but the UN's role more broadly, and that message could not come across more clearly from the Government.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Under international law, Palestinian refugees retain their right to return. By seeking to dismantle UNRWA, Israel could,

as part of a wider plan, be pressurising Palestinian refugees to relinquish that right to return. Despite our Foreign Secretary and Governments of many other countries raising concerns and pleading with Israel, the Knesset went ahead with this vote. What additional pressure will the UK Government apply to Israel, which continues to violate international law and breach the UN charter?

Anneliese Dodds: I am not going to speculate about the reasons behind a decision made by another Parliament, as I do not believe that would be appropriate. What we must be clear about, however, is the UK Government's response, which has been very clear. As we have discussed already, we do not accept this decision, which we believe is the wrong one. Only UNRWA can deliver the aid that is desperately needed, and we will continue to advocate for that very clearly. That aid is critically needed, given the extent of the displacement taking place in Gaza, with large numbers of people having been moved not just once or twice, but nine or 10 times. The Government will continue to push very strongly on these issues.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If the Knesset Bill is an indication of how Israel now sees international treaties and international law, there is surely no point in further negotiations on a free trade agreement with Israel? Should we not just end those negotiations now?

Anneliese Dodds: As I have stated, I will not speculate on the activities of another Parliament. However, I will be very clear about the UK Government's response, particularly when it comes to the potential humanitarian impact. Others may wish to discuss trade issues, but for me, as Development Minister, the most important thing is how we ensure access to aid for those who are so desperately in need in Gaza. That is what I will continue to focus on.

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): With winter on its way, as the Minister said, it is vital that we are clear about the importance of aid and of challenging all who obstruct it. The Israeli Finance Minister said that the starvation of 2 million people in Gaza might be "justified and moral" in order to free the hostages. Let us be clear: the hostage families do not think that. The Israeli National Security Minister backed the protests against aid convoys reaching Gaza. I understand why the Minister says that she will not give a running commentary on sanctions, but if we do not have sanctions now, what else is open to us to send the clear message that aid must get to Gaza immediately?

Anneliese Dodds: I most definitely share the deep concern at, and the rejection of, the truly appalling comments to which my hon. Friend has just referred. We are very clear that they were completely unacceptable; we could not have been clearer. Some in the Opposition have suggested that the sanctions regime should be in opposition to taking action on the legal regime on arms exportation, but the Government believe that we need to keep all these issues under review, as the House would expect us to in fulfilling our legal requirements. That is why we announced the changes to arms export licences a few months ago.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The run-up to the vote in the Knesset was that UNRWA confirmed last Thursday that its employee Muhammad Abu Attawi

actually led the attack on Kibbutz Re'im, where British national Aner Shapira was brutally murdered—after throwing seven grenades back at those attacking him, he was killed by the eighth. Given those circumstances, what assessment have the Government made of UNRWA employees' direct involvement in the 7 October attack? Until the individuals involved are rooted out, there will of course be mistrust in UNRWA delivering the aid we all want to see going in. Will the Minister take action on that issue?

Anneliese Dodds: The Government have been very clear that UNRWA must meet the highest standards of neutrality, as was of course laid out in Catherine Colonna's report. As I mentioned, the Government have provided financial support to the tune of £1 million to ensure that UNRWA is taking the necessary actions. I have discussed the issue in detail with Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini and other members of UNRWA's leadership. I know that they are taking action on this issue, and rightly so.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North) (Lab): I utterly condemn this decision by the Israeli Parliament. Tens of thousands of people have died as a result of Israeli firepower, and now thousands more will die as a result of an Israeli-induced famine unless the world acts. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that if this decision is put into effect, it will be a breach of international humanitarian law? A track record of honouring international law is required if we are to keep arms export licences open.

Anneliese Dodds: We have been very clear about UNRWA's role. As I have mentioned, UNRWA has a critical role, which is provided for via the UN, in relation to not just Gaza but many refugees in the rest of the region—it is incredibly important, and it is internationally recognised. This Government have already taken action to ensure that we fulfil our responsibilities on international humanitarian law. Again, I refer my right hon. Friend to the decisions we have taken on arms export licences.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): In effect, the Knesset yesterday legislated for extraterritorial decisions over Gaza, the west bank and refugee camps, and decided that UNRWA is an illegal organisation within Israel. What sanctions will the UK Government take against Israel for that? The one thing Israel will understand is if we suspend arms supplies to it, because those are being used to create the humanitarian catastrophe that exists in Gaza and that is beginning to exist in the west bank as well. If we do not do that, British arms and American arms that come through Britain will be complicit in the destruction of life of the Palestinian people.

Anneliese Dodds: We will continue working with our international partners and through the UN to press Israel to ensure that UNRWA can continue its vital operations; we know how important its role is. I do not want to bore the House, because I have already responded to questions about sanctions, but we continue to keep sanctions under review. However, the right hon. Member will surely be aware that the Government have already acted to suspend arms licences—30 of them—where it was clear that there could be a risk to international humanitarian law and where they could be used for lethal reasons in Gaza. We have already put those measures in place, because we take that responsibility to humanitarian law very seriously.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): The humanitarian situation in Gaza is horrific and catastrophic, and the Israeli Knesset has actually voted to make it worse. Without UNRWA, millions of Palestinians will lose life-saving food, medical treatment, housing and much more. I am grateful that the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Minister have condemned the Knesset decision, but does she agree that the fact that 90% of the Knesset voted to ban UNRWA is an indictment of the Knesset, as well as an insight into the value that Israeli parliamentarians place on Palestinian lives and therefore on human life?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for saying that the UK Government have been clear on this. We do not agree with the Knesset's decision. We believe it is wrong. We believe that UNRWA has a clear, mandated international role in the region, which is particularly important right now in Gaza given the extreme humanitarian need. As she intimated, we are very concerned about the potential impact of any harm to UNRWA's operations on the provision of food, services, education or healthcare—the support that people in Gaza so desperately need.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): Further to the very serious point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) about UNRWA staff's involvement in the evil attack on 7 October, terror infrastructure has been found in 32 UNRWA facilities in Gaza; we have seen a 3,000-strong Telegram group of UNRWA teachers openly celebrating the 7 October attack; Israeli intelligence shows that up to 10% of UNRWA staff have affiliations to terror organisations; and a Palestinian eyewitness has borne witness to the fact that he saw an UNRWA school director selling food meant for civilians at \$100 a carton. It is clear that UNRWA is deeply infiltrated by Hamas. Will the Minister work with Israel and other allies to find another way to work with organisations that can be trusted to deliver aid into the hands of civilians, not terrorists?

Anneliese Dodds: The UK Government have been crystal clear that we expect robust processes to continue to be followed. UNRWA must meet the highest standards of neutrality, as is laid out in Catherine Colonna's report, including it comes to staff vetting and acting swiftly when concerns arise. We have seen that in UNRWA's leadership. As I have mentioned, the UK has allocated £1 million to support UNRWA in implementing the Colonna report's recommendations.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Ind): Another day, another outrage from an Israeli Government, who are treating the international community, international law, the UK Government and, above all, Palestinian lives with utter contempt. Words are not enough; actions are needed to force the Israeli Government to end the war crimes and the violations of international law. When will the UK Government impose on Israel the scale of sanctions that they have imposed on Russia?

Anneliese Dodds: I refer my hon. Friend to the comment that I made earlier: this was a decision of a Parliament—the Knesset—rather than of the Israeli Government. The UK Government have been very clear about our position on this. We believe that UNRWA has a critical role to play in Gaza and that international humanitarian law is incredibly important, and we have acted on that basis.

I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that the new UK Government have been very clear that there is a definite mandate for the ICC and the ICJ, and we will continue to keep our sanctions regime under review.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): The Government have to accept that the far-right Government of Israel are laughing behind their hands at us at the moment. They know that they are operating under the comfort blanket of a UK Government who say that they stand with Israel and that Israel has a right to defend itself. But when has murdering children in their hospital beds been tantamount to defence? In what way is the cold-blooded slaughter of 11,000 children tantamount to defence? Rather than the use of words to condemn the actions of Israel, why does the Minister not follow suggestions of many Members in the House today and start taking action to make the Israeli Government sit up?

Anneliese Dodds: The new UK Government have been absolutely clear that the kind of comments that we have seen from some Israeli Government Ministers are totally unacceptable. The views that have been expressed towards Palestinians both in Gaza and in the west bank from some members of the Government are unacceptable. We could not have been clearer on that, both in opposition and now in government. The hon. Member talks about action, but we have been acting time and again on the humanitarian situation, and we will continue to do that. We have also been acting to make sure that we uphold our responsibilities under international humanitarian law. As I mentioned, that has been very clear in the decisions that have been taken around the arms export licence regime.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): This month we have seen just 28 trucks a day entering Gaza, with none in the north, leading to a catastrophic humanitarian situation. In 90 days, we may have no infrastructure left in Gaza to distribute that aid. Does the Minister believe that this is a deliberate and systematic destruction of a nation, ethnic, racial or religious group with the intent to destroy it in whole or in part? Will she enlist the international courts to test that?

Anneliese Dodds: The UK Government have been very clear that we are extremely concerned about the situation in northern Gaza that my hon. Friend referred to. It is unacceptable that this month will potentially see the lowest level of aid delivered since the beginning of the crisis, yet the need is even more intense now than at any point. People's resilience is completely destroyed in many cases, so we are very clear about the need to provide aid. We will also continue being absolutely clear about our adherence as a Government to international humanitarian law.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber) (SNP): The Knesset's decision to brand UNRWA a terror group was very well signposted, so the question now is: what leverage are the Government prepared to use to prevent this decision from being enacted? I think we can all agree that another round of hand-wringing, head-shaking and soft, whispered words of disapproval will be as successful as they have ever been in the past. Perhaps it is time to summon the Israeli ambassador and tell them in no uncertain terms that if this goes ahead, the UK will have no choice but to immediately end all arms sales to Israel, specifically the F-35 components on which its military campaign relies so heavily.

Anneliese Dodds: With all due respect to the hon. Gentleman, I find the description of the UK Government's communication of their views as soft whispering very surprising. He surely cannot have failed to have seen the very clear concern expressed by the Foreign Secretary, by my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Hamish Falconer) and by me. That has been expressed not only through international deliberations and the fact that we have worked clearly and strongly with allies on this, with the joint statement produced over the weekend, but bilaterally as well. It is well known that the Foreign Secretary took this up directly with his Israeli counterpart. The new UK Government are determined to ensure that we are upholding international humanitarian law, which is why we acted on the legal requirements of the arms export regime, as I described.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), my right hon. Friend suggested that it was difficult to explore the motivations behind the Knesset's decision. But we have to be clear that UNRWA is being targeted because of its mandate with Palestinian refugees. The Knesset's vote will likely be devastating for lifesaving aid operations. It is also a unilateral attempt to impact the right of return and make a two-state solution even harder. Does she agree that this is unacceptable?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for being crystal clear, as the UK Government have been, that UNRWA has a clear mandate—one that is obviously part of the UN framework not just in Gaza but in the west bank and the wider region. We have stated that numerous times, and we are in concert with our international partners to make that crystal clear. We will continue to make that clear. As I mentioned, with winter approaching it is critical that UNRWA can continue to operate without impediment.

Mr Adnan Hussain (Blackburn) (Ind): These are the words of the United Nations humanitarian chief, Joyce Msuya:

"The entire population of north Gaza is at risk of dying".

If someone so high up in the United Nations is making statements of that nature, we can safely make the assertion that the onslaught on Gaza is genocidal in nature—the measure being intent, and not, as the Foreign Secretary alluded to yesterday, the volume of counted deaths. Will the Government alter their position on this matter? What will they do, by way of resolute action, to ensure that this crime against humanity is halted immediately? Words are not enough; action is needed.

Anneliese Dodds: I agree that words are not enough. One of the reasons I met Joyce Msuya when I was at the UN General Assembly was to ensure we are working in concert with UN bodies on the humanitarian crisis and catastrophe within Gaza. We need to ensure that UNRWA is able to continue its lifesaving work. We need to see that other lifesaving measures are adopted, too. It was the UK Government who pushed so hard to ensure leadership on the polio vaccination campaign. We continue to push to ensure that the measures that are so vital for those in Gaza continue and that far more aid goes into Gaza than we are seeing at the moment.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): If I have the Government's argument correct, it is that there is a window of opportunity now between the decision by the Israeli Parliament and the implementation of the measure by the Israeli Government. Yesterday, I think it was the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) who raised the question of what the consequence would be for the Israeli Government if they went ahead to implementation.

The message today—I say this with regret to my right hon. Friend, for whom I have a great deal of respect because we have worked with each other over the years—is that: on sanctions, there will be no additional sanctions, we are just reviewing them; on arms, we will continue to supply the parts for the F-35; on trade, which was raised, the trade negotiations will just continue; and on diplomacy, we will allow to remain in this country without any consequence the Israeli ambassador, who is an advocate of a greater Israel and therefore opposed to the UN position on a Palestinian state and a two-state solution.

Does my right hon. Friend not realise that the message to the Netanyahu Government will be that nothing will happen during the window of opportunity and that they will be able to act with impunity still? Will she go back and consult her colleagues, and come forward with a series of actions that will have some effect in saving lives in Gaza?

Anneliese Dodds: I would say to my right hon. Friend that the message from the UK Government to the Israeli Government is actually extremely clear. It has been articulated by our Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and all members of the Government who have spoken on this issue. The world will not tolerate further excuses from Israel on humanitarian assistance. I stated that in my speech and deliberately so. That is a very strong message and it must be heeded.

Danny Kruger (East Wiltshire) (Con): The fact is that Hamas are deeply integrated in the civilian and humanitarian infrastructure of Gaza, whether hiding their soldiers in hospitals—we saw this week 100 terror suspects captured by the IDF in a hospital in northern Gaza—or being deeply integrated in UNRWA. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) mentioned a senior Hamas commander who was working for UNRWA. The fact is that Israel is not going to facilitate the work of UNRWA in Gaza, so the question is: what is the Government's policy? Is it simply to lament this decision and to criticise Israel, and to threaten as yet unspecified consequences which are clearly not satisfying this House? Or is it to do something practical to get aid in to the Palestinians, working with Israel and other partners to develop an alternative supply route that will get aid in, accepting that UNRWA will not be that mechanism?

Anneliese Dodds: The UK Government have actually stated time and again that we expect robust processes to continue to be followed by UNRWA. Not only did we state that, as the Opposition did previously, but we have done something about it. We have ensured that some of our support to UNRWA is going towards ensuring that the recommendations of the Colonna report are implemented. We have seen UNRWA take decisive and swift action when allegations have been made, and rightly so. That is right and proper. It would be for any UN agency, especially including this one, given its vital role.

[Anneliese Dodds]

The hon. Gentleman talked about practical measures. On practicalities, we believe that to suggest there is an alternative to UNRWA, given its depth of reach and the scale at which it operates, is incorrect. It is the only body that can currently provide the infrastructure that is needed, and it is already mandated by the UN and the international community to do so.

Paula Barker (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): The former Israeli Defence Minister, the late Moshe Dayan, famously once said:

“Our American friends offer us money, arms and advice. We take the money, we take the arms, and we decline the advice.”

Regrettably, the same could now be said of Britain. I have every reason to believe that the Foreign Secretary is making a strong case for peace, but it seems to me and millions of others that the relationship with the Israeli Government is entirely one way. When will the Government start using robust leverage above and beyond what has already been done to ensure that Israel acts on British advice, as well as the advice of other international partners?

Anneliese Dodds: The UK Government have not been intimating advice. We have been providing very clear injunctions, especially when it comes to UNRWA and the need for its continued operation. We have always acted in line with our responsibilities around international humanitarian law and we will continue to do so.

Mr Lee Dillon (Newbury) (LD): Last week, I joined constituents from my constituency United Nations Association in Newbury Market Place to celebrate the ideals of the UN. Yesterday, I was shocked and appalled to see a fellow member state's Parliament start the process of banning a UN-mandated body. Given that the UK Government will take over the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council this coming Friday, what will the Government do via that vehicle to demand that the banning of UNRWA is immediately undone?

Anneliese Dodds: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's constituents for their support of multilateralism, which is surely now more important than ever. The pact for the future came out of the UN General Assembly. To me, that is a demonstration of the power of multilateral action, even in these deeply challenging times. We will use our role in the UN Security Council to ensure that international humanitarian law is upheld and that, as the UK, we play our part in leading responses to humanitarian crises like the one we have been discussing today.

Ian Byrne (Liverpool West Derby) (Ind): As the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Hussain) said, on Sunday the UN's top humanitarian official warned:

“The entire population of north Gaza is at risk of dying.”

I spoke to the United Nations special rapporteur in person last week. He was in absolute despair about the lack of action from the world against what is happening in Gaza. I implore the Minister to give him and the House some reassurance that the Government are actively reviewing how the sanctions are working and what else they can do to force Israel to begin to work under humanitarian law.

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for meeting the UN representative. I know that many Members have been seeking to engage with the multilateral organisations involved in this situation. The UK Government have, of course, engaged repeatedly with all the UN agencies involved: the World Food Programme, UNICEF, with which I have directly discussed the situation, and UNRWA itself. I pay tribute to all those who are engaged in that manner, as well as to all the charities and other bodies so engaged, including UK-Med, which is doing an incredibly important job. The new UK Government will continue to do all we can to ensure that international humanitarian law is upheld here, as well as in every other context.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Of the 12,000 UNRWA employees, about one in five are members of Hamas, and almost 500 of them are members of Hamas's military wing. When I asked the Foreign Secretary whether he could guarantee that UK taxpayers' money would not go via UNRWA if there were any links with Hamas, he did not answer my question, so I ask the same question today. Is the Minister able to give UK taxpayers a guaranteed assurance that Hamas has no links with UNRWA in aid delivery in Gaza?

Anneliese Dodds: When it comes to the views of the UK public and UK taxpayers, it is critical for us to reflect on what has taken place over the last few days, when we have seen a great many Brits stepping up to support the DEC humanitarian appeal for the middle east. This is clearly of great concern. Of course it is important that whenever there are allegations of activity that is not neutral—particularly some of the appalling allegations relating to the 7 October attacks—they are fully investigated. When it has been provided with that evidence, UNRWA has investigated and taken swift action, and we will continue to do all that we can, as the UK Government, to ensure that that remains the case. As I said earlier, that has included providing funding to ensure that the neutrality reforms that UNRWA itself has wanted to implement for some time are indeed being implemented and followed.

Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab): Last night, I spoke to constituents who support the provision of medical aid directly into Gaza and the west bank. They were angry and heartbroken, because after each of the conversations I have had with them in the past year, the bombing and destruction have increased. I welcome the statements from the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend about the situation, but the vote in the Knesset risks making things worse—for aid, for the release of the hostages, for a two-state solution, and for the recognition of Palestine. What hope can right my hon. Friend give my constituents, the Palestinian people and the world community that this time it will be different?

Anneliese Dodds: I thank the constituents to whom my hon. Friend has referred. I mentioned earlier the many Brits who are deeply concerned about the situation, and I pay tribute to all the UK medical staff who are directly engaged in Gaza. I have had the incredible honour of meeting some of them, and their work is truly lifesaving in extremely difficult circumstances—perhaps the most difficult that we can imagine. I agree with my hon. Friend that the Knesset's decision is deeply

counterproductive for Israel itself, as well as being very harmful to UNRWA, to the delivery of humanitarian aid and, indeed, to the UN system.

Mr Tom Morrison (Cheadle) (LD): Like many other Members, I was appalled at yesterday's decision by the Knesset. This is a humanitarian crisis. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are displaced: they are now without homes, without water, without food and without healthcare. If UNRWA is banned, what practical steps can the Government take to ensure that aid gets into Gaza and, more importantly, that the people who need it receive it?

Anneliese Dodds: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's characterisation of the situation. We need to ensure that lifesaving supplies of water, sanitation, food and shelter do reach those who are in need in Gaza, and other Members have expressed particular concern about the situation in northern Gaza during these exchanges. The Government have made it very clear that UNRWA plays a critical role that cannot be replaced by other organisations, and we will continue to make it very clear that its mandate must be supported and it must be able to continue to operate.

Tracy Gilbert (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): The vote in the Israeli Knesset is deeply worrying, and will result in further suffering, starvation and deaths in Gaza. What urgent steps are the Government taking, alongside international partners, to get more aid into Gaza?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for asking that very important question. We do need to see more aid entering Gaza, because it really is needed. As many Members have pointed out, winter is coming, but we have not seen enough aid entering even over recent months and, as I said earlier, it seems likely that October will turn out to be the month during which we have seen the lowest level of aid actually entering Gaza since the conflict began. We are very clear that any restrictions on aid are unacceptable, and we have been working with international partners in that regard. My hon. Friend will have seen the joint statement that we released over the weekend; it was part of a series of actions that we have taken with partners, bilaterally and in multilateral organisations, to ensure that we are playing our part and that the UK is offering leadership.

Ayoub Khan (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind): A few weeks ago, I sought assurances from the Foreign Secretary in respect of children being killed after being given the polio vaccinations that the Minister has mentioned. Those vaccinations were undoubtedly given by staff members working with UNRWA. Close to 1,000 civilians have been killed since I sought that assurance from the Foreign Secretary. We will all recall that young teenager burning alive in a tent with an intravenous drip. Given the current state of affairs, does the Minister agree that all our talk of diplomatic and political levers is falling on deaf ears, and that the only real thing that this Government can do is put words into action, namely sanctions—including trade sanctions—embargoes on all licences, and the unconditional recognition of Palestinian statehood?

Anneliese Dodds: The UK Government's position is very clear. We have advocated—in the Foreign Secretary's case, since the first hours that he was in office—for the ceasefire that is so desperately needed, for the release of hostages and for the provision of aid in Gaza that is so clearly required. There is no question about that position, on which we have been crystal clear.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the impact of the conflict on healthcare staff. Let me draw his attention to the fact that we have seen more humanitarian workers killed in this conflict than in any of the other conflicts that we are seeing around the world. We have taken action, and we do believe that the UK must fulfil its responsibilities to international humanitarian law. I believe that the hon. Gentleman can see that very clearly, for example in the decisions that have been taken about the arms export licence regime.

Joe Powell (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): Given the humanitarian collapse in Gaza and the risk of mass starvation, the Knesset vote is obviously deeply dangerous for the Palestinians, but does it not also send a deeply dangerous signal internationally to civilians in conflict zones, in that other states that have been accused of violating international humanitarian law may take succour from this vote and target UN agencies providing lifesaving aid?

Anneliese Dodds: As has been discussed this afternoon, the UK and our partners have made it clear that the Israeli Government cannot continue to restrict aid—nor, indeed, should that be done by any other Government or any other warring parties internationally—but unfortunately we do see a number of violations of international humanitarian law. Earlier today, we discussed the situation in Sudan, where we have also seen restrictions on aid. Those are unacceptable. Civilians must be protected in war, and the UK Government will continue to advocate strongly for that.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her answers and for her clarity, which is much appreciated. Does she accept that Israel did not take this decision lightly, but based it on intelligence gathering which indicated an infiltration of Hamas within UNRWA? Does she agree that we must work to find a solution to ensure that charitable foundations are free to supply the aid that is so desperately needed? While the UN has a role to play, will she liaise with Israel to determine how we can get help on the ground to those who need it throughout Gaza and Israel?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his questions and, as ever, for his sincerity in discussing these issues. The UK Government will continue to work with charitable foundations and organisations. A number of them, including many based in the UK, provide incredibly important support for the people of Gaza. However, we are clear that when it comes to the delivery of aid and services, there is no other organisation that can fulfil the role that UNRWA performs because of the need for scaled and deep support, and also because of its critical mandate from the UN.

Mr James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): I join the Government in condemning the decision by the Israeli Parliament. Does the Minister agree that cutting ties and undermining UNRWA leaves us aghast at a time

[Mr James Frith]

when we need institutions to work effectively, independently and without prejudice to build any prospect of peace and a future after a ceasefire and the return of the hostages? Worst of all, the ban further compounds the misery for the Palestinians and for those of us who still hope for a two-state solution.

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for taking a long-term perspective on these critical questions. Given the humanitarian catastrophe, we agree that this decision, if implemented, will be deeply harmful not just currently, but in the future. As we just discussed, we will continue to work towards the ceasefire that is so desperately needed. When that ceasefire is achieved and we see a cessation of hostilities, it will be incredibly important that the reconstruction continues. We will need to see UNRWA and other UN agencies, as well as other countries in the region, involved in that process. A number of different partners will need to be engaged in the very important effort of rebuilding, which the UK Government have discussed with many partners.

Paul Waugh (Rochdale) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Minister seen the latest letter from the Commissioner-General of UNRWA? It states unequivocally:

“Today, even as we look into the faces of children in Gaza, some of whom we know will die tomorrow, the rules-based international order is crumbling in a repetition of the horrors that led to the establishment of the United Nations”.

Does she agree with him that the implementation of the UN mandate

“may become impossible without decisive intervention by the General Assembly”

and UN Security Council members?

Anneliese Dodds: I have discussed these issues directly with Commissioner-General Lazzarini and other members of the UNRWA leadership, as my hon. Friend would expect. I agree that we all need to do what we can to preserve the rules-based international order. On the possibility of the UN General Assembly taking action on this issue, I spoke for the UK when the matter was discussed at the UN General Assembly in New York about three weeks ago.

Steve Yemm (Mansfield) (Lab): It is incredibly concerning that the Knesset is pursuing legislation to restrict UNRWA's work. Does the Minister agree that the international community needs to put in place mechanisms to fully monitor and incentivise the implementation of the Colonna reforms in order to assure and give comfort to Israelis and Jewish communities in the UK that UNRWA's staff will never again be able to participate in terrorism?

Anneliese Dodds: I appreciate the considered question that my hon. Friend has just asked. The Colonna report itself, and the work that has been undertaken since, has focused on how we can ensure that the reforms—particularly those relating to neutrality—are implemented but then continuously reviewed, so that we know that neutrality is carried out throughout the organisation. The UK Government have supported this endeavour

financially with a £1 million contribution. We believe that it is important, and we will continue to discuss this issue with UNRWA and, indeed, other multilateral bodies and bilateral partners in the future.

Peter Prinsley (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that the way to stop this conflict is to get the hostages released? Can she explain to the House what connections have been made through diplomatic channels with those who are holding the hostages so that we can get them released, which I believe would end the fighting?

Anneliese Dodds: I very much agree that we must see the hostages released. I know that many of us have been thinking about the immense pain of the families and friends of the hostages, who have now been in captivity for such a long period; it is an incredibly concerning situation. As one would expect, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have met a number of the hostages' families, as have I. We will continue to do all that we can to make it clear that the hostages must be released. We will continuously advocate for that, for the ceasefire that is so desperately needed, and for the aid that is so desperately required in Gaza.

BILLS PRESENTED

CHILDREN'S HOSPICES (FUNDING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Ian Byrne presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to conduct a review of the funding of hospices specialising in the care of children and to publish proposals for measures to guarantee access to hospices for all children who require palliative care; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 November 2024, and to be printed (Bill 115).

REGISTRATION OF DEATH (RELIGION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Preet Kaur Gill presented a Bill to make provision about the collection of religious information of the deceased where the death has been registered; to make provision for religious data to be provided on a voluntary basis; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 116).

FIREARMS (3D PRINTING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Preet Kaur Gill presented a Bill to create an offence of possessing a blueprint for the production of a firearm by 3D printing; to create an offence of possessing part of a firearm produced by 3D printing; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 117).

Microplastic Filters (Washing Machines)

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

2.37 pm

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require manufacturers to fit microplastic-catching filters to new domestic and commercial washing machines; to make provision about the promotion of the use of microplastic-catching filters in washing machines and raising awareness about the consequences of microplastics from washing machines for pollution in rivers and seas; and for connected purposes.

Two years ago, I presented this ten-minute rule Bill to the House, and I am grateful to the many colleagues who have since approached me to express support and encourage me to present it to the House again. I thank colleagues who have co-sponsored my Bill this time round, and I am pleased to inform you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it has cross-party support, with co-sponsors from the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats, the Green party, the DUP and the Conservatives.

Microfibre plastic pollution is one of the most pervasive and preventable forms of microplastic pollution; in fact, around half a million tonnes of microfibres from synthetic textiles are released into the oceans each year due to washing clothes. I am introducing this Bill to encourage the Government to collaborate with washing machine manufacturers and set standards to ensure that all new domestic and commercial washing machines are fitted with cost-effective microfibre-catching filters.

Microfibres, which are shed during the wash cycle, are too small to be captured by existing washing machine filters. They make their way into wastewater systems, where they either end up as sewage sludge, which is later spread on our agricultural land, or escape treatment entirely, ending up in rivers and seas. Research now indicates that these fibres, once released, not only contaminate aquatic environments but travel up the food chain, making their way into an alarming amount of the fish that we all eat.

The growing body of scientific literature on microplastics is truly alarming. We are not only eating and drinking these particles, but the latest research from the University of New Mexico shows that they have now, sadly, crossed into our blood, into human placentas, into breast milk and even into our brains. Our bodies are now contaminated by microplastics. We should all be concerned that in lab studies conducted by Hull York Medical School, microplastics have been shown to damage human cells, and while the full impact on our health is still unknown, the evidence is mounting that numerous adverse health effects—including endocrine disruption, respiratory disorders, autoimmune issues and certain cancers, to name but a few—are caused or exacerbated by microplastics in our bodies. Researchers have even found microplastics in human testicles, and this may be a major factor in the dramatic drop in sperm count over the last 40 years.

I hope the Government are convinced that microplastics pollution is a now major problem to our environment and our health, but how effective can microplastics filters in washing machines be in addressing microplastics pollution at source? There are two factors that should

persuade the Government. First, they may be surprised to learn that a 2017 study revealed that 35% of all microplastics released into the environment are shed from our own clothing. That means that over a third of environmental microplastics are coming from a single source, which we know how to reduce. Secondly, evidence shows that washing machine filters can reduce the release of microfibres by 78% in every wash cycle, with some manufacturers now claiming that their new products are able to take up 90% of these offending plastic pollutants.

Countries such as France have already taken legislative steps to require microfibre filters in all new washing machines from next year, and Australia has an industry-led goal of introducing these filters in six years' time, so the UK can and should do its part. The United States Senate introduced the Fighting Fibers Act earlier this year. This is a promising federal initiative, which, although still in its early stages, is a mandate for filters in washing machines. The world is starting to wake up to this problem, and the UK has an opportunity to show leadership by introducing legislation that could make a substantial difference. This is not just about setting an example; it is about honouring our commitment to the environment and the health of the British people.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on microplastics, I have worked alongside numerous stakeholders including the obvious ones such as environmental groups, but also with industry leaders, washing machine manufacturers, academics and, in particular, the Women's Institute, which first brought this to my attention seven years ago when it was here lobbying MPs. They have all helped to identify viable solutions. Together, we believe that fitting microfibre filters on washing machines is a cost-effective, achievable, near-term solution that would have a significant impact on reducing plastic pollution and its effect on our health.

British companies are already leading in the design and manufacturing of these filters, showcasing the innovation and capability needed to support this measure. I urge the Government to work with these businesses to position the UK as a global leader in the fight against plastic pollution. My Microplastic Filters (Washing Machines) Bill is a low-cost, practical approach to a serious problem, and it aligns with the UK's ambition to build a sustainable and environmentally conscious society. Microfibre pollution is an urgent environmental issue, and this Bill represents a clear, immediate and simple step we can take to address it, with the backing of washing machine manufacturers. I urge my colleagues in Government to support the Bill and to work with white goods manufacturers to enact a solution that has virtually no cost to the consumer and that provides the safeguards that we need for our environment and our health.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Alberto Costa, supported by Sarah Champion, Jim Shannon, Sir Julian Lewis, Ellie Chowns, Ruth Jones, Peter Dowd, Siân Berry, Carla Denyer and Mr Alistair Carmichael, present the Bill.

Alberto Costa accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 114).

Great British Energy Bill

Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 1

REVIEW OF EFFECTIVE DELIVERY

“(1) The Secretary of State must appoint an independent person to carry out reviews of the effectiveness of Great British Energy in—

- (a) delivering its objects under section 3,
- (b) meeting its strategic priorities under section 5, and
- (c) complying with any directions given under section 6.

(2) After each review, the independent person must—

- (a) prepare a report of the review, and
- (b) submit the report to the Secretary of State, as soon as is reasonably practicable after the completion of the review.

(3) The independent person must submit to the Secretary of State—

- (a) the first report under this section within the period of 12 months beginning on the day on which this Act comes into force, and
- (b) subsequent reports at intervals of no more than 12 months thereafter.

(4) On receiving the report, the Secretary of State must, as soon as is reasonably practicable in each case—

- (a) publish the report,
- (b) lay a copy of the report before Parliament, and
- (c) prepare and lay before Parliament a response to the report’s findings.

(5) In this section, references to an “independent person” are to a person who appears to the Secretary of State to be independent of—

- (a) the Secretary of State, and
- (b) Great British Energy.”—(*Claire Coutinho.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.46 pm

Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—*Nature Recovery Duty*—

“(1) In exercising its functions, Great British Energy must take all reasonable steps to contribute to the achievement of targets set under sections 1–3 of the Environment Act 2021.

(2) Under the duty set under subsection (1), Great British Energy must consider opportunities to incorporate nature-based solutions in—

- (a) the design and maintenance of any assets in its ownership, and
- (b) its investment decisions.”

This new clause would give Great British Energy a new duty, requiring it to contribute to the achievement of Environment Act targets. The duty specifies the incorporation of nature-based solutions (including nature friendly design and building measures) in all assets owned by and invested in by Great British Energy.

New clause 3—*Prohibition of investments which would increase greenhouse gas emissions*—

“(1) Prior to making any investment, Great British Energy must publish an assessment of the impact of the investment decision on—

- (a) greenhouse gas emissions and
- (b) the production or combustion of fossil fuels.

(2) Where the assessment carried out under subsection (1) showed that the investment was expected to contribute to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, Great British Energy must not make that investment.”

This new clause would require Great British Energy to publish an assessment of potential investments on greenhouse gas emissions and the production or combustion of fossil fuels. Any investment which the assessment showed was expected to increase greenhouse gas emissions would be prohibited.

Amendment 3, in clause 1, page 1, line 3, at end insert—

“within 6 months of the day on which this Act is passed.”

Amendment 4, in clause 3, page 2, line 18, at end insert—

- “(e) an emergency home insulation programme with targeted support for people on low incomes, and
- (f) the expansion and development of renewable energy and technology.”

This amendment would set objects for Great British Energy of facilitating, encouraging and participating in an emergency home insulation programme with targeted support for people on low incomes, and the expansion and development of renewable energy and technology.

Amendment 1, in clause 5, page 3, line 8, at end insert—

“(1A) The statement of strategic priorities under subsection (1) must include a priority to reduce household energy bills by at least £300 in real terms.”

Amendment 5, page 3, line 8, at end insert—

“(1A) The statement of strategic priorities under subsection (1) must include a priority to advance the production of clean energy from schemes owned, or part owned, by community organisations.”

This new section would require the statement of strategic priorities to make specific regard to facilitate community-based clean energy schemes.

Amendment 6, page 3, line 8, at end insert—

“(1A) The statement of strategic priorities under subsection (1) must include the reduction of household energy bills by £300 in real terms by 1 January 2030.”

Amendment 8, page 3, line 8, at end insert—

“(1A) The statement of strategic priorities under subsection (1) must include the creation of 650,000 new jobs in the United Kingdom by 2030 resulting directly or indirectly from Great British Energy’s pursuit of its objectives under section 3.”

Amendment 11, page 3, line 8, at end insert—

“(1A) The statement of strategic priorities under subsection (1) must include a priority to allocate 3% of Great British Energy’s budget to marine energy projects.”

This amendment would require 3% of Great British Energy’s budget to be allocated for marine energy projects.

Amendment 12, page 3, line 8, at end insert—

“(1A) The statement of strategic priorities under subsection (1) must include a priority to work with Great British Nuclear on the development of nuclear energy projects.”

This amendment would require Great British Energy to work with Great British Nuclear on developing nuclear energy projects.

Amendment 13, page 3, line 8, at end insert—

“(1A) The statement of strategic priorities under subsection (1) must include a priority to require any renewable energy development located in Wales that Great British Energy owns or invests into offer a minimum of 10% community and 10% local ownership for each project.”

This amendment seeks to ensure that all renewable energy projects in Wales which are owned or invested in by Great British Energy would be required to offer a 10% stake in community ownership i.e. for individuals and households, and a 10% stake of local ownership, i.e. any Wales-based organisation.

Amendment 15, page 3 line 16, leave out “consult” and insert “receive the consent of”.

This amendment would require that the Secretary of State receives consent from Welsh ministers before including in the strategic priorities and plans any matter concerns a subject matter provision about which would be within the legislative competence of Senedd Cymru, if contained in an Act of the Senedd.

Amendment 7, in clause 6, page 3, line 38, at end insert—

“(1A) The Secretary of State must give a specific direction to Great British Energy that it must report to the Secretary of State on the progress made by Great British Energy towards the strategic priority of reducing household energy bills by £300 in real terms by 1 January 2030.

(1B) A report under subsection (1A) must include a projection of how Great British Energy’s activities are likely to affect consumer energy bills over the following five years.

(1C) A report under subsection (1A) must be made within two years of the date of Royal Assent to this Act and annually thereafter.

(1D) The Secretary of State must lay a report made under subsection (1A) before Parliament.”

Amendment 9, page 3, line 38, at end insert—

“(1A) The Secretary of State must give a specific direction to Great British Energy that it must report to the Secretary of State on the progress made by Great British Energy towards the strategic priority of creating 650,000 new jobs in the United Kingdom by 2030.

(1B) A report under subsection (1A) must be made within two years of the date of Royal Assent to this Act and annually thereafter.

(1C) The Secretary of State must lay a report made under subsection (1A) before Parliament.”

Amendment 10, page 3, line 38, at end insert—

“(1A) The Secretary of State must give a specific direction to Great British Energy that it must report to the Secretary of State on—

(a) Great British Energy’s in-year return on investment, and

(b) A forecast of the following year’s expected return on investment.

(1B) A report under subsection (1A) must be made within two years of the date of Royal Assent to this Act and annually thereafter.

(1C) The Secretary of State must lay a report under subsection (1A) before Parliament.”

Amendment 14, page 3, line 38, at end insert—

“(1A) The Secretary of State must, in particular, direct Great British Energy that any revenues generated from activities of Great British Energy in relation to resources located in Wales must be invested back into projects located in Wales.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to ensure that all revenue generated by Great British Energy from resources in Wales are invested back into energy projects in Wales.

Claire Coutinho: It is nice to be back discussing Great British Energy, and on the day before the Budget, too. I am sure that Labour Members are worrying about what kind of horrors they will be forced to defend next. They will have had a miserable summer trying to explain to their constituents why they are scrapping the winter fuel payment for pensioners in poverty, just weeks after a general election in which no mention was made of that. They will have spent the last few weeks explaining that the term “working people”—the people they promised to protect in their manifesto—does not include small

business owners, or employees with savings, and that their use of the term “national insurance” does not prevent a national insurance rise for employers. They will be getting a bashing from companies, who were told that Labour would be pro-business, yet have been clobbered by post-election announcements of tax rises and trade union charters, and who have a Prime Minister with an optimism about Britain that puts him on the charts somewhere between Eeyore and Victor Meldrew. And tomorrow Labour Members will have to explain why the Chancellor who said before the election that any change to the fiscal rules would amount to fiddling the figures is now changing them to open the door to billions of pounds of borrowing.

This is a timely return to the Great British Energy Bill. Our amendments today will give Labour Members an opportunity, which I am sure they will welcome, to hold their leadership to account for at least some of the promises that they were told to go out and sell. Let us take a look at a few of the promises that Labour Members made during the election. The hon. Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) wrote on her website:

“We will set up Great British Energy...cutting energy bills by an average of £300 a year.”

The hon. Member for Bracknell (Peter Swallow) posted on Facebook:

“Why am I backing Labour’s plan to set up Great British Energy? It will save £300 off average household energy bills in the South East by 2030.”

The hon. Member for South Norfolk (Ben Goldsborough) said on Facebook:

“everyone in the east of England will get £300 off their energy bills...no ifs, no buts, no maybes, these will be measurable and you will be able to check our progress at the end of the next Parliament.”

At least 50 MPs made similar claims.

Why were Labour candidates up and down the country saying these things? Perhaps they were simply listening to the Cabinet. The Science Secretary said on “Good Morning Britain”:

“I can tell you directly...by the end of this Parliament that...energy bills will fall by up to £300.”

The Work and Pensions Secretary said:

“Great British Energy will get people’s bills £300 a year lower.”

This is my personal favourite: the Chancellor—the woman of the hour—said,

“Great British Energy, a publicly owned energy company, will cut energy bills by up to £300.”

These were not one-off promises; it was the party line, as dictated by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero. These promises are still up in writing. In fact, the Labour party website still says that its energy plans will cut bills by £300 on average. Oddly, Ministers now do not seem so keen on that pledge. We have asked them about it in this House, as have the media, but the number seems to have vanished. They have even taken down the Great British Energy website, and the newly appointed chair even said in Committee that cutting bills is

“not the scope of Great British Energy.”—[*Official Report, Great British Energy Public Bill Committee*, 8 October 2024; c. 6, Q5.]

This is not trivial; these are promises that people care about. Every single Labour Member will have had constituents vote for them because they believed that Labour’s promise of £300 off their energy bills would

[*Claire Coutinho*]

make a meaningful difference to their lives. Amendments 6 and 7 in my name will hold the Government to account on their election promise to cut bills.

Our amendments would give Great British Energy a strategic priority to cut people's energy bills by £300 by 2030, and would require Great British Energy to produce an annual report on progress towards meeting that target. Surely all Labour Members who made these promises and kept them up on their social media accounts will want to track the Government's progress on this important issue for their constituents. Well, tonight is their chance.

But £300 off bills was not the Secretary of State's only promise at the election. He also claimed that Great British Energy would create 650,000 new jobs, but he did not mention that figure on Second Reading, and the Energy Minister, the hon. Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks), did not mention it in Committee. It does not appear in Great British Energy's founding statement, nor does it appear in the Government's explanatory notes on the Bill.

The only detail we have heard about the number of jobs to be created by Great British Energy came from the Secretary of State's hand-picked chair of that body, who said that "hundreds" of people will be employed at its Aberdeen headquarters. We have since found out that the chair himself will be based in Manchester. It is a funny kind of headquarters if the head will not be based there, but that is the kind of sophistry that the public are starting to expect from this Labour Government.

More importantly, those few hundred people will hardly make up for the 200,000 jobs this Government are putting at risk through their plans to shut down the North sea, or the missed opportunities for jobs thanks to their go-slow on nuclear. On the Secretary of State's watch, we have already seen thousands of jobs in industry lost.

The Secretary of State can talk about skills passports and Government transition projects all he likes, but the truth is that they do not pay the bills. He likes to say that we need to cut carbon at an extreme pace, faster than any other major economy, in order to show climate leadership and save the planet, but if our gas production, steelmaking or energy-intensive manufacturing moves to Asia, which is still powered by coal, he will be adding to emissions. That would mean more carbon in the atmosphere, and would be devastating for the hundreds of thousands of people who would lose their livelihoods here in Britain. I say that as someone who, before entering Parliament, worked on regenerating some of our most deprived communities once the jobs were gone.

As with our amendments on the Government's £300 pledge, amendments 8 and 9 in my name would give Great British Energy a strategic priority of creating 650,000 new jobs by 2030, and would require an annual report to Parliament on progress towards this aim. That is important, because even the trade unions that normally support Labour have warned the Secretary of State and his team that his plans will lead to the mass deindustrialisation of Britain. The general secretary of the GMB has said that the Secretary of State's plans are "hollowing out working class communities",

and will amount to "decarbonisation through deindustrialisation." He said that importing more from China is

"bad for communities, not great for national security and it makes no sense in terms of the environment."

He also said, and I hope the ministerial team are listening closely to this one:

"Our message to Ed Miliband is very clear: We are worried about a lot of promises that are not being delivered on jobs."

Those Labour MPs who are members of the GMB, including the Energy Minister, have the opportunity tonight to hold the Government to account by voting for annual reporting on the jobs being created. The question is, will they listen to the general secretary's concerns?

The next promise was that Great British Energy would turn a profit for the taxpayer. The Secretary of State admittedly got himself into a mess on this one. He has never had to make commercial investment decisions, and neither has any of his ministerial team, which is why they have been caught out promising the British public that they can turn a tidy profit, while at the same time telling multimillion-pound energy companies that they will take the least attractive parts of their investments off their hands. That is important, because the Secretary of State has written this Bill to give himself powers of direction. That was not the case for the UK Infrastructure Bank, and there was a recurring question in Committee about how much independence the supposedly independent Great British Energy will have.

This is my proposal: if the Secretary of State wants the power to meddle, he should be duty-bound to report the results of that meddling—its profits and losses—to this House. Amendment 10 in my name would require Great British Energy to produce an annual report on the performance of its investments, including its in-year return on investment and a forecast of the following year's expected return. That is the bare minimum we can expect, so that British taxpayers can see what he is doing with £8 billion of their money.

I tabled clause 1 because it is crucial that we have proper oversight of the wider activities of Great British Energy. New clause 1 would require the appointment of an independent reviewer to assess Great British Energy's effectiveness in achieving its objectives and strategic priorities. In Committee, the Energy Minister said that the Government want Great British Energy to be

"accountable, transparent and clear about how it is delivering on its objectives."—[*Official Report, Great British Energy Public Bill Committee*, 15 October 2024; c. 168.]

I agree, and that seems a perfectly good reason to support new clause 1.

As I have said previously, Great British Energy is pretty much a carbon copy of the UK Infrastructure Bank, which was set up to provide loans, equity and guarantees for infrastructure to tackle climate change, backed by £22 billion. No Minister has been able to tell us the real difference between Great British Energy and the UK Infrastructure Bank, or why the taxpayer has to pay for two headquarters, two chief executives and so on. The one difference appears to be that Great British Energy will mean additional powers for the Secretary of State.

If Labour Members are so intent on handing this Secretary of State billions of pounds to gamble with, I expect they will also want to replicate the independent

review enacted by the United Kingdom Infrastructure Bank Act 2023. New clause 1 would provide that scrutiny and, although I intend to withdraw it this evening, if the Minister would like to table a similar amendment in the other place to follow the precedent set by the Act, I assure him of our backing.

The Secretary of State and his ministerial team have made big promises. It is crucial that this House can hold them accountable, as the consequences could not be more important for people's energy bills, people's jobs and businesses' ability to succeed. As the respected energy and climate economist Dieter Helm has said, the risk is that this Government will head towards a 2029 election with industries lost and bills higher—exactly the opposite of what the electorate has been promised.

The Government's refusal to publish evidence for their claims, to set out the details of their plans or to engage in any meaningful policy discussion outside their normal slogans and mantras means that their policies are more likely to fail. For example, the Secretary of State has said that this Bill and Great British Energy are part of his plan to ramp up renewables at breakneck speed because every wind turbine and every solar panel constructed will lead to cheaper energy and greater security, but that is simply not true. First, it depends on the price we pay for them. Expert analysis by Cornwall Insight found that the contracts for difference round that the Secretary of State bumped up, and that he now boasts about, will actually increase people's bills by £5. Moreover, he has advertised to the multimillion-pound energy companies that he will buy whatever they sell, no matter the cost, up to 2030. People do not need a business background to work out what that will do to prices.

Secondly, if we are building renewables faster than we can connect them to the grid, the constraint payments needed by 2030 could add hundreds of pounds to people's bills. Then there are the network costs, the green levies and the cost of dispatchable power. If the Secretary of State wants to replace gas, which is our main form of dispatchable power, he should set out the cost of what will replace it.

The options in this country are coal, which I assume Labour Members do not want, biomass, carbon-capture gas or unproven technologies, none of which will make our system cheaper. All the signs are that, far from making energy cheaper and more secure, this Secretary of State and his ministerial team will send people's bills through the roof, and more and more people are sounding the alarm about whether he can even keep the lights on. Perhaps that is why he never commissioned an accurate assessment of his plans. Labour Members had 14 years in opposition, 14 years hankering for the jobs and the responsibilities they now have, but when we asked for the full-system cost of the Secretary of State's approach, he could only say that it will be published "in due course."

3 pm

Tomorrow, when the Budget is revealed and Government Members are defending the difficult choices that the Government will make on behalf of their constituents, they should consider how much this Secretary of State and his team are costing them: £12 billion in tax receipts has been lost from the North sea to press ahead to end oil and gas licences, a move no other major economy has taken; and £8 billion will be spent on Great British

Energy, a duplicate of the UK Infrastructure Bank, with no accountability to lower bills or do the things they promised their constituents. That is £20 billion right there.

As Government Members are looking their constituents in the eye—the small business owners, the struggling pensioners or the people who get on the bus to work—they should remember that a less ideological approach from this ministerial team, not one of whom has worked in industry or run a business, could have spared them those painful conversations. The British public deserve to have someone put their interests above ideology. That is why we have laid our amendments, to ensure that it is British interests, more jobs, cheaper bills and investment returns that are the guiding priorities for Great British Energy.

If Government Members want to be able to say to voters in five years' time that they stuck to their words, they will vote for our amendments this evening. In fact, when asked if he stood by his promises, the Prime Minister said

"one of the things I made clear in the election campaign is because I wouldn't make a single promise or commitment that I didn't think we could deliver in government—".

If their own Prime Minister stands by his statement that he would not make a single promise that he did not think he could deliver, then Labour MPs have no reason not to support our amendments today.

Luke Murphy (Basingstoke) (Lab): I am enjoying the right hon. Member's lecture on energy security, but where was that argument during the last Government, when they left our country reliant on Putin and volatile fossil fuels, and when we saw energy bills soar? This Government are cleaning up 14 years of mess that the right hon. Member's Government left behind.

Claire Coutinho: I suggest the hon. Gentleman does some homework. We do not get our oil and gas from Putin. Instead, some 50% of our domestic gas supply comes from the North sea, which the party in government is trying to shut down. If he wants to talk about energy markets, he should do some reading about how they work. On that note, I commend our amendments to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Natalie Fleet to make her maiden speech.

Natalie Fleet (Bolsover) (Lab): It is the honour of my life to be in this Chamber as the Member for Bolsover, a seat made famous by the legend that is Dennis Skinner. From Calow to Pilsley, they tell me stories of him singing to them on the phone, and they remind me of his witty one-liners. He showed the very best of politics: what can be achieved when we send one of our own here to fight for us. I accepted a long time ago that I will not fill his shoes, but when I feel like I do not belong here, I remember that I am following in the footsteps of a "beast", whose legacy is that kids like me can be here against the odds.

Dennis famously praised half the Members on the Conservative Benches for not being crooks, and I like to think that he would have included his successor, Mark Fletcher, in that group. Mark saw that kids in Bolsover were 10% less likely than those in the rest of England

[*Natalie Fleet*]

and Wales to get higher education qualifications, and he fought to change that. He worked so hard to get us our own sixth form within Bolsover. I am also passionate about smashing down barriers to opportunity, so that is a fight that I am delighted to take up. Mark made the most of his time here. He appreciated the privilege of serving and continues to show that there is more that unites us than divides us. I wish him so very well.

In his maiden speech, Dennis spoke about the more than 10,000 working miners he represented. I do not have that pleasure. Born at the start of the strike, I grew up seeing our pits go. I had to stop visiting the canteen that my Dad took me to on the way to race the pigeons, because it closed. My community grieved, and I grew up seeing more kids like me go to prison than to university.

In place of industry, mine is a story of the state—stepping in, once again, to pick up the pieces and make sure that every child can reach their potential. I was really lucky to have a Government that prioritised my education, and that gave teachers like Mrs Gregory the opportunity to nurture me, as she did. When my home was dangerous, there were police to keep us safe. When I did not have a home at all, the state stepped in. When I was pregnant at 15, I had a Government that wrapped their arms around me in the form of Sure Start. Better still, they implemented a long-term strategy that meant that when I visit schools in Bolsover now, there are less children facing parenthood. That is really cool.

I always felt like the exception, but I am seeing more families struggle than ever before. That is why it has been so heartbreaking to see the state ripped back again. A care home in Shirebrook and a day centre in Bolsover face closure. Kids in South Normanton are waiting years for special educational needs support. Some 52% of children in Carr Vale live in poverty although their parents work hard to earn. It is not just our most vulnerable who are struggling. Professionals in Creswell are accessing food banks that never used to exist. There is more antisocial behaviour in Whitwell because there are less police. Mortgages are up in Barlborough. The amount that people can buy with their money in Tibshelf has gone down.

The reason I am here—the reason I leave my family every week to do this—is because I feel so deeply about the difference that politics can make. Things have been better before, and they will be again. That change has begun. I am here to make sure that this powerful state has the most positive impact on lives in Bolsover.

This Great British Energy Bill will mean that less children in Pleasley have their lights switched off as they are doing their homework. Kids in Holmewood can start the day with full tummies because they will have free breakfast clubs. Children in Glapwell will not have to feel the shame of asking their parents to pay for their school trips, because those parents will have good jobs, and great terms and conditions. Families in Clowne will get access to dentists, and entrepreneurs can succeed in Wessington, with global companies investing in Markham Vale. My daughter can start her own family in Pinxton, making me the world's proudest Nana, knowing that this Government will make getting childcare that much easier.

For my daughters and my soon-to-be granddaughter, and for your daughters and granddaughters, I stand here proudly as the first woman MP for Bolsover. It is a privilege to be a part of the most diverse Government in our country's history, because representation matters. I stand on the shoulders of the women who came before me, and who raised, supported, educated and mentored me. They threw that ladder down and would not take it up until I had grabbed it.

They were women like Gloria De Piero, who showed me that we are not all the same, and who proved to me that we can carry the scars of poverty and still belong in this House; Bess of Hardwick, who never took no for an answer, built the best of Tudor England and put her initials on the top of her house for us all to see; Margaret Cavendish, who was not mad but a difficult woman ahead of her time; and Arkwright's Norma Dolby, who kept her community together during the strike, faced police intimidation and made sure the miners' families were fed.

Being the first woman to stand in this post is a huge privilege, but it comes with a greater responsibility. It is my duty to speak up for the women in my constituency whose stories are not being told, even when it is difficult to do so, and even when I wish they were stories that they did not have—like those women who have been raped and are having to wait years for trial; attempting suicide as they fear that nobody will believe them. I have a moral obligation to speak on behalf of the women who have been hurt in the worst possible way and then told that it is their own fault.

So, to the women in my constituency, who I represent, who will be raped today, raped tomorrow and raped every day of this Parliament, I say: "I do not know where you are, I cannot find you, but you can find me. I will believe you, I will support you, and I will fight to make sure that we can all tell our truth, backed by a Government who will make it easier for us to get justice, determined to make sure that our daughters grow up safer." Being able to speak your truth until you can—that is privilege.

So, to the people of Bolsover, I say that I am thrilled to be here, for my family and for yours. I will not let you down.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Natalie Fleet), who showed real courage in talking with emotion, pride and passion, which is not always easy in this place.

Today we are debating a number of amendments related to the strategic priorities of Great British Energy, and that will be the focus of my remarks today. I rise to ask the Government to assure the House that, given that this is not specifically mentioned in the Bill, they understand that one of the biggest challenges we face when it comes to decarbonisation is in relation to heating, and to make that a strategic priority. The UK has more than 28.5 million homes, and another 1.9 million buildings, offices, hospitals, shops, warehouses and more, the majority of which are heated by gas boilers, which also provide hot water. Nearly one fifth of all the UK's emissions come from these buildings. The Climate Change Committee considers decarbonising heat to be one of the greatest challenges we face in getting to net zero, but that is not specified in the Bill.

Getting to net zero by 2050 will require us to pull every possible lever available. GB Energy needs to encompass the full thermodynamic meaning of the term energy, rather than focusing just on electricity. Although there is much to be said for the current plan to use air source and ground source heat pumps alongside other methods of using electric to heat buildings, attempting to convert our entire housing stock to this approach will place enormous strain on our electricity grid and supply chains.

When we consider this issue, there is one stand-out technology that will help us: geothermal energy, both shallow and deep. I am pleased to tell the House that there is cross-party consensus on this topic, and I have been able to work with a number of Members across the House, including the hon. Members for Bishop Auckland (Sam Rushworth), for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham), for Camborne and Redruth (Perran Moon), for Rushcliffe (James Naish) and others to form the deep geothermal all-party parliamentary group. Although I have mentioned shallow geothermal, which includes technology such as coal mine water, promoted by the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson), my remarks will focus on deep geothermal.

When I was first introduced to deep geothermal technology, my reaction was that it must be too good to be true: an environmentally friendly, dependable and cost-effective source of heat and power that can be found right under our feet—surely not. But over the past few years I have been pleasantly surprised to learn that deep geothermal is, in fact, just as good as it sounds. This technology uses the heat from naturally occurring sources of hot water deep underground to generate a large amount of usable heat and energy. In the UK, heat, rather than electricity, is the key benefit of deep geothermal, as that best matches the resources in counties such as East Sussex. This naturally occurring heat is a real resource—just as wind and sunlight are for other technologies, but unlike them it is there all year round whatever the weather.

Suella Braverman (Fareham and Waterlooville) (Con): May I applaud my hon. Friend for really championing this innovative source of energy? May I officially log my support for Hampshire as well, because in our previous conversation we have spoken about the potential for parts of my county to exploit this energy source? Does he agree that, whether Labour says that it will not raise taxes on working people, or that GB Energy will reduce energy bills by £300, its promises are falling apart and the real way to lower energy costs is not by setting up quangos that cost the taxpayer billions of pounds, but by investing in innovative energy forms such as geothermal and other forms such as North sea oil and gas, which the previous Government did.

Dr Mullan: My right hon. Friend is right that the Government have made some big claims in this House, but the detail of the work and how to get us over the line in an affordable, cost-effective way is 10 times more challenging than that, and that reality is fast catching up with them.

3.15 pm

We have seen across Europe how deep geothermal is contributing to this challenge. It heats more than a quarter of a million homes in Paris, and the French

Government aim to increase the number of schemes by 40% by 2030. Munich is pouring in €1 billion through to 2035 to develop deep geothermal and make the city's heating carbon neutral. More widely, Germany is already producing more than 353 MWh annually and the Government are targeting at least 100 new geothermal projects.

There is a particular opportunity for using deep geothermal to decarbonise our NHS building estate. The Minister will know that the NHS has set its own target to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2040. This is a very challenging target given the size of the hospital estate and the need to decarbonise its heating. But hospitals are fantastic anchor candidates for deep geothermal plants. They are big users of heat and can help build a successful business case. The advantage of working across the NHS is that we can potentially bundle up opportunities across a number of sites to create a big investment opportunity.

However and wherever we use it, deep geothermal plants would allow us to recruit from an entirely different workforce and an existing part of the economy in delivering net zero, and this is a workforce on which we already lead. Our oil and gas industry is one of the best in the western world, with world-beating companies and workforces with a long history of success not just in the North sea but globally. Deep geothermal provides us the opportunity to recruit that workforce to drilling for clean, green heat instead of fossil fuels. This will not only help us to get to net zero more quickly, but help this industry transition, with all the jobs it currently holds, investments in pension funds and other things, so that they can contribute positively to net zero.

Deep geothermal potential is also particularly prevalent in locations that are economically falling behind in the UK. There is a decent alignment between areas that have been left behind and need an economic boost, and areas that would be good for this technology. We have seen how coastal communities have benefited from offshore wind, for example. We need the investment in climate change technologies to be spread as widely as possible.

There are other benefits, too. Unlike solar and wind, geothermal does not require large swathes of land. A site can be as small as one or two acres. There can be no better example of the minimal environmental impact of a plant than the Eden project plant that recently opened in Cornwall, nestled alongside the famous biodomes and surrounded by green countryside.

Given all of this, I hope the Minister will understand why I am keen to ensure that, in the light of the Bill, GB Energy is suitably tasked to make the most of this resource. As mentioned, the wording in the Bill perhaps lacks clarity, so, on the face of it, this would provide the assurance that we are looking for. Under clause 3, which states that one of the objectives of GB Energy is “the production, distribution, storage and supply of clean energy”, clean energy is defined as

“energy produced from sources other than fossil fuels.”

We do not know whether this includes sources of energy related to heat, or whether the Government believe that this relates to electricity. By considering heat production as well, GB Energy can tackle the climate crisis from all angles, using as many avenues as it can to address the challenge.

I suggest that the Minister consider including as part of GB Energy's strategic priorities the exploitation of geothermal, deep and shallow, and I ask him for his view on that proposal. I know that if GB Energy is directed to support this industry, it will propel us closer to solving one of the most difficult challenges that we have faced in relation to heat. If we dig deep on geothermal, we will help level up the UK and reap the rewards this will provide.

Torcuil Crichton (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Natalie Fleet), who has proved by her passion and ability that she will soon emerge from the shadow of the beast and make the constituency her own.

I welcome the Report stage of the Bill, which will be the first to pass into law in this Parliament. Labour is delivering change within weeks of coming into office. The Bill has the potential to transform not just the way in which we produce power in this country and the impact that we have on our burning planet, but the way we live our lives. It could also have a transformative effect on the communities we serve. I commend the work of the Secretary of State and, in particular, of the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks), who has seized the agenda and grasped the potential of that transformation, which could be huge. It will match the scale and ambition of Tom Johnson, the legendary Labour Secretary of State for Scotland who brought power to the glens through the creation of the hydroelectric dam schemes that are now part of the highland landscape.

Moving to renewables and transitioning away from carbon must involve balancing and maintaining jobs in the North sea, which are such a vital element not just of our economic and energy mix, but of the incomes of many families in Na h-Eileanan an Iar. That is why I welcome the move to introduce a skills passport to help workers transition from one industry to the other, and why I welcome the co-operation this week between the UK Government and the Scottish Government in reviewing the outdated bureaucratic processes building new infrastructure and creating large energy projects. Untangling that regulatory framework and rewiring the national grid is a hugely complicated exercise. The Bill will achieve that by setting up a company, GB Energy, which will itself be the vehicle for reducing bills, involving communities and transforming the way we produce energy.

If the shadow Minister, the right hon. Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho), is looking for £300 off energy bills, she can accompany me to the village of Tolsta in my constituency, where one community-owned turbine has just distributed, as it happens, £300 per household to help people with their household bills and energy needs. Community energy will be a large part of what GB Energy does. We heard in evidence from Juergen Maier, who will chair GB Energy, that he and the Labour Government are committed to community energy as part of that mix.

Some of the amendments will seek to make community energy a part of the founding structure of the Bill. It will be part of the company, as set out in the explanatory notes to the Bill, but there is no necessity—[*Interruption.*] It is not necessary—

Michael Shanks (Rutherglen) (Lab): Just say it in Gaelic!

Torcuil Crichton: I could have said it in Gaelic. [*Laughter.*] It is not necessary for that to be part of the Bill or the company.

Communities must be at the heart of what GB Energy does, and community energy is at the heart of much of the wind production in my constituency—although there are commercial plans, too. Scotland's community-owned wind farms provide, on average, 34 times more benefit payments to local communities. I have given the example of just one village with one turbine, so imagine what three estates with nine turbines could do in terms of community benefit. Let us be in no doubt, the transformative move towards wind-farming—onshore and offshore—will be mean an extremely profitable, multibillion-pound industry. Communities that host such infrastructure, or which have serious infrastructure passing through their areas, must benefit as well. People will not mind the pylons going past as long as some of the profit comes to them. That will be a critical part of the contract between GB Energy, developers and communities. Communities settling and making deals should not be left to chance.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): Does the hon. Member seriously think that people in my constituency and across Lincolnshire and the east of England will be happy with thousands and thousands of huge pylons going through their area, damaging the value of their properties and businesses?

Torcuil Crichton: I remind the hon. Member that to switch on one lightbulb in Lincoln from a turbine on the Isle of Lewis will require a link and a chain of dominos to fall in order, on a scale that we have only ever seen in the Guinness record books. For each of those dominos to stay in place, the communities along that line must be involved and rewarded locally, or nationally with a sovereign wealth fund, to ensure that they play a part and have a sense of ownership in the transformation. The only way for this to succeed is if we all benefit. The wealth of wind is owned by no one man, and we should all share in the transformation. That is what I think GB Energy will deliver, and it is why I support the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Pippa Heylings (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): I start by thanking the Minister for how constructively he has worked with me, and by thanking the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Torcuil Crichton) for his words just now. I also thank all the colleagues who have sat on the Great British Energy Bill Committee. It is encouraging that this legislation has been given a prime spot at the beginning of this Parliament, and I thank the Clerks and the Speaker's Office for their diligent work in administering the Bill thus far, as well as all the Members who have taken the opportunity to represent their constituents' aspirations and concerns regarding the Bill. As many Members know, this is my first Bill as spokesperson for energy security and net zero, and I have appreciated all the support I have been given.

I also acknowledge colleagues from across the House who have lent their support to the amendments to which I am going to speak, and have also tabled their own. In particular, I recognise the contribution made by the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay), whose amendment promotes a nature recovery duty. He will know that nature recovery is close to my heart, and that I raised that topic in Committee. Last week, I had the privilege of attending the UN conference on biodiversity in Cali, Colombia—a poignant reminder of how it is impossible to address climate change and energy security without tackling the nature emergency. National energy infrastructure must therefore be nature-positive and aligned with the obligations in the Environment Act 2021.

As the Minister knows, the Liberal Democrats support the Bill in principle, because we want a nationwide energy system that will bring down energy bills and provide clean, green energy. Amendment 3, which stands in my name, would guarantee that Great British Energy is established within six months of the Bill becoming law. We all know that as a result of the Conservative Government's delay and dither, we are not on track to meet our ambitious targets.

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): I echo that. Torbay has an oven-ready solar scheme that would power our hospital and our council, yet because the national grid is not fit for purpose, that scheme has remained a blueprint. Does my hon. Friend agree that building capacity in the national grid is absolutely essential if this Bill is to be successful?

Pippa Heylings: I agree very much with my hon. Friend. National grid capacity is critical if we are to unblock all of these projects, which are so critical to powering our community services, our public services and the national economy. That is why we need to ensure there is no delay, and that is what amendment 3 speaks to.

Amendment 4, which also stands in my name, would ensure that Great British Energy has an explicit duty to help deliver energy efficiency through

“an emergency home insulation programme with targeted support for people on low incomes”,

as well as the expansion of renewables. This Bill has the power to transform lives, but also to protect lives. Warm hubs are becoming too familiar in my constituency of South Cambridgeshire: Comberton, Duxford, Melbourn, Meldreth and Toft are just a few of the village hubs run by amazing volunteers in the local community that provide warmth to those who have to make the heartbreaking choice between heating and eating. It is frankly astonishing that this is now a reality for so many in the UK in 2024, and is a damning indictment of the last Government's record on prioritising home insulation. Insulated homes mean warmer homes, which in turn means safer homes. The NHS spends an estimated £1.4 billion annually on treating illnesses associated with people living in cold and damp housing, and amendment 4 would seek to address this.

Amendment 4 also seeks to capitalise on our unique opportunity to be world-leading in renewable energy, which the Lib Dems know from our own track record. We must ensure that Great British Energy is duty-bound to support those activities. If renewable energy and home insulation can be rolled out at speed so that we

can meet those vital climate targets, that will reduce energy demand, bring down energy bills and provide green, future-proofed, well-paid jobs for the UK.

I turn to amendment 5 on community energy. At every stage of the Bill, the Liberal Democrats have raised our concerns, and those of many MPs from other parties and of the many community energy groups and communities that we represent, that as it stands, the Bill is missing a vital limb. It lists four objects for Great British Energy, but nowhere does it mention supporting the growth of community energy.

3.30 pm

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. She mentions community energy and I wonder if she recognises, as I do, the value of projects such as Stockport Hydro in Romiley in my constituency, which since 2012 has been using its two Archimedes screws, Thunder and Lightning, to power around 60 homes, thereby saving more than 100 tonnes of CO₂ a year. Is that the sort of project that she thinks the Bill should do more to support and encourage, so that we can tackle climate change and ensure that communities benefit from community energy projects?

Pippa Heylings: I thank my hon. Friend for that fantastic example from her constituency, which is exactly the kind of project we are talking about. We know that

“Local power generation is an essential part of the energy mix, ensuring communities own and benefit from clean power projects, and reducing pressures on the transmission grid.”

In fact, those words are taken from the Government's founding statement for Great British Energy, and the Minister said in this Chamber that

“Great British Energy will deliver a step change in investment in local and community energy projects, putting local authorities and communities at the heart of the energy transition.”—[*Official Report*, 5 September 2024; Vol. 753, c. 530.]

Yet the community energy sector was brought almost to a standstill by the former Conservative Government, and barriers still exist in selling directly to customers and in the cost of connecting to the grid, so welcome words are not enough.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. I would like to clarify what she said about there not being anything in the Bill about community energy. It is in the founding statement of GB Energy, because we know the importance of locally delivered community energy in facilitating this transformation. I want to correct that for the record, because the suggestion that community energy is not one of the aims of this legislation is a misunderstanding.

Pippa Heylings: I appreciate that, which is why I quoted from the founding statement. The problem is that those words are not enshrined in the Bill itself, which is why we are surprised that the Government continue to vote down amendments that would put communities at the heart of the Bill. We will continue to push on that.

I thank the 58 Members from different parties who have supported amendment 5, which requires that the statement of strategic priorities for Great British Energy has specific regard to community-based clean energy schemes. I would also like to give recognition to my colleagues who are leading the way in promoting the

[Pippa Heylings]

benefits of community energy, including my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart), as we have just heard.

Torcuil Crichton: Does the hon. Lady recall the evidence of Juergen Maier, EDF, SSE and the Minister to the Committee? They all gave commitments to community energy and to the local power plan being almost an eighth—almost £1 billion-worth—of GB Energy's plans.

Pippa Heylings: In fact, I said at the beginning of my contribution that I welcomed the constructive debate in Committee.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): If the Government have bought into the idea of community energy, does my hon. Friend not think it odd that they are so afraid to put it in the Bill?

Pippa Heylings: I could not have put it better myself. I thank my hon. Friend for leading the fight for the Liberal Democrats as the former spokesperson on energy security and net zero. That question goes to the crux of the matter.

We have fantastic examples from many communities of how important community energy is. My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire (Mr MacDonald) led the recent Westminster Hall debate, in which there were fantastic examples from rural communities of how they feel about community benefits. There are also the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) in supporting the Aikengall community wind farm, which provides a direct benefit of an amazing £120,000 for the community.

Community energy is not just for Scotland. In my own county of Cambridgeshire, there is the Swaffham Prior community heat network, and the village is the first of its kind to switch to reliable zero-carbon heating. It was started by the Swaffham Prior Community Land Trust, and it addresses fuel poverty and the village's reliance on oil heating. The Liberal Democrats will continue to promote those who have pioneered community energy schemes, proving their worth and championing their critical importance to our energy future.

While the Government have not previously backed our amendments, which is incomprehensible to us, I am grateful to the Minister for the conversations we have had recently and the assurances he has given us that the Government really do want to make provisions in the Bill for community energy in the Lords. I look forward to supporting our colleagues in the other place in this endeavour, but the interventions from Labour Members—saying that this will be in the founding statement and the strategic priorities, but not in the Bill—are causing us to doubt that commitment. I therefore urge the Government to make good on their promises. We know their commitment to community energy, so let that be understood clearly and let us put it in the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Adam Thompson to make his maiden speech.

Adam Thompson (Erewash) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your kind invitation to present my first speech. May I first congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Natalie Fleet) on her deeply

moving and powerful speech this afternoon, alongside the many Members who have spoken for the first time in this House in recent days and weeks? If the high bar set by the newest Members of this House is indicative of the quality of debate to follow in the coming Parliament, I am very confident about the future of our nation.

In my own first speech, I will lay out why I stood to represent my home of Erewash, my plans for my time in Parliament and why I love the area I now have the honour of representing. By the way, before I start in earnest, for the information of all Members present, the constituency is pronounced “Eh-ruh-wash” or occasionally “Eh-ree-wash”, but never under any circumstances “Ear-wash”. I look forward to seeing how that is recorded in *Hansard*.

I begin my speech by thanking my predecessor, Maggie Throup, for her efforts in serving the people of Erewash over the past nine years. Maggie worked diligently for our community, consistently lobbying for funding to support our towns and villages. Given her background in the health sector, Maggie regularly contributed to health policy throughout her tenure, and she served the nation admirably through the latter stages of covid-19 as Vaccines Minister. While Maggie and I rarely saw eye to eye on policy, our relationship across the political divide has always been courteous and collegiate, and I wish her the very best for the future.

I would also like to pay tribute to my colleague Liz Blackman, who served Erewash as our Member of Parliament throughout the last Labour Government. Liz's guidance during my campaign to become the MP for Erewash was invaluable, and I am sure I will continue to seek her advice throughout my tenure.

In my first months in Parliament, as I have met colleagues from across the country, the question I have most frequently been asked is: “What even is an Erewash, anyway?” Named for the river and the canal, we comprise two towns—Ilkeston and Long Eaton—the five villages of Breaston, Draycott, Risley, Sandiacre and Stanton-by-Dale, and other communities in Sawley, Kirk Hallam and Cotmanhay. More often, though, I find it easiest to answer, with a reference to our geography, simply, “We're junction 25 of the M1.”

Like many towns that operate as a binary star, Ilkeston and Long Eaton exist in a delicate balance, with residents of Ilkeston—or “Ilson”, as we call it—regularly declaring, “Long Eaton gets everything.” It is probably no surprise then, Madam Deputy Speaker, that if you spent 10 minutes talking to someone in Long Eaton, you would similarly and resoundingly hear the mantra, “Ilkeston gets everything.” I should note that I have sanitised these statements somewhat; references to the other town in my constituency are often a little more colourful.

In truth, both of our towns have been hard done by for the past 14 years. Despite the hard work of incredible and passionate teaching and support staff, for example, many of our schools struggle with underfunding—something I witnessed at first hand when I trained as a secondary physics teacher. Both high streets have declined, and while towns funding is helping to support Long Eaton's regeneration, the underlying problems remain: antisocial behaviour, crime, shopkeepers forced out by online giants, and a general malaise and the feeling that nothing will fix the foundations.

Despite the difficulties we face, I would like to explain why Erewash is a fantastic place by paying tribute to the people and the groups in our towns who are doing everything they can to lift the area up by its bootstraps—people like Joe Cahill, who, by liaising with shopkeepers and landlords through a local Facebook group focused on incredible independent shops, has empowered our community and begun restoring Ilkeston as a thriving market town. Similarly, I commend the work of Paul Opiah and others in building the new Friends of Ilkeston Town Centre, providing grassroots regeneration to our town. The efforts of Joe and Paul have been fantastic and I want to provide them with more support. Joe recently noted that he had done as much as he could without changing the law to bring the remaining, rotting shop units back into service—units that are currently held hostage by absentee landlords. I am therefore excited about the Government's proposals to revive our town centres, and I will do everything in my power to support local people in their efforts.

In Long Eaton, I pay tribute to Scott Clayton and his team, who have created a beautiful new community focused on supporting mental health through the joy of song, where men of all abilities can come together to sing and discuss their issues. It was a pleasure during my campaign to become a Member of Parliament to join Scott and the Bluetonic community and to dive head first out of my comfort zone to sing with new friends.

I also pay tribute to Chris and Jackie Brookes, along with the team at Long Eaton rugby football club. The club serves Long Eaton so well, providing access to sport in our local park for children and adults, and supporting local charities and the armed forces community. After growing substantially over the past decade in the men's game, in the women's game and now with its new minis side, Long Eaton RFC has become a pillar of our community.

Then there is Lindsay Rice and her team, who have built a food bank and a lunch club, and are on their way to creating a brand-new Ilkeston carnival through their Every One Eats institute, alongside the collective churches in Long Eaton that have similarly supported those in our community struggling through poverty. Lindsay recently asked me, "Adam, as a food bank, when are you going to shut us down?" I responded, "As soon as possible, Lindsay, as soon as possible."

Erewash has a thriving veteran community, and as a member of the Royal British Legion, I am very proud that our current mayor, Councillor Kate Fennelly, is a Royal Air Force veteran. I recently met the local charitable trust, Forces Veterans Afloat, which does incredible work housing veterans for whom bricks and mortar are not the answer on narrowboats. As a cadet warrant officer in 1344 (Cardiff) Squadron ATC for much of my childhood, I have long supported our forces and veterans; without 1344 and the citizenship, leadership and community spirit instilled in me by the wider cadet movement, I would not be standing here as a Member of Parliament.

Erewash is the birthplace of many national stars, from Douglas Houghton, Baron Houghton of Sowerby, who served our country in the first world war and in Harold Wilson's Government as the last British Cabinet Minister born in the 19th century, through to Robert Lindsay, who has played countless parts, including the infamous Wolfie in "Citizen Smith" and the former

Prime Minister, Tony Blair. We also have Bru-C, who today is putting Long Eaton on the map in the grime scene. Our towns, villages, and people are fantastic, but they have been let down by the previous Government, by politicians and by their country.

So what do I bring to this place, and what do I hope to do for Erewash? My background is in academia and education. In my previous day job, I taught engineering apprentices at the University of Nottingham. I worked there for a decade, specialising in metrology research and training the next generation of world-leading manufacturers. I believe I am the first metrologist elected to this place, metrology being the science of measuring things and definitely not meteorology—as I said in the opening quote to my PhD thesis, it has absolutely nothing to do with clouds.

Erewash, and the wider east midlands, has long been the engine of our nation's manufacturing base, producing everything from drain covers—look down on nearly every street in the country to see the logo of the famous Stanton Iron Works—to the fine lace worn by the Princess of Wales on her wedding day, produced by Cluny Lace in Ilkeston, to tunnels for HS2 made by Sateba UK, and composite motorsport and aerospace components from Atlas Composite. I want to see an expansion of our manufacturing base through an industrial strategy and reform of the apprenticeship levy, so that we can cement Erewash's position as a centre for advanced manufacturing.

We also need new infrastructure to build the new homes to support our local economic growth, which I am glad to see the Government commit to. As the Stanton industrial regeneration site grows, I will fight every day for infrastructure works. We need a new junction on the M1 to support the growing industry in the area and to reduce the impact on residents in Sandiacre and Ilkeston, who currently endure a huge volume of heavy goods vehicles passing through the towns.

3.45 pm

I am proud today to support the Great British Energy Bill. For years, my constituents in Erewash have suffered through rising bills, because of our exposure to dictator-controlled fossil fuel markets. Now that Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station, just outside my constituency, has burned its final lump of coal, I look forward to the investment in our community that GB Energy will bring and the rewards that we will reap in energy security, clean power and new jobs.

It is the most incredible honour for me to represent my home of Erewash. I would not be here without my partner, my family, my friends and my incredible campaign team, who, by constant repetition of our mantra of being five points behind under any circumstances, began the process of changing our country for the better. Coming from a background of education and science, I look forward to contributing to evidence-based policy debates and applying my scientific training in this House. Standing here, I feel the weight of my community, the weight of responsibility, and the weight of the need to deliver a better future for my constituents and the whole country. Throughout my tenure, I will always be guided by reason not dogma, by the scientific method and by a desire to serve.

Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): I am pleased to speak in this debate, and the Green group of MPs is pleased to back this Bill. I will be speaking in support of new clauses 2 and 3, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay), which are designed to make the Bill even stronger. The new clauses would create a new nature recovery duty for Great British Energy and prevent investments that increase climate emissions.

I thank the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Pippa Heylings) for her statement of support for my hon. Friend's work and for making the Bill better for nature recovery. I also thank her for her proposals on insulation and community energy, which we support. All those things are vital for the Bill's success.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): If nature recovery is to be important in the Government's present drive, does the hon. Member accept that renewable energy has been destructive of nature? Some 17 million trees have been cut down in Scotland to facilitate windmills. Now, there are studies indicating that offshore wind is leading to dead porpoises, dead dolphins and dead whales being washed up on beaches because of the effects of drilling.

Siân Berry: I do not agree with all the assertions that the right hon. Member makes, but the duty is intended precisely to ensure that every single project would have a positive impact on nature. Under new clause 3, they would all be renewable projects.

The nature recovery duty under new clause 2 would help GB Energy invest only in projects that deliver significant biodiversity benefits and meet targets under the Environment Act 2021, by building nature-friendly design features into renewable energy projects and creating and restoring habitats on development sites in and around clean energy infrastructure.

The Bill Committee heard from Shaun Spiers of Green Alliance, who made a strong case for a nature recovery duty being created for GB Energy. The ensuing discussion saw the Crown Estate used as an example for how a public body could deliver for nature without having a statutory duty to do so. However, the Crown Estate is a highly relevant case study that demonstrates why non-statutory duties are not enough. The Crown Estate's lack of a statutory duty to consider nature in its own decision making has led to its involvement in a number of environmentally damaging schemes.

For example, let us consider mining proposals in the Sperrin mountains area of outstanding natural beauty in Northern Ireland. The Crown Estate entered into an initial mineral extraction agreement with a mining company there in 2016, leading to proposals for goldmining. That has provoked significant environmental concern about harmful chemicals and waste from mining operations polluting nearby rivers and degrading the surrounding AONB. An application was submitted in 2017 and is now subject to a public inquiry, following nearly 40,000 objections from local people. So an abundance of warm words about protecting and conserving the environment, and about the Crown Estate's status as a public body, did not inhibit it from playing a role in a project that threatens nature.

Sammy Wilson: The hon. Lady mentioned Northern Ireland and particularly the Sperrin mountains, which is an area of great natural beauty. It has many features,

including wildlife and wild uplands, but it has been industrialised. I took a motorbike journey around the area three weeks ago, and there are hundreds of huge wind turbines. The peat has been dug up, the landscape has been destroyed and thousands of birds are killed every year. What has happened in the Sperrin mountains is hardly a good example of renewable energy being nature-friendly.

Siân Berry: I am sure we can have those debates in the context of a statutory duty. These are important questions to consider.

I want to give some other examples of public bodies damaging nature, because they abound—from the granting of new oil and gas licences in marine protected areas by the North Sea Transition Authority, to Highways England pursuing damaging road construction projects on the edges of national parks. Without legal backing, nature considerations can be and are brushed aside.

There is no reason to think that Great British Energy, without a duty to consider nature recovery, will be any different. A statutory duty to deliver for nature's recovery would be complementary to GB Energy's other objectives around clean energy, energy efficiency and energy security. It would also reflect the Government's manifesto commitment to tackle the interconnected nature and climate crises together. I hope the Government will carefully consider those arguments.

New clause 3, which was also tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney Valley, is vital to guarantee that our energy investments are not only financially responsible but aligned with the legal requirement to reach net zero by 2050. As legislators, we have a duty to hold GB Energy accountable, preventing investments that will lock us into high-carbon energy pathways and undermine our net zero commitments. The new clause mandates environmental impact assessments before any investments are made, ensuring that each decision is grounded in evidence. It forces us to ask, "Will this investment push us at speed towards, or risk pulling us away from, our climate goals?" Publishing those assessments opens the process to public scrutiny—an essential principle in democracy. The public deserve to know exactly how their tax money is being used, particularly when it comes to funding projects that may exacerbate the climate crisis.

The new clause would also bar public money from being spent on fossil fuel and unsustainable high-carbon projects such as biomass. We cannot ignore the facts: Drax, the largest biomass-burning plant in the UK, emitted over 11 million tonnes of CO₂ in 2023. Worse still, it receives nearly £900 million in Government subsidies a year. If we allow investments in projects such as Drax or new fossil fuel infrastructure, we risk undermining the very goals we are trying to achieve. The new clause would close the door on such contradictions.

When we talk about greenhouse gas emissions, it is crucial to acknowledge that carbon dioxide is not the only danger. Methane is a greenhouse gas with over 80 times the warming potential of CO₂ over a 20-year period. Methane emissions, often associated with fossil fuel extraction and agriculture, must be tightly controlled to ensure that the UK meets its climate commitments. The new clause would ensure that all climate emissions, including methane, are thoroughly assessed before any public investment is made. If we do not account for methane and other greenhouse gases, we risk underestimating

the climate impact of certain energy projects, and particularly those related to natural gas production and transport.

Fossil fuel infrastructure does not just burn carbon; it locks us into long-term dependence on dirty energy. Every pound spent on high-carbon infrastructure makes it harder and more expensive to transition away from fossil fuels in the time that we have. This amendment ensures that we avoid that trap, by making it impossible for Great British Energy to invest in projects that would limit our ability to end our reliance on carbon-emitting technologies.

Great British Energy should also be a true trailblazer in the global transition to clean energy. The amendment strengthens that mission by making clear that only projects contributing to emissions reductions should receive investment. With countries around the world watching, we have a unique opportunity to lead by example. A failure to act boldly now will leave us behind in the global race for climate leadership.

We are in a climate and nature emergency, and we cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past by further locking ourselves into harmful high-carbon infrastructure. These amendments reflect that. The stakes could not be higher. These decisions are about securing a liveable planet for future generations. I hope the Government will listen.

Graeme Downie (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): Let me begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Adam Thompson) on his maiden speech. I am delighted that he gave us a lesson on how to say his constituency name. How can I say “Erewash” to further confuse *Hansard*? I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Natalie Fleet), who is no longer in her place, but I think everyone in this House felt the passion in her speech. I look forward to hearing more from her on a number of issues.

I will focus my remarks on how to ensure that GB Energy delivers effectively for Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. To do that, it must generate investment that delivers tangible results and brings jobs and economic growth, along with the energy security that we all want. In Committee, witnesses said that one of the challenges for GB Energy will be finding a balance between accelerating renewable energy delivery and ensuring a return on investment, while supporting less mature technologies. I agree that it will be a difficult balance to strike, but we are more likely to succeed in our investments if they are encouraged in areas where there is likely to be a warm welcome and strong understanding of electricity generation, and where the foundational skills and engineering heritage already exist. They include former coalfields across Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, including in west Fife in my constituency.

Although the mines closed decades ago, the heritage of electricity generation lived on in the Longannet power station near Kincardine, on the banks of the River Forth. Constructed in the 1960s, Longannet was once Europe’s biggest coal-fired power station and one of the largest carbon emitters on the continent, before shutting down in 2016. Having represented that community as a councillor, I know that people across west Fife accept that coal had to go and things had to move on, but they want something to replace it. Like so much of our past energy infrastructure, and like in so many

industries, Longannet was closed down with little or no consideration for what might replace it or how the thousands of jobs lost could be replaced and the skills maintained, particularly in the rural villages of west Fife, where losing even a few families or employees can put their whole sustainability at risk.

I believe that GB Energy and the investment opportunities that it presents is a chance to change that. The site is currently being safely demolished by ScottishPower, but there are still no clear plans for the future of the site. Longannet is perfectly situated to play its part once again in helping to provide electricity for our country and leverage some of the £60 billion possible investment that could be available via GB Energy. The site is designated for major employment, and due to its location right on the coast it is likely to be suitable for major industrial use only. It has the potential to bring jobs and investment to the coalfield villages of west Fife and the whole of central Scotland, securing opportunities for those communities to fulfil the aspirations of the people living there.

Despite being listed as a strategic priority site by the Scottish Government, they have had no plans for it, and from what is available in the public domain, it seems they have not prioritised any action at all in recent years. Promises made of train manufacturing being brought to the site came to nothing, and the decision by that company to withdraw from an agreement came to light only because of a freedom of information request I made back in 2022. Nothing was discussed publicly at all. Indeed, some people in that community still talk about when the train manufacturer is coming. Similarly, both Fife council and Scottish Enterprise have struggled to engage with ScottishPower about the future of the site, although I have a meeting with ScottishPower this week, and I hope to gain more clarity after that. Will the Minister, in winding up, agree to meet me and other stakeholders to ensure that sites such as Longannet, once a symbol of Scottish and UK electricity generation and the skills that come with it, are priorities for GB Energy? How will it work with the industry to create the right plans to bring investment to the area?

We know the wreckage that the Conservative party made of UK and Scottish industry over the past decades: change without a plan. GB Energy offers an opportunity not only to have a plan for our low-carbon secure energy future, but to fix yet another part of the mess left for us by the deliberate actions of the Conservatives and the incompetence of the SNP in Scotland. The Bill is a huge opportunity for Scotland. We must ensure that it is passed today, so it can get on with its work as quickly as possible.

4 pm

David Chadwick (Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe) (LD): I pay tribute to the two excellent maiden speeches that we have heard so far in this debate, from the hon. Members for Erewash (Adam Thompson) and for Bolsover (Natalie Fleet). I hope that people from former mining communities are listening to this debate, because I am sure they will have some choice words to say about a Conservative talking about de-industrialisation. In Wales, we will never forget what the Conservatives did to our industries, and the jobs and futures they took away from people.

Harriet Cross (Gordon and Buchan) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman therefore appreciate why Conservatives are so concerned that the plans coming forward from the Labour Government will do exactly the same to north-east Scotland if this is not handled properly?

David Chadwick: I thank the hon. Member for that contribution. De-industrialisation has been happening for a very long time across the United Kingdom, and we are yet to see a real industrial strategy that would restore the wealth, prosperity and jobs that used to exist across our industrial areas in the entire United Kingdom.

Wales stands ready to play its part in powering the United Kingdom once again, but this time Wales would like to experience the tangible benefits from these projects. In my constituency, Llangattock Green Valleys has the ambition to develop plans for a large, community-owned renewable energy scheme to supply premises in the Crickhowell region. The scheme will have a mix of technologies, such as solar, hydro, wind and storage, to give a year-round supply of energy. It will be developed from the start in consultation with the community. It will be managed by the community and the profits will benefit the community itself.

We Liberal Democrats are firm believers that this is exactly the model of community ownership that will provide communities with security and prosperity well into the future. It is for this reason that I urge all Members to support amendment 5 and ensure that the Bill puts the principle of community ownership at the very front and centre of what the Government are trying to achieve.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I welcome the Bill, which brings us one step closer to establishing this much-needed, publicly owned energy company. To quote the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Ed Miliband), at the UN General Assembly, this is a Government who are

“willing to tell the truth”

and “show international leadership” when it comes to climate change. In that spirit, I would like to bring to the attention of the House the importance of upholding human rights and the principles of a just transition in our renewable energy supply chains.

I am heartened by the determination of our Front Bench to see human rights protected across our energy transition. When questioned on forced labour in the solar industry, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, my right hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds), stated that he

“would expect and demand there to be no modern slavery in any part of the supply chain”—[*Official Report*, 5 September 2024; Vol. 753, c. 418.]

In a similar vein, the Minister for Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), recently spoke about

“galvanising just energy transition partnerships, to making sure that everyone feels the benefits of green innovation”.

While GB Energy must ensure that everyone benefits from green innovation, it must also guarantee that no one suffers from it. However, I have grave concerns that if we charge ahead with our net zero transition without safeguards in place, we will knowingly be doing that on the backs of those in slavery. Let me outline why.

Wind turbines, solar panels, electric vehicles and battery storage all require large quantities of critical minerals. There is conclusive evidence of human rights abuses associated with critical minerals. The abuse is most severe and systemic in the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region of China, where the Chinese Government are systematically persecuting millions of Uyghur, Turkic and Muslim majority peoples on the basis of their religion and ethnicity. It is well documented that the lower tiers of our solar supply chains are concentrated there, and have a sinister dependency on state-imposed Uyghur forced-labour programmes. Those programmes have bolstered China’s global market share, which exceeds 80% across the whole solar PV supply chain. I raise these concerns not to undermine our business relationship with China, but because through the purchasing power of GB Energy, we can protect human rights around the world.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Middleton South) (Lab): My hon. Friend says that she does not want to undermine our commercial relationship with China. I do. China is carrying out genocide of the Uyghurs. It is an appalling country—or, rather, it has an appalling leadership, to be precise. It is trying to monopolise crucial supply chains around the world in order to oppress people. Surely we should be reducing our relationship and making ourselves independent.

Sarah Champion: I appreciate that my hon. Friend has put that on the record. I think that what we need to be doing is reducing our dependency—some might say “stranglehold”—on China for some of our most critical resources.

Perran Moon (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): I agree with my hon. Friend about China. Does she agree with me that we should be looking at domestic production of critical minerals such as tin, lithium, tungsten and manganese? In Cornwall we have plenty, and we are very hopeful that the Bill will support the opportunities that they offer.

Sarah Champion: I completely agree with my hon. Friend, and that, to my mind, is what GB Energy should be doing. It is using its purchasing power around the world to increase human rights and improve working conditions, for example, but it also needs to be supporting British-based businesses, because our businesses need that support more than ever before. What we need to be doing is applying pressure on all our trading partners around the world, not just China, to improve standards. There are allegations of child labour in cobalt mining for EV batteries in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and there is evidence of labour exploitation in nickel processing in Indonesia.

With those examples in mind, I ask the House a simple question: do we turn a blind eye to modern slavery in our energy supply chains, or do we lead the way with a just transition? As the Chancellor outlined in her conference speech, this Government are

“Calling time on the days when government stood back...and turned a blind eye to where things are made and who makes them.”

It is vital that we follow up her words with real, meaningful action, because, as things currently stand, we are a global outlier. In 2021 the United States enacted the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, banning the importation

of products from the Uyghur region, including shipments of solar panels with connections to Xinjiang. That has been highly effective, with the market responding with new, ethical supply chains. Canada and Mexico have followed suit with similar regulations, and this year the European Union passed the corporate sustainability due diligence directive, which will ensure that companies prevent and address the adverse human rights impacts of their actions.

Ms Billington: We should bear in mind that the regulations established by those other countries apply to all companies. It seems to me that we should be going in that direction, rather than simply saying that we will focus on one company, GB Energy. Given our high ethical standards, this is the kind of sectoral approach that we should be able to create ourselves, as an international leader.

Sarah Champion: My hon. Friend pre-empts me. This will work only if we do it across the whole of Government and in all sectors, and I want my Government to be leading the way on that. We have a hugely important role to play internationally, as well as in our own industries.

The UK's failure to keep pace with our partners has resulted in the global supply chain splitting. Slave-made renewable products are being redirected to countries with weaker regulations, such as the UK. As the other place's Modern Slavery Act 2015 Committee recently recognised, without forced labour import bans, the UK risks becoming a dumping ground for tainted products. Current legislation, such as the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and the Procurement Act 2023, cannot meet the scale of the problem, especially while human rights due diligence remains optional for companies.

I appreciate that the Department is looking into these issues through the solar taskforce's upcoming solar road map, which I really welcome. However, the solar taskforce, made up mostly of industry voices, needs to have civil society and trade unions on the team for its work to be truly credible. That is especially the case given my concerns about Solar Energy UK's solar stewardship initiative, or SSI, as I am doubtful that an industry-led solution can meet the scale of the challenges I have outlined today.

A just transition is not only about international workers' rights; it is also about securing UK jobs and industry. Our energy strategy must prioritise green jobs and wealth creation here, and avoid fuelling growth in economies known for cutting corners. Following my discussions with the industry and unions, it is clear that the UK's inadequate response to these issues is creating a competitive disadvantage for businesses here and an uneven playing field internationally. If GB Energy allows exposure to state-imposed forced labour, it creates a distinct risk for investors and businesses here in the UK.

The arguments I have laid out today have the support of unions, businesses and human rights advocates alike. They echo the sentiments of our Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Business Secretary and Energy Secretary. For too many years, tackling modern slavery has received a siloed, disjointed response from Government. We now have an opportunity to change that and to embrace cross-departmental, collaborative working. Renewable energy has a key role to play in our transformation to a low-carbon economy, but without placing human rights at its centre, our green transition will come at a grave cost.

This Bill is aptly named the Great British Energy Bill. It simply cannot live up to its name if it depends on modern slavery to achieve its aims.

Mr Angus MacDonald (Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire) (LD): I invite hon. Members to refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Pippa Heylings) for her commitment to our essential amendments, both in Committee and here today. I also thank the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Torcuil Crichton), who has been incredibly supportive of our ambition for communities to benefit from renewable energy. I have one little correction: Tom Johnston, who invented the hydro boards, and the Labour Government did not actually put in place a proper system whereby local communities could benefit. They supplied a lot of power to the south and the cities, but it was of very little benefit to those of us living in the highlands, even then.

The Government have argued that nothing in this Bill limits community ownership. That is almost certainly true, but as my colleagues and I have emphasised, amendment 5 would not restrict GB Energy; it would simply clarify that community-led energy is a priority.

The Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, the hon. Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks), recently experienced a powerful story of community-driven energy on his visit to the island of Eigg. Just 25 years ago, Eigg's residents, frustrated by years of poor management and a lack of investment, took matters into their hands and purchased their island. The Eigg buy-out succeeded in 1997, sparking what is now a beacon of self-sustained energy. Since then, Eigg has moved away from fossil fuels, becoming the world's first island to generate 24-hour electricity from a variety of different renewables. This small community of just 110 people demonstrates the innovation and resilience that flourish when communities are empowered.

Eigg's journey is a true example of prioritising community ownership and how that drives forward sustainability and local resilience. To paraphrase the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, the hon. Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks), community involvement is critical, not a mere "nice to have". If we are to build the infrastructure of the future, we must ensure that communities benefit directly. Community-driven projects are key to making that a reality, so let us follow Eigg's lead and put the Government's own words into action.

The current Government have an opportunity here to show their commitment to cross-party collaboration by embracing community energy. We are all aligned on the goals, so let us not get bogged down by technicalities or party politics. The Minister knows of the huge cross-party support for community energy ownership. If this goes to a vote, do this Government really want to vote against community energy ownership? Let us show the people of Britain that this Bill truly supports the right to own and benefit from our natural resources through Great British Energy.

4.15 pm

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): It is an honour to welcome this Bill as it is moving forward, and I want to commend the leadership of the Secretary of State

[Tom Hayes]

and the Energy Minister. To show such leadership so early on in the Parliament on such an important topic is really commended in my community.

My community of Bournemouth, and Britain, have suffered the worst cost of living crisis in a generation, driven by the energy shock that followed Putin's invasion of Ukraine. This cost of living crisis has been a disaster for businesses. Typical energy bills have nearly doubled in the space of a year. It has been a disaster for family finances, with millions struggling with fuel poverty and many still facing enormous debts. It has been a disaster for public finances because the Government that we replaced left our country so unprepared. They were forced to spend an eye-watering £94 billion to support households with the cost of living—almost as much as our entire defence budget over the entire period. Because energy costs underpin economic performance, inflation soared, growth sputtered and Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent inflation in the UK to over 10%, with a full third of that directly due to rising gas prices as a direct result of our vulnerability over the last 14 years.

We risk paying an even heavier price if we stay exposed to fossil fuels. We still depend on gas to generate more than a third of our electricity and to heat more than four out of five of our homes. No more. We must make sure that we are energy secure, and we must be able to bring down our bills. The Office for Budget Responsibility has warned about our exposure to surges in energy prices, and the potential costs to bill payers, taxpayers, consumers and businesses alike. The OBR now estimates that another fossil fuel price shock would cost the economy 2% to 3% of our GDP in the 2030s.

The crisis is not over. It still casts a long shadow and we cannot go on like this. We must learn the lessons, and the fastest way to reduce our vulnerability is to end our dependence on volatile global fossil fuels. The cheapest way to meet our energy needs is to enhance our home-grown renewables and British-based nuclear. I was intrigued to hear the Conservative spokesperson, the right hon. Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho), saying that this Government want to go slow on nuclear, so I have to ask: what nuclear projects were built over the last 14 years of the Conservative Government and five Prime Ministers? What small modular reactors actually moved ahead? What did those Prime Ministers do with the investment and the work that developers wanted to bring forward? Nothing. Our nuclear industry has been starved of funding and attention, but no more. When the energy is produced here and consumed here, Britain is protected against the volatile international markets that send our bills soaring.

The Climate Change Committee's report, published two weeks after the Labour Government came into office, laid bare the true reality of energy policy under the last Conservative Government. It states:

"Last year...the previous Government signalled a slowing of pace and reversed or delayed key policies".

We did not hear about that from the right hon. Member for East Surrey. It also stated that

"announcements were given with the justification that they will make the transition more affordable for people, but with no evidence backing this claim".

We did not hear anything about that. The assessment of the committee was that

"only a third of the emissions reductions required...are currently covered by credible plans"

by the previous Government. We did not hear anything about that. That is this Labour Government's inheritance, for a target that has to be achieved in just five years' time. Britain is way off track to hit our 2030 international target of a 68% reduction in emissions. That is why the Government are in a hurry, and it is why they introduced the Bill so early in this Parliament.

In the five years ahead, our big challenges will be building an energy system at speed and supporting people through the energy transition. We need to demonstrate the benefits of the infrastructure we are building and make sure that host communities benefit in return. When we ask our communities to host this infrastructure, I am confident that they will say yes. They will do so on behalf of our nation. They will do so for cheaper bills in the long run, for good jobs that pay well and to benefit our communities.

National Grid estimates that five times as many pylons and underground lines will need to be constructed by 2030 than in the past 30 years. Underground cables cost six to 10 times more than overground cables. If part of our challenge is to cut bills and to reduce overall costs in a time of scarcity, we must be willing to invest in our infrastructure.

The faster we go, the more secure we become. Every wind turbine we erect, every solar panel we install and every piece of grid we construct will help our families and protect them from future energy shocks. Conversely, every wind turbine blocked, every solar farm rejected and every piece of grid left unbuilt will make us less secure and more exposed.

The faster we go, the better our economy will work for working people by creating a new generation of good jobs that finally pay decent wages in our industrial heartlands. Labour Members do not seek deindustrialisation; we seek decarbonisation. And decarbonisation will be achieved through reindustrialisation and the creation of good green jobs. The faster we go, the more we will be early movers and lead the world in new technologies. Why should these jobs be created in Pennsylvania or Shanghai? Let us create them in Bournemouth and across our country. And the faster we go, the more we can tackle our climate challenge. This is no longer a future threat. It is right here, right now, and we need to be able to tackle it.

Over the past few years, the race for jobs and the industries of the future has accelerated across the world. For too long, our country has been opted out of that race against our will. We have lost out, and our communities have fallen behind. Pay has not kept pace, and jobs have not been created on the scale needed. Why did the previous Government allow other countries to lead in these industries and clean jobs? Why did they not bet on our country and our potential?

I am delighted to see this Bill make progress. I commend Ministers for introducing it, and I look forward to seeing true investment in our green industries and the jobs of the future.

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): I rise to support amendment 5, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Pippa Heylings),

to require a statement of strategic priorities on the facilitation of community-based clean energy schemes.

Energy supply is the second largest contributor to UK domestic greenhouse gas emissions, making up 20% of carbon emissions in 2022. Community energy should play a key role in reducing this and in helping the UK to meet its net zero targets. Community energy projects have positive impacts on equality, social cohesion and economic opportunity. We must therefore encourage local communities to take ownership of energy production. This way, we can ensure that decisions are taken in the best interests of local communities, and in collaboration with them, to better meet their needs.

The local economic benefits are clear, with community energy businesses in 2021 raising £21.5 million of investment for new projects and spending £15 million of community energy income to boost local economies. Community energy schemes currently produce just 0.5% of UK electricity but, according to studies by the Environmental Audit Committee, this could grow twentyfold over the next 10 years.

My constituency has seen the benefit of community energy schemes, with Avalon Community Energy in Street and South Somerset Community Energy in Wincanton providing services to the local area. Avalon is currently focused on delivering the clean energy project as one of the projects that make up the Glastonbury town deal. The £2 million project will develop renewable energy and carbon saving for the community. It is currently estimated that the project will save around 1,000 tonnes of carbon per year, and there will be an annual revenue surplus of over £100,000, some of which will be used for ongoing local community benefits. South Somerset Community Energy has installed three solar panels on the roof of Stanchester academy in Stoke-sub-Hamdon. Those solar panels produce around 100,000 kWh of energy per year, at least 70% of which is used by the academy.

The Liberal Democrats want to support the expansion of community energy schemes by requiring large energy suppliers to work with community schemes to sell the power they generate to local customers. If the Government want to drive a clean energy revolution, community energy has to be part of that. Community energy schemes have the potential to power 2.2 million homes, to save 2.5 million tonnes of CO₂ a year and to create over 30,000 jobs. The Government have sadly neglected community energy provisions in the original Bill, as many of my Liberal Democrat colleagues have and will outline. That is a major missed opportunity.

Engagement and consultation with local communities is crucial if GB Energy is to be a success. GB Energy should also provide communities who host renewable energy infrastructure with the ability to realise community benefits from that. I have spoken on this point at length over recent weeks, because it is crucial if we are to boost the much-needed roll-out of renewable energy, particularly in areas like Glastonbury and Somerton. Communities must be part of the process. They have a critical role to play and a voice that must be heard. Through engagement, we can deliver clean energy, increase social cohesion and allow communities to invest in their place.

For the reasons I have laid out, I will be supporting the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire, and I urge the House to do the same.

Brian Leishman (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): Before I make my contribution, I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the House for failing to mention during the Employment Rights Bill debate last week the financial donations made to me by Unite the Union of £7,500, and by the Communication Workers Union of £3,500. I appreciate that being a first time MP is no excuse, and I extend my sincere apologies to you and to the House. On that note, I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, where it also says that I am a member of Unite the Union, which I will refer to later in my remarks.

There is so much to like in the GB Energy Bill: a publicly owned clean energy company, the creation of skilled jobs, reindustrialising communities and cutting household bills. It is a transformative and bold idea, which is to be applauded and to be proud of. Since coming to this place, I have heard it said—indeed, I have said—that a nation's energy security is linked to its national security. GB Energy should eventually help with both those things and create thousands of skilled jobs. That is excellent.

However, what about the jobs of the Grangemouth refinery workers, the same workers who are right now crucial to Scotland's energy security, and therefore to Scotland's national security? Those workers are nearing the end of their 45-day consultation process, during which the focus should be on how jobs can be saved and maintained for those workers. Recent comments include, "These workers will be okay and it will all be fine because they'll get employment elsewhere." If the workers have to leave, that will not help my community. Stopping refining does not help Scotland's fuel or national security.

There can be no doubt that my constituency will be much weaker for losing the refinery—job losses will run into the thousands. There can also be no doubt that Scotland will be weaker for losing the refinery. After all, Scottish Enterprise has reported that the economic contribution of the Grangemouth refinery is north of £400 million.

Mark my words, stopping refining at Grangemouth and closing Finnart will have monumental consequences for all of Scotland. It will not take long for the pumps on forecourts all over the country to be impacted, and so too the public. Although this is not a problem of this Government's making—the previous UK Tory Government and the current SNP Scottish Government have long since turned their backs on the refinery, and it was previous UK Ministers and Scottish Cabinet Secretaries who got us into this mess—make no mistake, it is our mess to clean up now.

4.30 pm

If the refinery closes, jobs will be lost, communities will be impoverished, and Scotland's fuel and national security will absolutely be compromised. There are economic, social and moral reasons to keep Grangemouth working, but if they are not enough—and they really should be—let me say that there is also a political reason: we will be judged at the ballot box on what happens next, and not just at the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections.

To finish, let me say that it is not too late for the Government to do the right thing: speak with Unite the Union and listen to what it says, and engage and negotiate with Ineos to deliver a proper and true just transition, and to keep Grangemouth working until the new industrial cluster is ready at the site.

Harriet Cross: There are few areas of the country that are as reliant on, and therefore as vulnerable to, the energy industry as my constituency of Gordon and Buchan and wider north-east Scotland. It is because of this that I want the Government's energy strategy to be a success. Indeed, my constituents need it to be a success. However, that is why I have severe reservations about the Bill and why I believe that we must view the Great British Energy Bill not in isolation, but alongside the Government's wider energy strategy.

I begin by considering the public money involved—the £8.3 billion of taxpayers' money going into Great British Energy. Labour has cited international examples, such as France's EDF, as inspiration for Great British Energy, but let us examine EDF's recent history, which reads like a cautionary tale of state intervention gone wrong. In 2022, the French Government were forced to fully nationalise EDF, costing €9.7 billion, and in 2023, they had to inject another €13 billion. That huge expenditure of taxpayer money did not even solve EDF's problems; the company now faces debts exceeding €64 billion. Therefore, is £8.3 billion of investment into Great British Energy realistic?

Let us move on to Labour's wider energy strategy—perhaps there are assurances there that can help mitigate the apparent inadequate funding. Let us not forget that the UK will be using oil and gas for years to come, which is not disputed. The expectation that we should get this from our domestic oil and gas supplies should not be controversial, yet our energy security is being put at risk through the Government's actions and words. Jobs and investment in Gordon and Buchan and across north-east Scotland are being lost, and a home-grown energy transition is being made ever more difficult. It is incoherent to pump public money into the energy sector, while at the same time scaring away private investment from the very companies that will be vital to the energy transition, whether by announcing that there will be no new North sea licences, extending and increasing the windfall tax or removing investment allowances.

Offshore Energies UK has warned that expected tax changes could see investments in UK projects by oil and gas producers fall by about £12 billion by 2029. Last week, Reuters reported that a North sea producer is looking to sell stakes in its North sea assets and relist on the US stock exchange. The same article quoted the chief executive officer of TotalEnergies, who said that his team had halted exploration in the basin, and that:

“With this political landscape, even if you find something you're not sure you can develop it... The situation in the UK is very problematic.”

The CEO of Deltic Energy also announced plans to cut spending, telling Reuters:

“The clear message from key investors was ‘do not invest in the UK’.”

That is just a snapshot, but it puts the Government's £8.3 billion into context, alongside the other decisions that they are making.

Torcuil Crichton: Does the hon. Member accept that my constituents and hers have earned energy security for this country for the last two generations, and will do so in the North sea for another two generations?

Harriet Cross: I certainly hope that we will have the opportunity to do so, but as I am setting out, the Government's proposals for the North sea in respect of taxation and cutting down on licences do not guarantee that. As much as I and the hon. Member want and need for that to be the case for our constituents, we cannot guarantee it. That is why it is so important that we get the transition right.

The Bill must include consideration of the impact on the public. Communities such as Leylodge and Kintore in my constituency face unprecedented infrastructure pressures. Those communities have seen a 3 GW hydrogen plant, an expanded substation, multiple battery facilities and new pylons. What are their statutory protections? What assurances are there in the Bill that certain communities will not be over-saturated with an unsustainable amount of infrastructure?

Before the election, the Labour party claimed that GB Energy would reduce household bills by £300. Since then, Ministers have not repeated the promise and have not explained when or how it will be achieved. I am sure that the Labour Government would not want us to think that that promise was simply a headline-grabbing figure before an election, so I look forward to their clarifying that commitment and voting for our amendments on that figure.

Let me move on to the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow. We hear that GB Energy will create 650,000 jobs—apparently, 69,000 of them will be in Scotland, which, if delivered, would be welcome—but as is the running theme in this Bill, we do not have sufficient detail to offer even a grain of certainty to comfort those whose jobs are on the line now. Existing oil and gas and supply chain businesses in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and the north-east need a timeline so that they can plan their business and workforce. How, when and where will jobs be created? What kind of jobs and skills will be required?

Of course, we now have certainty that one job will not be coming to Scotland, as we hear that the CEO will be based in Manchester. Is Aberdeen a headquarters in name but not in nature? We already know that there will be satellite sites in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Which other executive management jobs will not be based in Aberdeen? We in north-east Scotland are not buttoned up the back, so will the Minister confirm today that Aberdeen is still the headquarters for GB Energy—and I mean that in no other way than the meaning that the general public would understand?

The funding may not be sufficient, the overall energy strategy is incoherent and there is no clarity on the delivery of jobs or any mention of £300 energy bill savings, but surely the Bill offers certainty to the very industry that will deliver the energy transition. That brings me to the strategic statement. One thing that we know for sure is that we do not know all we need to know about what GB Energy will do. As a result, the uncertainty will continue. For communities such as mine in Gordon and Buchan, and for businesses, supply chains and those working in the existing energy industry,

that is profound. We need to know how those communities will be brought with us in the transition—if it is, indeed, to be a just transition.

GB Energy will not generate energy, but it cannot instead generate mass redundancies across north-east Scotland. As has been mentioned, the Bill gives the Secretary of State extensive power to dictate what is in the strategic statement, and he has given himself the huge responsibility of ensuring that GB Energy delivers its aims. The work of the existing energy industry, and of communities such as Gordon and Buchan, must be taken into account. If it is not, the transition to cleaner, greener energies will be less efficient, less affordable and less possible. As such, I sincerely ask that the Secretary of State prepares the strategic priorities in a timely manner, taking account of stakeholders in the industry, the impacted communities, the current jobs and skills, and the existing businesses that are the bedrock of our future energy generation.

Because the Bill gives us all but no clarity on what is going to happen, the strategic statement—which we are all waiting for—is going to be the key document in dictating whether it will or will not be a success. As I said at the start of my speech, I want it to be a success; I want the UK to be a clean energy superpower, just as we are, and always were, an oil and gas superpower. If we get this right, that superpower status will drive the economy and jobs of the future. We cannot allow investment to be lost, because that means that investment in new technologies will be lost.

If we lose the expertise, the supply chains and the private investment because of the way this Bill is handled and how GB Energy is handled—there is no guarantee that private investment will stay in the UK just because GB Energy has been created—we will look back at this time and wish we had done things differently. I really do not want to be in that situation, because it is my communities in Gordon and Buchan and in north-east Scotland who will suffer the most.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): In a debate like this, it is important for Members to ensure that they link their contributions to the amendments we are addressing. I call Polly Billington.

Ms Billington: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will speak specifically to the amendments on community energy, and I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Back in 2016, I founded UK100, a network of local government leaders who are ambitious about shifting their communities and their economies to net zero. It is because of that experience, working with local leaders of all political persuasions across the country, that I would like to highlight the importance of a local-led approach to reaching our net zero targets. GB Energy will be able to play a crucial role in doing so by facilitating and encouraging local authorities to meet the ambitious net zero targets that have been set across the country. People will be familiar with the ambitions of big cities such as Leeds, Liverpool, Birmingham, Bristol and Brighton—to name but a few—but towns and villages in rural and coastal communities have also made those commitments. That is why community energy is so vital, and why it is so much a part of this Government's overall project and of this Bill.

Through the local power plan, GB Energy will be able to work with local and combined authorities to deliver hundreds of millions of pounds of funding to small and medium-scale clean energy projects, helping to turn those ambitious targets into reality. GB Energy will also be able to work with communities across the country to help deliver that local-led approach. I have seen some great real-world examples of community-led climate projects. For example, Green Meadows is a community climate action project in Nottingham, funded by the National Lottery's climate action fund, that aims to deliver home insulation, clean energy generation for local homes, planting projects and workshops to give residents the tools and skills they need to install their own energy upgrades.

With no disrespect to the National Lottery's fund, we need a more strategic approach to the local delivery of clean, home-grown, secure energy. That is the role of the GB Energy company. By working with communities and local people, GB Energy will be able to play a crucial role in building consent and support for clean energy projects, in order to reach our ambitious targets and avoid a backlash to net zero—we have already seen that backlash, particularly driven by some of the attitudes of the Conservative party. We have to bring people along with us and show them how they can tangibly benefit from the transition.

Net zero must not be something we do to people; it must be something we do with people. If we do not work with communities, we will face resistance across the country, but not because people are against tackling climate change. By involving people and showing them how they can tangibly benefit, we will face less resistance and deliver much quicker deployment of the energy projects we need to build. Swaffham Prior, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Pippa Heylings), is indeed a valuable project, but we cannot leave the transition to projects of that scale. To support community projects at scale, we need a transformative approach that is about transforming the rules of the market as much as it is about establishing GB Energy. Lastly, de-risking those projects—both at scale and community assets—will be a vital role of GB Energy.

Reaching net zero will be a partnership between the state, the private sector and the community. Government investment to help “crowd in” that private sector and community investment will be crucial. In that context, we often talk about new and developing technologies, but it is crucial not to forget existing, proven technologies.

4.45 pm

Integrated multi-technology projects, which incorporate solar panels, battery storage and EV infrastructure, are much more complex to build and therefore, at the moment, carry a greater financial risk of not becoming a reality. As we move towards smarter, more integrated energy systems, we have to keep that in mind to help those projects get off the ground.

I will finish with another example from my experience before I came to this place. The Trent Basin project in Nottingham was a fantastic innovation by a private company attempting to do a multi-technology project in a subsidy-free way. That has been important for the people who have ended up living there, but unfortunately it has continued to be an exception, not the rule, because there has not been the regulatory regime to develop

such projects. GB Energy will be part of that transformation by providing the investment as well as the regulatory framework for us to deliver the community energy that will be vital for the country's ambitions.

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): I rise to speak to amendment 5 alongside my hon. Friends. I welcome the fact that the Government are keen to increase the amount of energy produced by renewables—we have certainly waited far too long in this country for the priority and urgency needed to try to shift electricity production away from fossil fuels definitively. Unlike the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho), I look forward to the day when I can turn my lights on knowing that the electricity has been produced by the sun or wind.

I will acknowledge four excellent projects in my constituency, which are brilliant examples—or potential future examples—of community energy. South Brent Community Energy Society runs a community energy fund with the surplus from the operation of the wind turbine and solar panels that have been erected in the village. The fund is directed to new energy saving measures and renewable energy generation projects for the benefit of the community. Charities, schools and community groups have all benefited from the surplus energy that it produces, and it is a brilliant example of what can be done in a village environment with a community energy project.

Totnes Renewable Energy Society has solar panels on the roof of the civic hall that I can see from my bedroom window, and that power the electricity in my house, along with others. We also have a turbine in the river, which sadly does not have a name such as Thunder or Lightning like the ones in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart), but does power the local high school. I also give a shout-out to Sustainable Blackawton, which is keen to find a site for a wind turbine, and to the Bigbury Fan Club, which is setting out on a long journey to try to get a turbine there.

I have spoken to many constituents who are excited by the prospect of creating new solar or wind projects on community or municipal buildings, or wind turbines in a village, but they are struggling. It is complicated to get planning permission, it is difficult to get funding, and it is virtually impossible to connect new projects to the national grid. We must make it easier, simpler and faster to connect up community energy projects, not only so that we can transfer to clean energy, but so that communities across the country, like the brilliant example from Eigg in Scotland, can connect to renewable energy in that way.

In the early 2010s, we had the Green Investment Bank—what a shame that we lost it in 2014, and with it 10 years of potential investment in green projects. We need to catch up for the lost decade since the Liberal Democrats did so much to grow offshore wind when we were in office. We will support the Government's ambitions to transform our energy network, but community energy must be at the heart of it and baked into the Bill, so that every village that agrees to a wind turbine can benefit from it, knowing that they are using their own clean, locally produced energy for the benefit of their community, for lower bills and for cleaner energy.

We are calling for larger energy suppliers to work with community schemes across the country so that we can sell power to local customers at a discounted rate and provide community benefits.

Ms Billington: I would like further clarification about this interesting proposition from the Liberal Democrats about community energy groups working with the big energy companies. What plans do the Liberal Democrats have for the concept of securing ownership at community level? My concern about the model being suggested is that, rather than there being a community energy ownership model, it would instead be one of big companies investing in small communities.

Caroline Voaden: I thank the hon. Member for the intervention. The model would involve part ownership by the community and part ownership by large energy suppliers—

Pippa Heylings: And community energy groups.

Caroline Voaden: And community energy groups—but, yes, I will hand over to my hon. Friend, if I am allowed to do so.

Pippa Heylings: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Caroline Voaden: Yes, please.

Pippa Heylings: I think I will intervene, if that is okay with you, Madam Deputy Speaker. We welcome that question from the hon. Member for East Thanet (Ms Billington). In fact, there are multiple ownership models, so it is quite right to get clarification. Some of these will need investments from other companies, but others will—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. Please be seated. We have a speech mid-flow. Is that correct?

Caroline Voaden *indicated assent.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Then please continue. If you wish to respond to that intervention, you may do so, and I will go to another speaker afterwards.

Caroline Voaden: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

To guarantee that local communities receive a fair share of the wealth generated from community energy projects, it is crucial that these are at the heart of the Bill, so I would welcome the Government's support for amendment 5.

Luke Murphy: I welcome the opportunity to speak at the Report stage of the Great British Energy Bill. It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friends the Members for Bolsover (Natalie Fleet) and for Erewash (Adam Thompson), who gave such eloquent and powerful maiden speeches earlier in the debate. It is also a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for East Thanet (Ms Billington), who showed such leadership on this issue prior to her being elected to this House. As well as commenting on the overall thrust of the Bill, I want to comment on new clause 1 and amendments 6, 8 and 5.

It is somewhat surprising and, indeed, interesting to hear Conservative Members calling for a review of the effective delivery of energy policy, for legislation to reduce energy bills by £300 and for the creation of jobs as a result, not least because a review of energy policy and the trajectory of bills and jobs created under the previous Government would reveal some stark facts. Every family and business in Britain paid the price of 14 years of Conservative failure through rocketing energy bills. Indeed, Britain faced a worse cost of living crisis than other countries, because the Tories left us exposed to international fossil fuel markets controlled by dictators such as Putin.

When I said in my intervention on the right hon. Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho), who has since vacated the Opposition Front Bench, that we were reliant on Putin, she responded that I did not understand energy markets. I am afraid that just shows that she does not understand energy markets, because the truth is that we are at the mercy of international markets of which Russia is a part. The previous Government did absolutely nothing to reduce our reliance on volatile fossil fuels, and as a result of their failure to invest in clean energy, they left us with a legacy of high energy bills, energy insecurity and a lack of clean energy jobs. With our plans for Great British Energy and clean power by 2030, the new Labour Government are determined to change that.

I am somewhat surprised by amendment 8, which calls for legislating the creation of 650,000 jobs, not least because we create these jobs not through legislation but by having a meaningful industrial strategy, which was lacking under the previous Government. Figures from the Institute for Public Policy Research—which, I must admit, is my former employer—show that around 4% of our GDP is made up of green goods and services compared with the European average of 6%. If we had had an industrial strategy and created jobs from offshore wind at the same rate as Denmark did from its offshore sector, we could have green goods and services making up 11.5% of the economy and we could have created 100,000 more jobs. So although I admire thechutzpah of Opposition Members calling for price reductions, and the creation of 650,000 jobs, through legislation, I welcome instead our approach of creating a publicly owned energy generation company—the first in 75 years.

Andrew Bowie: All we are asking through our amendments is for the Government to put on the face of the Bill what they promised the British people, in their manifesto and many election campaign commitments, that Great British Energy would achieve. Why will the hon. Gentleman not challenge his Ministers to put on the face of this Bill the very things on which he stood for election, such as the creation of 650,000 jobs and the reduction of bills by £300?

Luke Murphy: I have to say that, whoever is the winner of the Conservative party leadership contest, I am not sure legislating for the creation of 650,000 jobs is the direction in which they will be heading. I do not believe we can legislate our way to job creation; I believe that is done by introducing an industrial strategy, something that was so lacking in the last 14 years.

Harriet Cross: Does the hon. Member appreciate that the issue is not legislating for jobs but the lack of accountability in the Bill?

Luke Murphy: We have set out our industrial strategy, along with this Bill on GB Energy, and a few weeks ago, with the investment summit, the investment that will be coming in. I am confident that the best way of creating jobs is through the industrial strategy and the creation of GB Energy. Yes, we made those commitments and I am confident that by 2030 we will have met our clean power target, reduced bills and created jobs and revived the industry across the country.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): If the hon. Gentleman is so confident in the policies of his Front Bench, will he take this moment to use the words that were used before the election by the Energy Secretary? He can repeat after me if it makes it easier: “We will cut bills by £300.”

Luke Murphy: I will take absolutely no lectures from Conservative Members about the need to reduce energy bills after they soared under the previous Government. Great British Energy’s core focus will be to drive clean energy deployments to create jobs, boost energy independence and ensure British taxpayers, bill payers and communities reap the benefits of clean, secure, home-grown energy. I am also surprised by the Conservatives’ opposition to a publicly owned clean energy company, not least because 50% of our offshore wind capacity is already publicly owned but by foreign states. I am surprised that Conservative Members are so happy with that scenario.

On amendment 5, I welcome the Liberal Democrats’ support for community energy, but as my hon. Friend the Member for East Thanet commented, it is in the founding statement. Labour Members are absolutely committed to community energy. It does not need to be on the face of the Bill, but it is important that it is part of the founding statement of GB Energy. Opposition Members can be reassured that we will champion community energy. In Basingstoke, we have Basingstoke Energy Services Co-op, which is a wonderful champion for this issue. I look forward to seeing what GB Energy will deliver for such community organisations.

5 pm

Overall, this Bill is part of the rapid action that the Labour Government have taken to deliver on our clean power mission, lifting the nine-year onshore wind ban, securing a record-breaking 131 new renewable projects—enough to power 11 million homes—consenting more solar projects than ever before, setting up mission control, and putting international climate leadership back at the heart of Government. I commend the Secretary of State for his leadership on this Bill and this issue, and I commend the Energy Minister for his leadership, and I commend the entire team. I look forward to voting for the Bill later tonight.

Dave Doogan (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): I rise to speak in support of amendment 1, in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), and amendment 5, tabled by the Liberal Democrats.

I am supportive of the Bill in the abstract, and I am certainly supportive of its headline ambitions, like many Members, but I trust that the Minister is hearing what the House is saying today about the substantive lack of information and detail, and the troubling direction

[Dave Doogan]

of travel, which will place significant executive authority in the hands of the Secretary of State in discharging GB Energy's responsibilities.

It is a pity, too, that the attrition to the original budget of £28 billion has nearly quartered it to £8 billion. I hope that the jobs associated with this implied investment do not go the same way as the budget, before they get the chance to take root in the north-east of Scotland and support my constituents and many others in that part of the country. It is a shame that the only person appointed to GB Energy is not working in Scotland at all. I am not sure that was on the script going into the election, but it seems to be what has happened afterwards.

Amendment 1 from the SNP asks the Labour Government to deliver upon what they said they would do ahead of the election. That does not strike me as particularly unreasonable. I do not think our amendment will be selected for separate decision, so I think we will be forced to vote with amendment 6 in the name of the right hon. Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho), which asks for basically the same thing. [Interruption.] The Minister is getting very excited. Of course, we would not have had to table an amendment if the Labour party had just put the measure in the Bill. It was in the leaflets, so I do not know why it was not in the Bill. It is also no longer £300 that we need to see reduced from hard-pressed working people's bills. Since Labour made that claim, bills have gone up by £149, so the Government will need to get £449 off people's bills before they can get back to where they started, certainly in terms of them having any credibility.

The Liberal Democrats have a well-worded and noble ambition on community energy, and the SNP would have been pleased to support it. One of the things missing from GB Energy is a statutory responsibility to develop and accelerate community energy at pace in a measured fashion. Referring back to my opening remarks, I am supportive of the Bill's outline ambitions, but I am worried about the lack of detail. The more we discuss and debate the Bill, the more I am concerned that GB Energy will end up doing lots of things that nobody particularly needed it to do, because they were all done by a department within the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

What we do not have is what people want GB Energy to do. We do want it to generate energy independently and to have an effect on the energy market in the United Kingdom. We do want it to sell energy to the retail market. We do want it to buy community energy from community energy generators and to introduce it into the market. And we do want it to enable community energy and to lower bills.

Ms Billington: All the things that the hon. Gentleman mentioned are exactly what GB Energy will do. There is literally no reason why he cannot go through the Lobby with Labour Members this evening, because the Great British Energy Bill will do all the things he has asked for it to do. It is nothing to do with sucking up the energy of the civil servants doing policy; that is a completely different role, and they will continue their work.

Dave Doogan: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, but I politely disagree. No amount of emphasis on her part will change the detail in the Bill, and that is what MPs are concerned about.

Luke Murphy: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dave Doogan: No, I am going to make progress.

The Minister has advised us that GB Energy will not seek to displace foreign-owned energy companies but will instead crowd in investment. In reference to the previously mentioned £300 bill reduction, he has also said that GB Energy will play a role in lowering bills but that that will not happen immediately. When he sums up, perhaps he can tell us when that will be, because it is not unreasonable for people to hear that ambition and to want to see a timeline attached to it. I also mentioned the attrition in GB Energy's funding. Given its now drastically reduced funding, will the Minister advise us what challenges he sees GB Energy facing?

When the Secretary of State was in opposition, he often made big play of the fact that there is a nationalised energy industry in the United Kingdom but that none of it is owned by the United Kingdom—it is all foreign. It seems a little odd that there is not the ambition, now that he is actually in power, to deliver that ownership.

Luke Murphy: Could the hon. Member update the House on the progress of the SNP Government's commitment in 2017 to create a publicly owned energy company by 2021?

Dave Doogan: He can indeed. The hon. Member may think he is being terribly smart—he is a self-professed expert in the energy market—but he will know how difficult it is for someone to penetrate the UK energy market unless they happen to be a large plc or a multinational. When the Scottish Government took forward that noble ambition, they found precisely the same barriers to entry as community energy companies and trusts. If the hon. Member wants to get excited about that situation, I suggest he takes it up with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Mr Angus MacDonald: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why the SNP Government have left community benefit at the same £5,000 level it was in 2014, even though prices have gone through the roof? Their advisory information could have been changed. They have been pressed on the issue many times because it has severely damaged the income of rural communities.

Dave Doogan: I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman is driving at, but if he wants to get in touch with me after the debate, I will be happy to discuss it further.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. We are debating the amendments to the Bill, not SNP policy.

Dave Doogan: Well, indeed.

Will the Minister advise us whether we are talking about GB electricity or GB energy? I would be keen to know what investments and ambition this supposedly state-owned company—I have to grit my teeth when I say that, because it is actually little more than a trading fund—will be involved in? Will it be involved in carbon capture, utilisation and storage? Will it be involved in attenuated hydro? Will it be involved in pumped storage, geothermal or hydrogen? What are the limits of GB Energy? That is not in the Bill, and we do not understand what it

will deliver. As other hon. Members have asked, what is the Government's ambition on GB Energy when it comes to Grangemouth? Is it just limited to the common or garden production of electricity?

I will not vote with the Government on the Bill. I do not want to condemn it as an election prop that is now desperately looking for some sort of function—I hope it amounts to more than that—but I will vote for the amendments, and so will my colleagues, to try to make some sense of the Bill.

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): The Bill's job is to set up a new and unique public energy company, to work within the clear objects set out in clause 3(2)—not simply as an investment bank, but as part of a developing strategy for renewables across the UK.

Cornwall, where I am from, is set to benefit hugely from the investment from GB Energy into unblocking floating offshore wind in the Celtic sea, which will create jobs. Cornwall was post-industrial a long time ago, and we need the kind of investment that GB Energy can bring. We also have a strong local area energy plan, which is an integral part of Cornwall's renewable energy offer. It has co-operative, community and local authority energy as part of that plan, and as a Co-operative MP I support the local power plan that the Government are proposing, which will be part of GB Energy. We could have partnerships for deep geothermal energy on council land, which would bring potential for partnerships with local authorities and others. In Cornwall we have had numerous community energy schemes, such as the one in Ladock at the end of last Labour Government, before the Conservatives cut the schemes and the feed-in tariffs. We could invest in infrastructure with GB Energy, in partnership with the Crown Estate, for the cables, the grid and, potentially, even the ports.

The Bill offers a huge opportunity. There is so much that GB Energy can do in future as part of a developing strategy to secure clean energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as it says in the Bill. As its ambitions and horizons expand, in partnership with the Crown Estate and others, so too must its object and its strategy be able to expand.

Sammy Wilson: I rise to support amendments 6 and 8. The Bill was promised in order to do a number of things. First, it was to reduce the cost of energy to consumers—during the election, the Government gave a specific promise that the reduction this year would be £300 per household. As others have said, and as the Government have accepted, that will not be delivered. That is not a great start. Secondly, it was going to deliver a certain number of jobs. Thirdly, it was going to deliver sustainable and clean energy, and energy security. The Government could argue that these things are in the Bill's strategic objectives and priorities, but they are not. I do not believe that any of those things can be achieved, given the net zero strategy that we are pursuing.

Let us take the first claim: that costs for consumers would come down. We know that they will not come down this year, and given what needs to be done to deliver the strategy, huge costs will be imposed on consumers. We will turn our backs on a lot of the hard plans we already have in place, even though they are not defunct. We are going to build new power sources. Whether they are

built by the state or by power companies, capital expenditure will be involved, and there will be a return on that capital. Who will give the return on that capital to the companies? It will be the consumers. We are going to build many of these power sources away from where people live, because the open areas for wind or solar are not beside centres of population.

We already know that putting in a totally new network will require a huge expenditure of billions—indeed, some have mentioned it here today. That will be costly and controversial. I have listened to Members today saying, “Oh, to ensure the lights are turned on and there is a supply of energy, my constituents will be quite happy to have huge pylons erected in their back gardens or down beside their houses.” Of course they won't; it will be controversial. That is why the Government will have to change the planning system, too.

5.15 pm

Who is going to pay for the infrastructure? It will be paid for by consumers. And then, of course, because the wind does not always blow and the sun does not always shine, we will have to keep fossil fuel stations going. Only two weeks ago, the head of the grid network indicated that there would need to be “a significant amount” of power plants in reserve for the cold, dull, windless weeks of winter, but that they would run for only limited periods. That is the problem. They will only run for limited periods, but they will need to be maintained. They will have to be turned on to supply electricity for those short periods, at about 20 times the cost of running them continuously. To do away with fossil fuel production, we will keep those plants and there will therefore be additional costs. We have to keep them for when the wind does not blow hard enough, and we will have to pay out when the wind blows too hard.

The reason cost is not mentioned in the Bill is that the Government know—this might be a price people are prepared to pay, but at least be honest with them—that additional costs are involved in decarbonising the electricity system. Those costs will be paid for by the people who consume electricity—we cannot run away from that. If the argument is that we are so concerned about the impact of the fossil fuels we burn and that this is a Government priority—despite India, China and everybody else happily burning fossil fuels and increasing emissions, and despite the fact that we account for only 3% of the world's emissions—then spell it out to ordinary consumers that there will be a price for them to pay. There will be a cost.

Graham Stringer: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that this debate would be much easier if the Committee on Climate Change had produced a year-by-year estimate of the costs of getting to net zero by 2050? The previous Government always promised to do a proper impact assessment on costs, but they never did. I believe that this Government should do that, so we can have an objective and evidence-based debate. Does he agree?

Sammy Wilson: I do agree. There have been variations on the cost, from £3 trillion to £10 trillion by 2050. Those Monopoly money figures mean nothing to people. Setting out the cost on a year-to-year basis, where people understand and Members who vote in this House understand what they are putting in front of their constituents by way of bills, would at least be honest. It would also mean there could be a proper debate.

[Sammy Wilson]

I support amendment 6, which includes the price commitment. The second commitment was on jobs. We are told there will be 650,000 jobs. I agree with the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Luke Murphy) who said that we cannot legislate for jobs. That is quite right. But if a promise is made about the job implications of a policy, there should be no fear of sticking it in the Bill. Not that the Government are going to produce those jobs; the companies are going to produce them. We could then measure that. If the Government cannot legislate for jobs, they should not promise that they are going to create 650,000 jobs, especially at a time when we know that jobs are being lost as a result of commitments relating to North sea oil and energy-efficient industries. The emissions trading scheme means that there is little or no investment in Grangemouth, for instance, and the place is going to close.

Luke Murphy: Successive Governments have made commitments on jobs, but can the right hon. Gentleman name any Government who have legislated for a jobs target? Can he specify a single Bill that has contained such a measure?

Sammy Wilson: As I have just said, it cannot be done. What I have said is that a Government should not make a promise if they believe that when the Bill in question is scrutinised, that promise will not be fulfilled—especially here, when it is known that the policy will cost jobs, and unions have already made that point.

I have some sympathy with the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton Pavilion (Siân Berry) in respect of the impacts on nature. I come from one of the most beautiful parts of the United Kingdom—the Antrim coast is famous for tourism—and I am already seeing the impact of net zero policies on the landscape and the flora and fauna of the Antrim plateau. When I look out of my window in the morning, there is the wind farm that has been erected on top of the plateau, which involved stripping off 3 metres of peat and destroying a bird habitat; every year these windmills chew up birds and bats. I have already mentioned the admission that 17 million trees had been cut down in Scottish forests, and the hon. Member for Brighton Pavilion was unfortunate to mention the Sperrins, another beautiful part of Northern Ireland of which I have some knowledge and which has been totally despoiled by hundreds of windmills.

Let us not pretend, then, that the policy of renewables is a green, clean policy, because it is not. Let us be honest: any energy production will require the extraction of fuels and materials from the earth, and that in itself will be destructive, so let us not describe it as nature-friendly or green. Let us just accept that what we need if we are to bring about economic growth and reduce the cost of living for our constituents is the cheapest, most available fuel that we can have. That will drive economic growth and decrease the cost of living, and that is the kind of energy policy that the Government ought to be following.

Perran Moon: The Conservatives are generally adamant that there very are few Labour Members with any business experience, so having spent more than 30 years in business—latterly in electric vehicle charging

infrastructure—I was reassured to learn while listening to the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Dr Mullan) that there is at least one Conservative who is not a renewable-energy Luddite, and I am glad to see him back in his place. I wish that the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) would spend a bit of time understanding a little more about geothermal energy, which does not require the wind to blow or the sun to shine.

I was honoured to be part of the Committee considering the Great British Energy Bill, a core plank of this Government's policy programme whose benefits will be felt in every corner of the UK, including my own constituency of Camborne, Redruth and Hayle. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks), for their diligent work on and defence of this transformational Bill. Let me also put on record my thanks not just to my right hon. and hon. Friends who sat on the Committee, but to other Members on both sides of the House who contributed to it.

I will refer to the amendments. In Committee we heard from experts and stakeholders, and we extensively debated the issues, from oversight to community benefit. Opposition Members who were on the Committee know that, because they were there. As I said when I made my maiden speech on Second Reading, my focus will be on using the opportunities of this Bill to unleash the Cornish Celtic tiger.

Renewable energy—onshore wind, offshore wind, geothermal, tidal and solar—and critical minerals such as tin, lithium, tungsten and manganese are fundamental for our transition away from fossil fuels. There is no silver bullet; we need a mix of renewable energy, which will form part of our policy going forward. That is what GB Energy will give us the opportunity to do.

There are few areas of the UK where there is a greater distillation of renewable energy and critical mineral opportunities than in Cornwall. I refer to the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) about human rights and the opportunity to produce domestically an awful lot of the energy and the critical minerals that we currently import from places such as China, Indonesia, Australia and South America. As a result, there are extremely high expectations in Cornwall for local jobs in industries that support community initiatives and domestic supply chains in one of the most deprived areas of northern Europe.

Given the distillation of raw materials and natural resources in Cornwall, the fact that the new Centre for Critical Minerals, which will accelerate the move towards a green economy, opened very recently in Cornwall, and the fact that Exeter University, which has a campus in Penryn, has the largest number of top-100 climate scientists in the world, it will not come as a surprise to the Minister that I ask him to consider opening a satellite office for Great British Energy in Cornwall. They may not want it in Aberdeen, but we want it in Cornwall.

I support the Bill as it is. We discussed the amendments in Committee, and I look forward to the opportunities that this Bill will bring to the people of Camborne, Redruth and Hayle.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. To ensure that I can call everybody in the time remaining, Back-Bench speeches will be limited to three minutes, after a maiden speech by Iqbal Mohamed.

Iqbal Mohamed (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech today. I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Bolsover (Natalie Fleet) and for Erewash (Adam Thompson) on their excellent maiden speeches. They have set a high bar that I will struggle to match.

I thank the people of Dewsbury and Batley for the trust they have placed in me. I am honoured and humbled to be their representative and a voice for all residents. Dewsbury and Batley is a newly formed constituency, so I thank my two predecessors. First, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Spen Valley (Kim Leadbeater) for her service as the MP for Batley and Spen. She helped secure funding for the town centre, and became an MBE for helping to promote social cohesion and tackling loneliness. I wish her well as the new Member for Spen Valley.

Secondly, I thank Mark Eastwood for his service as the MP for Dewsbury. He was a man of great perseverance and helped secure over £40 million in funding for the town. I am honoured to follow Mark as the second locally born and bred MP for Dewsbury.

I stand here as the eldest of six children born to Gujarati Indian immigrants who came here in the '60s. I am an immensely proud, passionate and no-nonsense British Indian Muslim Yorkshireman who grew up on a council estate in Dewsbury Moor on free school meals and uniforms. My late father, Gulam Ahmed, and my mother, Noorjhan Fatima, gave us love, put food in our bellies and taught us proper British and Islamic values, such as honesty, integrity, hard work, friendship, compassion and wanting the best for others.

My political journey started when I was around nine or 10 years old. I remember standing in front of my parents' wardrobe mirror and asking God to make me one of two things when I grew up. I asked to be either a "Blue Peter" presenter, because a job that paid you to travel the world, do amazing activities and be on TV was surely the best gig in town, or—and I did not know why at the time—I asked God to make me a parliamentarian. I remember looking down at the colour of my skin and thinking that that might be difficult, but here I am today in the most diverse Parliament in history, where I look forward to breaking down barriers, making friends, doing good and preventing harm. If a "Blue Peter" producer is watching, however, I am still available for a guest appearance or a Christmas special.

5.30 pm

I would like to put on record my heartfelt thanks to my amazing wife, Asma, who has been a pillar of support to me and my whole family for over 30 years. I also thank my teachers, my wider family, my campaign team and everyone who has helped me get to where I am today.

One of the meanings of the name Dewsbury is "God's town", which is reflected today in its diverse communities living in harmony and in the many places of worship.

It is home to the famous Dewsbury market, which was established in the 14th century and was my first place of employment, aged 14, on a wage of £4 a day. Dewsbury and Batley became a global textile centre during the industrial revolution and a world leader in recycled wool textiles known as shoddy and mungo. Today, despite the lack of support, my constituency is a leader in bed and furniture manufacturing, and it competes with Bradford for the best curry in the UK. It is also home to the Dewsbury Rams and Batley Bulldogs rugby clubs. Dewsbury and Batley have too many worthy sons and daughters to mention, including Nobel laureates. I will, however, pay tribute to the late Jo Cox MP, who is fondly remembered and dearly missed to this day.

I stand today in the mother of Parliaments, but it is a sad indictment of our democracy that most people in our country are dissatisfied with the mainstream parties and their policies, politics and behaviours. Many feel trampled on, ignored, powerless and disenfranchised, and I am repeatedly told that politicians are all the same and just in it for themselves. People have lost hope and trust in politics and politicians, and it is our duty in this House to restore their faith by putting the interests of the people who elected us above ourselves, our careers, party donors, corporations and malign influences. After 15 weeks as an MP, it is unclear to me how the Whip system is democratic or in what way expensive gifts can help MPs better represent their constituents. I hope to support the Modernisation and Standards Committees and to work in this place to help restore the trust of the people we represent.

Some have sought to present my election and that of other independents as sinister or a threat to democracy. In fact, I was selected from 12 applicants to stand as the sole independent candidate in an open, rigorous and democratic process. My election had nothing to do with sectarian politics or caricatures about Muslim voters being manipulated by their spiritual leaders. It had everything to do with the state of our country and the raw anger over Tory complicity in, and Labour's refusal to call out, the unfolding genocide in Palestine. The attacks on 7 October were appalling, and I reiterate the calls for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages on both sides and unfettered access to humanitarian aid. When the Prime Minister endorsed the right of the Israeli Government to cut off water and electricity to the people of Gaza, people in Dewsbury and Batley said, "No, not in our name." What has happened in Gaza since is beyond words.

Earlier this month, the UN reported that Israel had committed war crimes and the crime against humanity of extermination in Gaza, adding to the International Court of Justice's conclusion in January that Israel's actions may plausibly amount to genocide. Most British people want an immediate ceasefire and an end to the UK's complicity. They are sick and tired of the double standards, with politicians lining up to condemn and sanction Russian aggression in Ukraine yet defend the most heinous crimes of Israel. Our compassion for Palestinian lives is not inversely proportional to our compassion for Israeli lives, or vice versa. All lives are equal, and our compassion must also be equal.

For the Prime Minister to call for a ceasefire while arming and defending Israel is meaningless and does nothing to bring an end to the killing. And for the Foreign Secretary yesterday to deny that genocide is

even taking place, simply because the Israelis have not yet killed enough Palestinians, is shameful and wilfully misrepresents what genocide is. Legal experts are warning that international law and the rules-based order are collapsing, along with the rest of Gaza.

On Sunday, I met Amin, a British-Palestinian constituent from Gaza. He told me that his 93-year-old father and whole extended family had been displaced, and that nothing remains of their homes or lives in Gaza. On behalf of Amin, his family and all the Palestinian people, I implore the UK Government to take a moral and legal lead and to do everything in their power to uphold the UK's obligation to halt the genocide and end the 76 years of unlawful occupation.

The ongoing genocide was a huge factor in my election, but it was not the only factor. Voters in Dewsbury and Batley have been hit hard by 14 years of Tory austerity and decades of local government failure that have decimated our public services. In one of my wards, three in five children are now living in poverty. Across Kirklees, the most deprived people live, on average, eight years less than the least deprived. It simply defies belief that among the first actions of this Labour Government was to pick the pockets of pensioners by taking away their winter fuel allowance and to refuse to lift the two-child benefit cap.

The fact is that a huge number of our fellow citizens are in real financial distress every day of every week, and the Government need to take immediate action to help them. I am concerned about the impact of yet more austerity on community cohesion. As a British Muslim and person of colour, I was alarmed when I heard one of the candidates in the Tory leadership contest say that 1 million migrants should be deported and that Muslims should be arrested for saying, "Allahu Akbar," which just means, "God is the greatest," because I know who will be the real beneficiaries of those comments.

We have seen where this kind of rhetoric leads—riots on our streets, asylum shelters attacked, religious institutions besieged by mobs, families and communities terrorised. This place must set the example for the people of Britain to follow. We must root out racism and bigotry, and we must reject any narrative that seeks to blame asylum seekers and immigrant communities for the decades of austerity that have eroded the fabric of once secure communities.

I believe that politics, when done correctly, is one of the highest forms of public service and a force for good for the many, not only the few. In my time in Parliament, I promise not to deliberately cause any harm to my fellow Members, our nation, the people of our country or the wider world. I am committed to working with all Members and all communities to create a more just and equal society, to end poverty and tackle inequality, to speak for those who feel forgotten and who have been left behind, and to try to harness their grievances as a force for good.

Victoria Collins (Harpenden and Berkhamsted) (LD): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Energy is at the heart of our economy. It powers our homes, our schools, our workplaces and even our democracy. Most importantly, it is at the heart of our communities. This Bill must ensure that it brings those

communities and community energy projects with it, which is why I am speaking wholeheartedly in support of amendment 5.

Local to Harpenden and Berkhamsted is the Grand Union Community Energy benefit society, which runs several community energy fund schemes, including solar canopies, and is investigating heating from aquifers. As a not-for-profit, it aims to use its proceeds to help householders, especially the most vulnerable, to reduce their energy bills and energy use. It also supports other community organisations that do not have a regular income. In Berkhamsted, it has worked with Sunnyside Rural Trust to review the energy strategy of its Northchurch site. I have spoken to passionate members, such as Sarah, Paul and John, about why they are making it work and the difficulties they face.

If we are to reach net zero, community energy is needed to fill a gap between individuals, businesses and councils. It was John who reminded me that if community energy is supported, there is a significant resource of people ready and waiting to put their voluntary efforts into getting schemes off the ground. By their very nature, they are embedded in their communities, and we must bring our communities with us if we are to make the change that is needed.

However, our community energy projects need support. Community energy projects face insurmountable costs when trying to sell the power they generate to local consumers. Grand Union Community Energy is nervous about taking on the delivery of projects, as there is uncertainty about how electricity prices may change in the future. Community energy needs stability too. As it stands, community energy schemes find it nigh impossible to sell their power directly to local consumers, which leaves pricing and some projects financially unviable without further support.

Previously, feed-in tariffs helped to provide pricing stability, but when that scheme ended in 2019, many planned community projects were scrapped and the number of new projects slowed significantly. Current access to funding has been vague, erratic and uncertain, especially since the rural community energy scheme ended, and I know many people have not bothered to apply for funding because they find it so difficult.

We must unlock the potential of our community energy projects, and that is why I support amendment 5. There are many ownership models. The Liberal Democrats are calling for large energy suppliers, when they work with community energy projects, to work with them to sell the power they generate to local customers at a discounted rate and provide community benefits. Overall, we must ensure that these projects are financially viable and supported with technical, commercial and legal advice, and we must seize this opportunity to bring our communities with us.

Wera Hobhouse: I welcome that the Government are taking renewable energy investment seriously and creating a mechanism for it. In common with many Liberal Democrat Members, I will focus on amendment 5, which would specifically require Great British Energy to support community energy projects as part of its strategic priorities.

Labour Front Benchers have supported community energy for a long time, and cross-party support was clearly displayed on Second Reading, as it is by the large number

of Members' signatures on amendment 5. The same was true of my amendment 2, which was sadly defeated in Committee. To their credit, the previous Government introduced the community energy fund, which made a difference, but more needs to be done to support community energy. Despite strong cross-party support for community energy, the Great British Energy Bill makes no mention of it. Liberal Democrat Members believe that it should be on the face of the Bill.

In Committee, the Minister said that including community energy in the Bill was not appropriate. I understand that GB Energy is not precluded from supporting community energy by the Bill, just as I understand the Government's argument that if the new company is to be able to work flexibly, it should not be hampered by too many provisions in the Bill. However, our concern remains that unless something concrete is included in the Bill, future Ministers, Governments or chief executives of Great British Energy may decide not to support community energy and the full benefits of local energy may not be realised. Amendment 5 would strengthen the Bill in line with the clear parliamentary consensus in support of growth in this highly promising clean energy sector.

The community energy sector has seen minimal growth in recent years. It has suffered from damaging policies, such as the end of the feed-in tariffs that helped fuel growth. Since 2010, there has been no growth in the sector. Regulatory changes are required to ensure that communities receive the benefits they deserve for hosting clean energy infrastructure. All of these arguments are well understood and the benefits of community energy have been well researched. The new Government have said time and again that they support community energy and that it is a shared aim.

I welcome the conversation and the open debate on this issue. I understand that the Government take issue with putting the term "priority" on the face of the Bill. The passage of the Bill has not reached its final stages, and there is room for further debate. I very much hope that the Government recognise how strongly colleagues across the House feel about including specific support for community energy, and that such an inclusion will create cross-party support for the Bill as a whole.

Llinos Medi (Ynys Môn) (PC): First, let me congratulate the hon. Member for Dewsbury and Batley (Iqbal Mohamed) on his passionate maiden speech.

I rise to speak to amendments 11 and 12, tabled in my name, which seek to provide certainty to particular energy sectors that they will be prioritised by GB Energy. I must declare an interest as an officer of the marine energy all-party parliamentary group, of which the UK Marine Energy Council is the secretariat.

5.45 pm

The commission has recommended that the Government commit £250 million, which is 3% of the Great British Energy budget of £8.3 billion, to accelerate deployment of, and embed UK content in, marine energy projects. This is in addition to a clear gigawatt deployment target by the Government, which would help the sector to flourish. In my constituency of Ynys Môn, we have the community-owned marine energy project, Morlais. Such

a measure could improve the sector and give it the certainty that it needs to use the natural resources around our country.

Let me turn now to amendment 12. I am incredibly disappointed to see that the Bill makes no mention of nuclear energy. My amendment would require Great British Energy to work with Great British Nuclear on the development of new projects in the UK, such as the Wylfa site on Ynys Môn. At present, it is unclear how GB Energy and GB Nuclear will interact with each other. We cannot afford a further delay in developing new nuclear projects, and amendment 12 would provide much-needed clarity on the Government's plan.

Finally, I turn to my last set of amendments relating to Wales. We need to ensure that there are meaningful benefits from energy projects in Wales, and this should include increasing the ownership of projects. Amendment 13 is based on the recommendation of the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales that policy should require renewable energy developments to offer up elements of community ownership. This is to address the current imbalance where companies and communities from elsewhere in the UK benefit from Welsh projects at a cost to the local communities. The commission has suggested that 20% of each project should be offered up, split equally between both local communities and the Wales-based organisations.

In my constituency, there is a proposal for a vast 360 MW solar farm, with only 1.5% of the gigawatts produced being offered to the local community. Under amendment 13, at least 36 MW would have to be offered for community ownership, a vast improvement given the economic damage that such a vast industrial site will have on the island.

To complement this amendment, I am also pleased to be supporting amendment 5, which would ensure that developing community energy is a priority of GB Energy. My colleague, the right hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), tabled an amendment at Committee stage of the Bill that would have ensured that the revenues generated from all projects based in Scotland would be retained in Scotland. That is a fair principle, which should also be extended to Wales, and is the reason why I have tabled amendment 14. Wales is a net exporter of energy, yet we have some of the highest energy bills in the UK.

Finally, amendment 15 would require express consent—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Nick Timothy.

Nick Timothy: I shall speak briefly about amendment 6 tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho).

In this debate, we have heard much from Government Members about cleaner and cheaper energy, not much of which has been connected to reality. This has been exposed by Labour's campaigning before the election, promising £300 off bills, only to drop that commitment as soon as the party entered government. That disconnect, as I have said, has been present throughout the debate.

Blind faith in renewable technology without the acceptance of the intermittency challenges and costs of wind and solar will lead to less security of supply and higher costs for industry and households. We cannot

[Nick Timothy]

allow policy to run faster than technology without risking a crisis in the grid and, therefore, in our economy. We need baseload power, which means nuclear—where the Secretary of State is going slow—and oil and gas, where the Secretary of State is refusing new licences. To pursue the ideological objectives of the Secretary of State, we see giant solar farms forced on communities like mine, against expert advice by examining authorities, contrary to the quasi-judicial responsibilities of the Secretary of State and dependent on solar panels made by slaves in Xinjiang. I say enough of the nonsense about fossil fuels and the dependence on dictators.

Tomorrow the Chancellor of the Exchequer will announce her intention to borrow to invest. We know that the borrowing will not just be for investment, but what investment there is will be dominated by energy schemes that will cost more to do less. We do have an underinvested economy, but net zero zealotry will make the problem worse, not better.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): I thank all Members who have made contributions to the debate, and I am grateful for all the points raised in Committee. I thank the witnesses who gave their time to the Committee, as well as the Clerks, House staff and civil servants, who put so much work into legislation such as this. I apologise to the House in advance both for the speed of my speaking and the speed with which I will have to go through the amendments—there is not a huge amount of time left.

First, I want to highlight the three maiden speeches that we have heard today. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Natalie Fleet) gave an incredibly emotional speech, and spoke passionately about the importance of the state having an impact on people's lives. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Adam Thompson) for telling us, apart from anything else, how to pronounce his constituency, and to the hon. Member for Dewsbury and Batley (Iqbal Mohamed), who I am sure will at least receive a Blue Peter badge in the post for his speech.

Great British Energy is at the heart of our clean power mission, and the Bill provides the statutory basis for it, enabling the Government to deliver on the ambitions that we set out during the election and that the country voted for so resoundingly just a few months ago. Let me turn to the amendments. New clause 1, in the name of the right hon. Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho), would create additional reporting mechanisms for Great British Energy. I agree with her that Great British Energy should be accountable, transparent and open in all its dealings and in how it delivers a return on investment. That is why we have made provision in the Bill to ensure that regular updates are given in the form of annual reports and accounts, which will be laid before Parliament for all Members to review. Of course, as a company, it will undergo external audit in the usual manner. As I outlined in Committee, my view remains that adding additional requirements at such frequent intervals is disproportionate and will stop the company from getting on with delivering its mission.

On amendments 6 and 7 in the name of the right hon. Member for East Surrey, and amendment 1 in the name of the right hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), every family and business in this country has paid the price for our dependence on fossil fuels during the cost of living crisis. Speeding up the roll-out of clean energy is the only way to get our country off the rollercoaster of volatile international gas markets and to protect families from future energy shocks. That is the argument that the Conservative party used to support but that it seems increasingly to distance itself from, as it has with so many principled positions.

Dave Doogan: Will the Minister give way?

Michael Shanks: I do not have time, I am afraid.

We are unapologetic that Great British Energy is a long-term project for this country, as part of a sustainable, long-term plan to protect bill payers for good. I stand by that commitment today. However, I also say, as we have said about so much of the mess that we have to clean up, that we cannot simply flick a switch and turn everything around, which is why these amendments are inappropriate. Conservative Members would never have made such amendments to a Bill when they were in government.

Let me turn to the amendments on jobs and industrial strategy. The Government are clear that clean energy is the economic and industrial opportunity of our time. Around the world, a race for jobs and industries of the future is speeding up, but for too long Britain has opted out and lost out. Great British Energy is at the heart of our plan to change that. It will help to rebuild the UK's industrial heartlands through its investments across every part of the UK, and locating Great British Energy's headquarters in Aberdeen will tap into the high-quality talent pool of Aberdeen and Scotland as a whole. We will use every tool at our disposal to win jobs for Britain. We have established the office for clean energy jobs, and are focused on developing the skills of the future, so that we have a workforce that can deliver what we need in future. Crucially, it is why the Government are, as many hon. Members have said, committed to a proper industrial strategy.

The amendments tabled by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Pippa Heylings) relate to the timeline for establishing Great British Energy, to energy efficiency and to community energy. Although I welcome and, frankly, share the hon. Member's eagerness to get Great British Energy up and running as quickly as possible, we will not be supporting amendment 3. The Government have already shown themselves to be committed to setting up Great British Energy as quickly as possible, and there will be no further delays in doing so. Indeed, of all the things that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State could be accused of, not moving quickly is not one of them.

Dave Doogan: Will the Minister give way?

Michael Shanks: I do not have time—I have a minute in which to finish.

I hope the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire will recognise that there is really no need to put an amendment such as this one on the face of the Bill. Turning to her amendment on the topic of community energy, she will

know, however, that I am passionate about community energy, as are the Government. It will form an integral part of Great British Energy's local power plan, which will put communities at the heart of the energy transition, giving them a stake in the shift to net zero. As a member of not just the Labour party but the Co-operative party, that is at the heart of my politics and that of many of my hon. Friends. We have been advocating for community energy for decades—this is not a new idea for us—and empowering communities is critical. The hon. Lady and I share that passion and a commitment to community energy.

I can assure the House that the Department is looking to take a cross-government approach—not just through Great British Energy but, crucially, on a number of the points that have been made—to ensuring that community energy projects can be delivered, with all the changes to planning and governance that are required to make that happen. I always want to work with Members across this House, and have done so throughout the passage of the Bill. We continue to engage with the Liberal Democrats and other interested parties on this important issue, exploring options to ensure the Bill has the effects they are seeking. I look forward to further such discussions in the weeks and months ahead. I hope all who have tabled or spoken to amendments today will feel reassured by what I have outlined—albeit considerably more briefly than I was expecting—and will perhaps feel able to withdraw, or not move, their amendments.

This is a truly historic Bill, delivering on the Government's promise to establish a new national, publicly owned energy champion for our country. It has been a privilege to take it through Committee, and I repeat my sincere thanks to everyone involved in that process. Great British Energy is the right idea for energy security, for bills, for jobs, and for delivering the climate leadership that the people of this country demand of their Government. It is the right idea for our time, hugely supported by the British public, and I urge all Members of the House to support it this evening.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Claire Coutinho: I also thank the Minister for his work in Committee, but I am afraid we are not reassured. Labour Members have a clear opportunity to prove to their constituents that they will stick to the promises they made just a few months ago. They promised to cut energy bills by £300 and to create 650,000 jobs; if Labour Members do not vote for amendments 6 and 8 this evening, we will know that they never had any intention of delivering on those promises. With the leave of the House, I will seek to withdraw new clause 1, which stands in my name, but we look forward to dividing the House on amendments 6 and 8.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3

OBJECTS

Amendment proposed: 4, page 2, line 18, at end insert—

“(e) an emergency home insulation programme with targeted support for people on low incomes, and

(f) the expansion and development of renewable energy and technology.”—(*Pippa Heylings.*)

This amendment would set objects for Great British Energy of facilitating, encouraging and participating in an emergency home insulation programme with targeted support for people on low incomes, and the expansion and development of renewable energy and technology.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 96, Noes 353.

Division No. 24]

[5.58 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat	Lake, Ben
Amos, Mr Gideon	Law, Chris
Aquarone, Steff	Leadbitter, Graham
Babarinde, Josh	Lockhart, Carla
Bennett, Alison	Logan, Seamus
Berry, Siân	MacCleary, James
Blackman, Kirsty	MacDonald, Mr Angus
Brewer, Alex	Maguire, Ben
Brown-Fuller, Jess	Maguire, Helen
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Martin, Mike
Cane, Charlotte	Mathew, Brian
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Maynard, Charlie
Chadwick, David	Medi, Llinos
Chamberlain, Wendy	Mierlo, Freddie van
Chambers, Dr Danny	Miller, Calum
Chowns, Ellie	Milne, John
Collins, Victoria	Mohamed, Iqbal
Cooper, Daisy	Moran, Layla
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Morello, Edward
Dance, Adam	Morgan, Helen
Darling, Steve	Munt, Tessa
Davey, rh Ed	Murray, Susan
Davies, Ann	O'Hara, Brendan
Dean, Bobby	Olney, Sarah
Denyer, Carla	Perteghella, Manuela
Dillon, Mr Lee	Pinkerton, Dr Al
Doogan, Dave	Reynolds, Mr Joshua
Dyke, Sarah	Robinson, rh Gavin
Easton, Alex	Roome, Ian
Farron, Tim	Sabine, Anna
Flynn, rh Stephen	Savage, Dr Roz
Foord, Richard	Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Franklin, Zöe	Shannon, Jim
George, Andrew	Slade, Vikki
Gethins, Stephen	Smart, Lisa
Gibson, Sarah	Sollom, Ian
Gilmour, Rachel	Stone, Jamie
Glover, Olly	Swann, Robin
Goldman, Marie	Taylor, Luke
Gordon, Tom	Thomas, Cameron
Green, Sarah	Voaden, Caroline
Harding, Monica	Wilkinson, Max
Heylings, Pippa	Wilson, Munira
Hobhouse, Wera	Wilson, rh Sammy
Hussain, Mr Adnan	Wishart, Pete
Jardine, Christine	Young, Claire
Jarvis, Liz	
Jones, Clive	
Khan, Ayoub	
Kohler, Mr Paul	

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Mr Tom Morrison and
Mr Will Forster**

NOES

Abbott, Jack	Anderson, Callum
Abrahams, Debbie	Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Arthur, Dr Scott
Akehurst, Luke	Asser, James
Aldridge, Dan	Athwal, Jas
Alexander, Heidi	Atkinson, Catherine
Ali, Rushanara	Atkinson, Lewis
Ali, Tahir	Bailey, Mr Calvin

Baines, David
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Begum, Apsana
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Bishop, Matt
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Buckley, Julia
 Burgon, Richard
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Clark, Feryal
 Coleman, Ben
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Craft, Jen
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Dalton, Ashley
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dean, Josh
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha

Dollimore, Helena
 Downie, Graeme
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Hurley, Patrick
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian

Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir
 Kendall, rh Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kumaran, Uma
 Kyle, rh Peter
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Miliband, rh Ed
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke

Naish, James
 Naismith, Connor
 Nandy, rh Lisa
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Scrogg, Michelle
 Seward, Mr Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex

Stainbank, Euan
Stevens, rh Jo
Stewart, Elaine
Stone, Will
Strathern, Alistair
Strickland, Alan
Stringer, Graham
Sullivan, Kirsteen
Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Sultana, Zarah
Swallow, Peter
Tami, rh Mark
Tapp, Mike
Taylor, Alison
Taylor, David
Taylor, Rachel
Thomas, Fred
Thomas, Gareth
Thompson, Adam
Thornberry, rh Emily
Tidball, Dr Marie
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Toale, Jessica
Tufnell, Henry
Turley, Anna
Turmaine, Matt
Turner, Laurence

Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Uppal, Harpreet
Vaughan, Tony
Vaz, rh Valerie
Vince, Chris
Wakeford, Christian
Walker, Imogen
Ward, Chris
Waugh, Paul
Webb, Chris
Welsh, Michelle
Western, Andrew
Wheeler, Michael
Whitby, John
White, Jo
White, Katie
Williams, David
Witherden, Steve
Woodcock, Sean
Wrighting, Rosie
Yang, Yuan
Yemm, Steve
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

**Kate Dearden and
Keir Mather**

Question accordingly negated.

6.14 pm

Proceedings interrupted (Programme Order, 5 September).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

Clause 5

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND PLANS

Amendment proposed: 6, in page 3, line 8, at end insert—

“(1A) The statement of strategic priorities under subsection (1) must include the reduction of household energy bills by £300 in real terms by 1 January 2030.”—(*Claire Coutinho.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 124, Noes 361.

Division No. 25]

[6.14 pm

AYES

Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atkins, rh Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Barclay, rh Steve
Bedford, Mr Peter
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blackman, Kirsty
Bool, Sarah
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, rh Dame Karen
Brandreth, Aphra
Braverman, rh Suella
Burghart, Alex
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartlidge, James
Chope, Sir Christopher

Cleverly, rh Mr James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Cocking, Lewis
Cooper, John
Costa, Alberto
Coutinho, rh Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Cross, Harriet
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Mims
Dewhurst, Charlie
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Doogan, Dave
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Easton, Alex
Evans, Dr Luke
Farage, Nigel
Flynn, rh Stephen
Fortune, Peter
Fox, Sir Ashley
Francois, rh Mr Mark

Freeman, George
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Garnier, Mark
Gethins, Stephen
Glen, rh John
Grant, Helen
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Alison
Harris, Rebecca
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holmes, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Jopp, Lincoln
Khan, Ayoub
Kruger, Danny
Lam, Katie
Lamont, John
Law, Chris
Leadbitter, Graham
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Lockhart, Carla
Logan, Seamus
Lopez, Julia
Lowe, Rupert
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
McMurdock, James
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mundell, rh David
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Norman, rh Jesse
Obese-Jecty, Ben

Abbott, Jack
Abrahams, Debbie
Adam, Shockat
Ahmed, Dr Zubir
Akehurst, Luke
Aldridge, Dan
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Anderson, Callum
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Arthur, Dr Scott
Asser, James
Athwal, Jas
Atkinson, Catherine
Atkinson, Lewis
Bailey, Mr Calvin
Baines, David
Baker, Alex
Baker, Richard
Ballinger, Alex
Bance, Antonia
Barker, Paula
Barron, Lee
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
Baxter, Johanna

O'Brien, Neil
O'Hara, Brendan
Paul, Rebecca
Philp, rh Chris
Raja, Shivani
Rankin, Jack
Reed, David
Robertson, Joe
Robinson, rh Gavin
Rosindell, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Simmonds, David
Smith, Greg
Smith, rh Sir Julian
Smith, Rebecca
Snowden, Mr Andrew
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, Patrick
Stafford, Gregory
Stephenson, Blake
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Swann, Robin
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Thomas, Bradley
Tice, Richard
Timothy, Nick
Trott, rh Laura
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Whately, Helen
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wild, James
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Alicia Kearns and
Jerome Mayhew**

NOES

Beales, Danny
Beavers, Lorraine
Bell, Torsten
Benn, rh Hilary
Berry, Siân
Betts, Mr Clive
Billington, Ms Polly
Bishop, Matt
Blake, Rachel
Bloore, Chris
Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Bonavia, Kevin
Botterill, Jade
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
Brash, Mr Jonathan
Brickell, Phil
Buckley, Julia
Burgon, Richard
Burke, Maureen
Burton-Sampson, David
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Caliskan, Nesil
Campbell, rh Sir Alan

Campbell, Irene
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Chowns, Ellie
 Clark, Feryal
 Coleman, Ben
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Craft, Jen
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dean, Josh
 Denyer, Carla
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dollimore, Helena
 Downie, Graeme
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill

Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Hurley, Patrick
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir
 Kendall, rh Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kumaran, Uma
 Kyle, rh Peter
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin

Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Miliband, rh Ed
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Naismith, Connor
 Nandy, rh Lisa
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe

Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Scrogham, Michelle
 Sowards, Mr Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Trickett, Jon
 Tuftnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Laurence
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony

Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo

White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

Kate Dearden and
 Keir Mather

Smith, Rebecca
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Swann, Robin
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick

Trott, rh Laura
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:

Jerome Mayhew and
 Alicia Kearns

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment proposed: 8, page 3, line 8, at end insert—

“(1A) The statement of strategic priorities under subsection (1) must include the creation of 650,000 new jobs in the United Kingdom by 2030 resulting directly or indirectly from Great British Energy’s pursuit of its objectives under section 3.”—(*Claire Coutinho.*)
Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 115, Noes 361.

Division No. 26]

[6.29 pm

AYES

Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Bedford, Mr Peter
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bool, Sarah
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brandreth, Aphra
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Burghart, Alex
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartlidge, James
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Cleverly, rh Mr James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Cocking, Lewis
 Cooper, John
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, rh Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Cross, Harriet
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Dewhurst, Charlie
 Dinéage, Dame Caroline
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Easton, Alex
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Garnier, Mark
 Glen, rh John
 Grant, Helen
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Alison

Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Holmes, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jopp, Lincoln
 Kruger, Danny
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Lopez, Julia
 Lowe, Rupert
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 McMurdoch, James
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O’Brien, Neil
 Paul, Rebecca
 Philp, rh Chris
 Raja, Shivani
 Rankin, Jack
 Reed, David
 Robertson, Joe
 Robinson, rh Gavin
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian

Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Adam, Shockat
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Baines, David
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Begum, Apsana
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berry, Siân
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Bishop, Matt
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Buckley, Julia
 Burgon, Richard
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus

NOES

Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Chowns, Ellie
 Clark, Feryal
 Coleman, Ben
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Craft, Jen
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Dalton, Ashley
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dean, Josh
 Denyer, Carla
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dollimore, Helena
 Downie, Graeme
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh

Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Hurley, Patrick
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir
 Kendall, rh Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Ayoub
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kumaran, Uma
 Kyle, rh Peter

Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Miliband, rh Ed
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Naismith, Connor
 Nandy, rh Lisa
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo

Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Scroggum, Michelle
 Sowards, Mr Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan

Stevens, rh Jo
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Trickett, Jon
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Laurence
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

**Kate Dearden and
 Keir Mather**

Question accordingly negated.

Third Reading

6.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It is a privilege to open the Third Reading debate—another milestone in setting up Great British Energy. In less than four months, this Government have incorporated GBE as a company, appointed Juergen Maier as its start-up chair, and launched its first partnership with the Crown Estate. Next will be the national wealth fund. Earlier this month, we announced GBE's partnership with

key public bodies in Scotland. We have also announced its headquarters in Aberdeen. We are acting on our mandate from the British people.

I want to thank everyone who has played a role in getting the Bill to this stage: the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks), who has done an incredible job steering the Bill through Committee; Members across the House who have scrutinised the Bill in Committee; all the parliamentary staff who have worked on the Bill; and the fantastic officials in my Department who have moved at such speed over the last four months.

I also want to thank the witnesses who gave evidence to the Committee, all of whom were in support of establishing Great British Energy. I am sure that the House will be interested in the list. They include SSE, EDF, Energy UK, RenewableUK, Scottish Renewables, the Carbon Capture and Storage Association, Nesta, the Green Alliance, the Net Zero Technology Centre, the TUC, Prospect and the GMB. And they are not the only ones. I can inform the House that they join a growing list of supporters, including the CBI, the Aldersgate Group, Octopus Energy, E.ON, the Hydrogen Energy Association, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the Port of Aberdeen, the University of Aberdeen and, of course, the British people themselves, who overwhelmingly backed Great British Energy at the general election. Sadly, the only people you can find to oppose Great British Energy are the faction of a sect of a once-great party sitting on the Opposition Benches.

The reason for such support—this will be the argument behind politics for the next few years—is that this country recognises it is time to invest in Britain's future and put an end to the decline of the last 14 years. That is the choice of this Bill and the choice of the coming years in British politics, and we should relish it: invest or decline.

Sarah Champion: I am fully supportive of GB Energy, but what assurances can my right hon. Friend give to the House that it will be a just transition, that it will be adopted across Government, and that the broadest sector will buy into it?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend has made really important interventions on this point. We have been clear that no company in the UK should have forced labour in its supply chain, and we will be working with colleagues across Government to tackle the issue of the Uyghur forced labour in supply chains that she has raised during the passage of the Bill. As part of that, we have relaunched the solar taskforce and we will work with industry, trade unions and others to take forward the actions needed to develop supply chains that are resilient, sustainable and free from forced labour.

Great British Energy is the national champion that our country needs, for three reasons. First, it is at the heart of our mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower. Every family and business has paid the price for our country's exposure to volatile fossil fuel markets over the last two and a half years. A sprint to clean energy is the way to increase our energy independence and protect families and businesses. We need to invest in wind, solar, nuclear, tidal, hydrogen, carbon capture and more—geothermal too.

Secondly, Great British Energy will help to generate the jobs the UK needs, not just the power. Here's the thing: our European neighbours recognise that a publicly owned national champion is a critical tool in industrial policy, and the good news is that after 14 years of industrial policy being a dirty, taboo phrase, it is back at the heart of policy making in this Government. Great British Energy is part of our plan to ensure that the future is made and built in Britain.

Thirdly, Great British Energy will ensure that the British people reap the benefits of our natural energy resources, generating profits that can be returned to bill payers, taxpayers and communities across the country. I know that many Members of the House are passionate about the issue of local power, so let me reassure them that the Government are committed to delivering the biggest expansion of support for community-owned energy in history.

Great British Energy is the right idea for our time and has in a short time won huge support. I am sorry that the Opposition have chosen to wallow in their minority status and stand out against it, but let me tell them: their vote tonight will have consequences. For every project that Great British Energy announces in constituencies around Britain, every job that it creates, every local solar project it initiates and every wind project it invests in, we will tell their constituents that they opposed it. They are the anti-jobs, pro-energy-insecurity party, and we will hang their opposition to GBE round their necks from here till the next general election. Invest or decline: that is the choice, and GBE is the right choice for energy security, bills and jobs. I commend the Bill to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

6.49 pm

Claire Coutinho: When we said that we could not support the Bill in its original form, it was because we had no detail to justify giving this Secretary of State a blank cheque for £8 billion of taxpayers' money. In the intervening two months, I am afraid that we have not learned anything to give us confidence. We have not seen a business plan, a framework agreement or an explanation of how this is different from the UK Infrastructure Bank, which was set up to do exactly the same thing.

We know that there will be a headquarters in Aberdeen, with a head who will be based 360 miles away in Manchester. We know that that same head does not think that the scope of Great British Energy includes reducing bills. I remind the Secretary of State that, in an interview in June, he said not only that he was ready to launch Great British Energy within days—so he should have this information—but that it would lead to a “mind-blowing” reduction in bills by 2030. Now he has completed the embarrassment of the bright-eyed MPs behind him by forcing them to vote against their own election promises.

Tonight, Labour Members have voted against holding Great British Energy accountable for cutting people's energy bills by £300 and for creating 650,000 jobs. The Secretary of State talks about hanging things around people's necks. Well, he made his colleagues repeat those promises over and over again during the election, and we will see what the electorate remember. These are not trivial matters. This is about people's energy bills,

[Claire Coutinho]

people's jobs and businesses' ability to succeed in this country. The risk is that this Government are heading towards a 2029 election in which industries have been lost and bills have gone up—exactly the opposite of what the electorate have been promised. That is not just my argument; it is the argument of the respected energy and climate economist Dieter Helm.

The Secretary of State, whether he is talking about Great British Energy or his plan for a zero-carbon grid by 2030, likes to talk in slogans and political mantras, but he does not deal in detail or fact. He knows that Great British Energy does not have the power to reduce household bills, which is why he has refused our attempts to hold him accountable for his own promises.

The Secretary of State argues that ramping up renewables at breakneck speed will lead to cheaper energy and greater security—I believe he just said that—but the latest renewable auction, which he bumped up, will increase people's bills by £5. He has advertised to multimillion-pound energy companies that he will be buying whatever they are selling, no matter the cost, until 2030—he even named a few and said that they welcome his approach. I can understand why! I know that he does not have a business background, but he does not need one to understand what kind of signals he is sending.

The Secretary of State has not modelled the cost of constraint payments, network costs or green levies. He has deprioritised exciting new technologies such as small and advanced modular reactors, which will come online after 2030, and he refuses to address the question of dispatchable power. If not gas, what is he arguing for in its place and how much will it cost? Far from making energy cheaper and more secure, he will send people's bills through the roof. And more and more people are sounding the alarm about whether he will even be able to keep the lights on, which we were able to do even during the height of an energy crisis.

Tonight, Labour Members have shown their true colours by voting against making their own energy company accountable. If the Secretary of State cannot even back up his own election promises, why should we back him on this Bill?

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House divided: Ayes 361, Noes 111.

Division No. 27]

[6.53 pm

AYES

Abbott, Jack	Baines, David
Adam, Shockat	Baker, Alex
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Baker, Richard
Akehurst, Luke	Ballinger, Alex
Aldridge, Dan	Bance, Antonia
Alexander, Heidi	Barker, Paula
Ali, Rushanara	Barron, Lee
Ali, Tahir	Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
Anderson, Callum	Baxter, Johanna
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Beales, Danny
Arthur, Dr Scott	Beavers, Lorraine
Asser, James	Begum, Apsana
Athwal, Jas	Bell, Torsten
Atkinson, Catherine	Benn, rh Hilary
Atkinson, Lewis	Berry, Siân
Bailey, Mr Calvin	Betts, Mr Clive

Billington, Ms Polly	Entwistle, Kirith
Bishop, Matt	Eshalomi, Florence
Blake, Rachel	Esterson, Bill
Bloore, Chris	Evans, Chris
Blundell, Mrs Elsie (<i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Bonavia, Kevin	Falconer, Hamish
Botterill, Jade	Farnsworth, Linsey
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena	Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Brash, Mr Jonathan	Ferguson, Mark
Brickell, Phil	Ferguson, Patricia
Buckley, Julia	Fleet, Natalie
Burgon, Richard	Footy, Emma
Burke, Maureen	Fookes, Catherine
Burton-Sampson, David	Foster, Mr Paul
Byrne, Ian	Foxcroft, Vicky
Byrne, rh Liam	Foy, Mary Kelly
Cadbury, Ruth	Francis, Daniel
Caliskan, Nesil	Frith, Mr James
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Furniss, Gill
Campbell, Irene	Gardner, Dr Allison
Campbell, Juliet	Gemmell, Alan
Campbell-Savours, Markus	German, Gill
Carden, Dan	Gilbert, Tracy
Carling, Sam	Gill, Preet Kaur
Champion, Sarah	Gittins, Becky
Charalambous, Bambos	Glendon, Mary
Charters, Mr Luke	Goldsborough, Ben
Chowns, Ellie	Gosling, Jodie
Clark, Feryal	Gould, Georgia
Coleman, Ben	Grady, John
Collier, Jacob	Greenwood, Lilian
Collinge, Lizzi	Griffith, Dame Nia
Collins, Tom	Hack, Amanda
Conlon, Liam	Haigh, rh Louise
Coombes, Sarah	Hall, Sarah
Cooper, Andrew	Hamilton, Fabian
Cooper, Dr Beccy	Hamilton, Paulette
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hardy, Emma
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Harris, Carolyn
Costigan, Deirdre	Hatton, Lloyd
Cox, Pam	Hayes, Helen
Craft, Jen	Hayes, Tom
Creasy, Ms Stella	Hazelgrove, Claire
Crichton, Torcuil	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Curtis, Chris	Hillier, Dame Meg
Daby, Janet	Hinchliff, Chris
Dakin, Sir Nicholas	Hinder, Jonathan
Dalton, Ashley	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Darlington, Emily	Hopkins, Rachel
Davies, Jonathan	Hughes, Claire
Davies, Paul	Hume, Alison
Davies-Jones, Alex	Hurley, Patrick
De Cordova, Marsha	Hussain, Mr Adnan
Dean, Josh	Ingham, Leigh
Denyer, Carla	Irons, Natasha
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Jameson, Sally
Dickson, Jim	Jarvis, Dan
Dixon, Anna	Jerry, Terry
Dixon, Samantha	Jogee, Adam
Dollimore, Helena	Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Downie, Graeme	Johnson, Kim
Duffield, Rosie	Jones, Gerald
Duncan-Jordan, Neil	Jones, Lillian
Eagle, Dame Angela	Jones, Louise
Eagle, rh Maria	Jones, Ruth
Eccles, Cat	Jones, Sarah
Edwards, Lauren	Josan, Gurinder Singh
Efford, Clive	Joseph, Sojan
Egan, Damien	Juss, Warinder
Ellis, Maya	Kane, Chris
Elmore, Chris	Kane, Mike
	Kaur, Satvir

Kendall, rh Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Ayoub
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kumaran, Uma
 Kyle, rh Peter
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Miliband, rh Ed
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Naismith, Connor
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex

Norris, Dan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Scrogham, Michelle
 Sowards, Mr Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Streeting, rh Wes
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren

Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Swann, Robin
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Trickett, Jon
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Laurence
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony

Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Bedford, Mr Peter
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bool, Sarah
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brandreth, Aphra
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartledge, James
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Cleverly, rh Mr James
 Cocking, Lewis
 Cooper, John
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, rh Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Cross, Harriet
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Dewhurst, Charlie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Easton, Alex
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Garnier, Mark
 Glen, rh John
 Grant, Helen
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian

Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Kate Dearden and
Keir Mather

NOES

Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Holmes, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jopp, Lincoln
 Kruger, Danny
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Lowe, Rupert
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 McMurdoch, James
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Morrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 Paul, Rebecca
 Philp, rh Chris
 Raja, Shivani
 Rankin, Jack
 Reed, David
 Robertson, Joe
 Robinson, rh Gavin
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Smith, Rebecca
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Spencer, Dr Ben

Spencer, Patrick
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Trott, rh Laura
 Vickers, Martin

Vickers, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:

Alicia Kearns and
 Jerome Mayhew

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time and passed.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

That the draft European Forest Institute (Immunities and Privileges) Order 2024, which was laid before this House on 15 May 2024, in the last Parliament, be approved.—(Chris Elmore.)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Ilkley Lido parking charges

7.7 pm

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): The future of our iconic Ilkley lido, a crown jewel of my constituency since 1935, is under threat. Despite that, Bradford council's latest act has been to introduce parking charges at the site for the first time ever, without public consultation and at odds with every other pool in the district. This petition of residents of the constituency of Keighley and Ilkley, and the wider Bradford district, notes these concerns, recognises the undue financial burden this will cause residents and local clubs who utilise the car park, including the Olicanian cricket club, which has no option but to use the Ilkley lido car park, and further notes that the Ilkley district is being treated unfairly by Bradford council compared with rest of the Bradford districts.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the constituency of Keighley and Ilkley,

Declares that for years, visitors have relied on free parking at Denton Road Car Park to make use of the Ilkley lido and other facilities; notes concern that Bradford Council have proposed parking charges at the popular site for the first time, which will impose an undue financial burden on residents and local clubs who utilise the car park, including Olicanian Cricket Club; and further notes that Ilkley is being treated unfairly compared to other pools and leisure facilities across the Bradford District, and that there has been a lack of consultation with the community.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage Bradford Council to honour its previous commitment to ensure that parking charges at Denton Road Car Park do not adversely affect Ilkley Lido users and Olicanian Cricket Club, staff, players and members.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P003017]

World Stroke Day

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Kate Dearden.)

7.9 pm

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): I am grateful to have this opportunity to address the House on World Stroke Day. Stroke is the UK's fourth biggest killer and the single largest cause of complex disability in the UK. On our current trajectory, the number of stroke survivors will increase by 60% over the next decade, which will swallow up nearly half the current NHS budget. By that time, one in three people in Glastonbury and Somerton will be 65 or older, so we will disproportionately feel the impact of the increase in strokes over the next decade.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. She mentioned the age of 65, which is really important; in Northern Ireland, there are some 2,800 new strokes every year. While the majority of strokes affect people who are over the age of 65, they can strike at any age. Some 25% of people who have strokes are under the age of 65, so does the hon. Lady agree that we must get away from the notion that stroke awareness is only for older people, and that we must be very aware of the FAST signs—face, arms, speech and time—that can make the difference between death and recovery? It can happen to young people as well.

Sarah Dyke: The hon. Member makes a really important point. Although we often assume that it is older people who suffer with strokes, so many young people suffer in the same way.

Unless there are major improvements, Somerset's poor ambulance response times and poor life-after-stroke care will mean that a disproportionate number of the 42,000 people who will die from stroke in 2035 will be from my constituency.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Further to the point that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made, although I fully accept that we have to do more in terms of stroke care, does my hon. Friend agree that the population of this country is generally unaware of the early warning signs of stroke to look for? When it actually happens, we recognise the symptoms, but we have no awareness of the long-term warning signs. We need to invest in teaching people what to look for and how to care for themselves to avoid a stroke.

Sarah Dyke: I thank my hon. Friend for making such an important point. I think we have progressed in our understanding of stroke awareness, but there is so much more yet to do.

Neither strokes nor the grim predictions I have made are inevitable. Stroke is preventable, it is treatable, and it is recoverable.

Alan Gemmell (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady allow me to place on record my thanks to the innovative team at the stroke unit in Crosshouse hospital, whose new treatment, thrombolysis, means that—as the

hon. Lady said—there is a way for many people to recover following strokes? I would like to thank charge nurse Elizabeth, consultants Martin and Sundeep, and Julie and Debbie in the hospital management team for saving my former teacher, Christine Stewart, when she self-diagnosed with FAST.

Sarah Dyke: The hon. Member makes a very good point, and I also celebrate those people, who do such hard work within their communities.

The UK knows how to deliver world-class stroke care, and some parts of England are doing that as I speak. Stroke is one of the few conditions that takes patients through the entirety of the health and social care system, from emergency services and acute care to social care, specialist rehabilitation support and end-of-life care.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am really grateful to the hon. Member for securing this debate. Time is everything with regards to a stroke, particularly around diagnosis, but also if treatment such as thrombectomy is needed. Does she agree that we should be looking at ambulance response times in particular, and perhaps at recategorising stroke as a category 1 call-out?

Sarah Dyke: I thank the hon. Member for her intervention and for all the work she has done in this area. I will come to the issue of ambulance response times a little later in my speech.

Delays in urgent care are currently leading to high mortality rates, and post-stroke services that provide crucial emotional, practical and social support are often treated as optional, rather than essential.

Andrew Cooper (Mid Cheshire) (Lab): I thank the hon. Lady for securing this important debate. She rightly talks about the need for stroke patients to receive urgent medical treatment. Last month, I attended a thrombectomy awareness event at which my constituent, Mark Paterson, was speaking as a stroke survivor. Mark's remarkable recovery was thanks to the emergency thrombectomy procedure he received. Sadly, many others are not so lucky, with too many people dying or suffering disability due to the previous Government's postcode lottery in care. About this time last year, the Stroke Association said that about 9.8% of patients receive that treatment in London, compared with 0.4% in the east of England. Does the hon. Lady agree that we need to see an increase in the proportion of patients receiving thrombectomies across the country?

Sarah Dyke: I thank the hon. Member for the intervention. He makes a strong point.

Our health and social care services are likely failing the 14,159 registered stroke survivors in Somerset at some stage in the system, but there is reason to be optimistic. If the Government put stroke at the heart of our health and social care system, each and every part of the system will be stronger and deliver better outcomes for everyone—not just stroke survivors.

Leaving aside the human cost, there is also an economic cost, as strokes lead to an avoidable £1.6 billion annual loss of productivity. I recently spoke to Garry, who works in Somerset and had a stroke in his 30s. He told

[Sarah Dyke]

me that he could have been back to work after nine months if he had had access to life-after-stroke care. Instead, he spent five years recovering, during which time he had to rely on the benefits system. At the start of the debate, I said that stroke is preventable, treatable and recoverable. If that is true—I know that it is—why are people like Garry forced to waste years in the prime of their life learning how to recover from strokes themselves?

Chris Bloore (Redditch) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making an important point. Our clinical profession does an incredible job of saving many people who suffer from a stroke, but the rehabilitation work that follows surviving a stroke—the ability to get back into work, build emotional confidence and rebuild relationships—is so important. As she was detailing, too many people who survive strokes have to wait for years to get on with their lives, including their work, friendships and relationships.

Sarah Dyke: I wholeheartedly agree, and that is exactly the point that I was making.

Research from the Stroke Association shows that the NHS faces £1,300 of additional pressure for each person like Garry who does not receive life-after-stroke care, due to avoidable secondary strokes and other health complications. It is an injustice for stroke survivors who are suffering longer than they need to, for the taxpayer who could be paying less, and for the friends and families who often have no choice but to become unpaid carers to support stroke survivors, as my mum did for my dad after he suffered a stroke.

Unpaid carers currently bear 62% of the cost of prevalent strokes, with the NHS and social care bearing only a distant 9% and 22% respectively. Unpaid carers do a remarkable, important and often invisible job, and the Government must ensure they have access to the support that they need, including paid carer's leave and a statutory guarantee of regular respite breaks.

There are not many easy answers when it comes to stroke. Constituents across Glastonbury and Somerton have written to me almost every month since my re-election because they are concerned about the closure of Yeovil district hospital hyper-acute services. It is right that steps are being taken to address the fact that 60% of people who arrive at hospitals do not get into a stroke unit quickly enough, so services are being reconfigured to provide patients with cutting-edge care in Dorchester or Taunton.

By concentrating hyper-acute services, wards can process patients more quickly, which is so important when caring for patients suffering from a stroke. After critical care has been provided, patients will be moved back to services closer to their home, such as Yeovil, so that family and friends will be able to visit their loved ones there rather than in critical care further away. I can understand why people are scared of potentially having to travel further in an emergency when response times are so poor. In fact, with an average response time of 42 minutes and 50 seconds, people in Somerset wait longer for an ambulance than anywhere else in England. For every minute a stroke is left untreated, nearly 2 million brain cells die, so fast ambulance response times are necessary for getting stroke patients lifesaving, disability-reducing treatments in time.

This is especially important for those living in rural locations, such as Glastonbury and Somerton, who may need to travel further for treatment. Liberal Democrat analysis has revealed that waits for life-threatening calls are 45% longer in rural areas than in urban ones. The average handover time for a category 2 ambulance call in Somerset has risen to over an hour, despite the ongoing 18-minute target, which results in ambulance crew being able to see only two or three patients per shift. The Government could lower these ambulance response times by increasing the number of staffed hospital beds, and ensuring our social care system is resourced well enough to allow people to recover outside hospital. We know that a matter of minutes can make all the difference in emergencies, so it is heartbreaking that ambulance delays are worsening and stroke victims are being left for hours for help to arrive.

I am inspired by the stroke quality improvement for rehabilitation project, which has helped over half the stroke survivors who were previously being failed by services in Somerset. The pilot has ensured that survivors have access to personalised and face-to-face support to help them with behavioural changes and re-entering work. Despite its success in preventing secondary strokes, and thus saving the health and social care system a great deal of money, the pilot is unlikely to receive funding from April next year, and 250 patients in Somerset face the prospect of losing access to good-quality life-after-stroke support.

I am particularly worried about stroke survivors in Glastonbury and Somerton, and elsewhere in Somerset, who will instead have to rely on Yeovil district hospital if this happens, as Yeovil district hospital provides only the minimum level of occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and speech and language therapy a week to less than half as many patients as the national average. There is a future where we no longer need to have a World Stroke Day, and that is what I am looking for—a future without a World Stroke Day.

Innovations such as the use of artificial intelligence in diagnosis could revolutionise recovery prospects for stroke patients, and preventive programmes could limit the impact stroke has on working-age people. We saw stroke mortality halved in just 10 years when stroke was prioritised in 2000, so progress can be made. If we are to reach that future, though, we must start by ringfencing budgets to enable the NHS to adopt innovative digital tools, invest in new technologies and develop a digital strategy.

This Government have already begun to make some progress with the Darzi report, which showed that the NHS is on its knees after years of mismanagement by the Conservatives, but we must ensure that stroke remains a top priority in their health mission.

Uma Kumaran (Stratford and Bow) (Lab): I would just like to share my experience. On my first day here in the Commons, my husband suffered a stroke. This is a timely debate, so I thank the hon. Member for securing it. I am pleased to say that my husband is doing much better now, and he is here in the Gallery of the Chamber, as are those from the Stroke Association, who have been absolutely invaluable to our family and many stroke survivors across the country.

I would like to pick up a point that the hon. Member made about stroke. One in four strokes happens to people of working age, and one in three in this group will have

to give up their jobs. It is very clear that, although the NHS has given excellent care to my husband and to families such as mine, there is much more to be done. The Darzi report revealed the scale of the challenges that our health service faces, especially with stroke services, and the severe impact of the underfunding of the last Conservative Government.

Sarah Dyke: I thank the hon. Lady, and it is so good to hear that her husband is making such a full and quick recovery.

World Stroke Day is a pertinent reminder that stroke must be well represented in the new 10-year health plan and that the Government must engage with patients, carers, and health and social care professionals, so that their lived experiences can help inform policy decisions.

7.24 pm

The Minister for Care (Stephen Kinnock): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glastonbury and Somerton (Sarah Dyke) on securing a debate on this vitally important issue. It is important not only for her constituents but for her personally, I think, given her family circumstances; I know she really spoke from the heart and we appreciate that.

Good health should be fundamental to all of our lives, but sadly that is not the case for too many people. Over 100,000 people have a stroke in the UK every year—one person every five minutes. One third of them will be left with some form of long-term disability. As the fourth largest cause of death for adults, stroke has a devastating impact on individuals, their families and wider communities across our country.

For decades the NHS has served us well, and it is one of the proudest achievements of the Labour party that we were at the foundation of our NHS. Our staff have tremendous expertise and dedication; they are working hard every day to make a difference. But we have to face up to the reality that we have had 14 years of neglect and incompetence on the part of the Conservative party. We are now facing a very significant set of challenges in looking to get our health and care system back on its feet and fit for the future. That is the important context for this debate.

I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Glastonbury and Somerton for giving me the opportunity to inform her and the House of the work that the Government have been doing since we came into office on 4 July, and particularly as today is World Stroke Day. The House will have seen that we have set out the three transformative shifts that we want to deliver in health and care, moving from care in hospitals to care at home, prioritising prevention over treatment, and advancing from analogue to digital solutions. These three strategic shifts will be the building blocks of our health mission, reducing time spent in poor health, tackling health inequalities and reducing lives lost from the biggest killers, which include cardiovascular disease.

We have to change the NHS so that it is no longer just a sickness service but a prevention service too. Prevention is always better and cheaper than cure. So we have to take preventive public health measures to tackle the biggest killers and support people to live longer, healthier lives. That is why in our health mission to build an NHS that is fit for the future, we have committed to reducing

deaths from heart disease and strokes by one quarter within 10 years. The NHS health check, England's flagship cardiovascular disease prevention programme, aims to prevent heart disease, stroke, diabetes, kidney disease and some forms of dementia. Each year the programme engages over 1.3 million people and, through behavioural and clinical interventions, prevents around 500 heart attacks or strokes.

To improve access to and engagement with this life-saving programme, we are developing a new digital NHS health check, which will be ready for testing in early 2025. It will enable people to undertake a check at home. We are also trialling more than 130,000 life-saving heart health checks in the workplace. These checks can be completed quickly and easily by people at work so that they can understand and act on their cardiovascular risk and reduce their future risk of a stroke.

Around 50% of heart attacks and strokes are associated with high blood pressure. Community pharmacies are providing a free blood pressure check service for anyone over the age of 40. In cases where this results in a high reading, pharmacists can make sure people receive the right NHS support to reduce their blood pressure. We know that there is more to do to prevent the causes of stroke, and the Department and NHS England are working together to tackle this issue.

I am also pleased to announce that on Monday 4 November NHS England is launching a new Act FAST campaign to increase knowledge of the main signs of a stroke and to encourage people to dial 999 immediately in response to any sign. The new campaign builds on the success of the previous Act FAST campaign and uses a revised call to action:

“Face or arm or speech, at the first sign, it's time to call 999”.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): I pay tribute to a young man who lived in Shepton Mallet named Will. He spotted what was happening to his father. He is a young man with some difficulties himself, but he recognised FAST. He had seen it on television, and it is testament to the power of television and radio campaigns in making sure that those messages get through, because that young man has difficulties in communicating and moving, but he managed to get the rest of his family to realise what was happening to his father sitting there across the breakfast table. I just wanted to mark that.

Stephen Kinnock: I thank the hon. Lady for that telling intervention. She is absolutely right: so much of the challenge and the opportunity before us is about how we use traditional media, social media, all forms of communication and awareness-raising campaigns and techniques. By definition, we are dealing with a situation in which speed is of the essence. It is truly a public health challenge, because it is only the public who can do what Will did in that circumstance. I certainly pay tribute to Will for acting so quickly and to the Act FAST campaign. I am sure Members will welcome that we are looking to build on the success of Act FAST and to replicate and renew it.

That campaign will run in England across TV, radio, social media, national press and ethnic minority TV and radio stations. The campaign includes specific communications for multicultural and disabled audiences. A higher reduction in mortality rates over the next

[Stephen Kinnock]

10 years will require a focus on NHS England stroke priorities, including rapid diagnosis and increasing access to time-dependent specialist acute stroke care. We know that so many deadly diseases can be avoided if we seek help in enough time. That is why we are working to improve access to treatments. Current targets include increasing thrombectomy rates to 10% and thrombolysis rates to 20% through facilitating ambulance service use of pre-hospital video triage and use of AI decision support tools for brain imaging in comprehensive stroke centres. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Cheshire (Andrew Cooper) has a keen interest in that issue.

Andrew Cooper (Mid Cheshire) (Lab): Building on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), does the Minister agree that stroke patients should have the highest priority for ambulance call-outs—as high as cardiac arrest, for example?

Stephen Kinnock: I am a little wary of generalising too much, because I know that so many decisions have to be made in real time by our skilled ambulance drivers and paramedics and the many others involved, but my hon. Friend makes a valid point. In a general sense, he is absolutely right that stroke needs to take priority. The red thread going through this entire debate is the need for speed. It is all about prioritising and acting quickly; he is absolutely right about that.

In the past year, we have seen a 30% increase in the number of thrombectomies delivered in England. Alongside that, our 20 integrated stroke delivery networks are looking to optimise care pathways. The General Medical Council is addressing critical workforce gaps through its thrombectomy credentialling programme, and our national optimal stroke imaging pathway is improving information sharing.

I am aware of the reconfiguration in the constituency of the hon. Member for Glastonbury and Somerton. NHS Somerset integrated care board has decided to close the hyper-acute stroke unit at Yeovil hospital and to establish a single hyper-acute stroke unit at Musgrove Park hospital in Taunton to provide 24/7 emergency treatment. All service changes should be based on clear evidence that they will deliver better outcomes for patients. A high bar is set out in guidance for intervening in contested reconfiguration cases, and the reconfiguration of services should be a matter for the local NHS. I would expect all avenues of local resolution to have been exhausted before a call-in request is made. The Department has received a formal request to call in

NHS Somerset ICB's decision, and Ministers will make a decision on whether to use their call-in powers in due course.

Unfortunately, there is still significant variation across the country in access and outcomes in relation to stroke. For example, the percentage of suspected stroke patients who received the necessary brain scan within an hour of arrival at hospital varies from 80% in Kent to only around 40% in Shropshire. That variation needs to change, and we need to bring the best of the NHS to the rest of the NHS. That will be one of the central challenges for the Government going forward.

The Government have a profound ambition to improve the lives and health outcomes of people who survive a stroke. At this point, I would like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford and Bow (Uma Kumaran) and to the man in the Public Gallery for what they have been through and for their fortitude. It was certainly not easy for my hon. Friend to come to this place and to have to go through the extremely difficult situation that she did. I also pay tribute to all the key partners and stakeholders who worked with her and her family to get through it. That really is a tribute to the immensely important work they do.

Rachael Maskell: As well as looking at acute triage to rapidly diagnose people who have had a stroke, it is important to invest in rehabilitation—something I did for 20 years in the NHS. I would be grateful if the Minister could set out how he proposes to have integrated rehabilitation teams that not only see people through the immediate aftercare, but continue to provide a top-up for them so that they do not backslide in their rehabilitation.

Stephen Kinnock: I can say a word about our national service model for an integrated community stroke service, which involves a number of specific projects aimed at improving delivery of psychological rehabilitation. The ICSS model is vital to support psychological recovery, return to work and improved quality of life, and I would be more than happy to discuss it further with my hon. Friend.

Before I close, I want to recognise the remarkable work of the charities that help people across the country to rebuild their lives after a stroke. Once again, I thank the hon. Member for Glastonbury and Somerton for this important debate, and I encourage every Member of the House to go to change.nhs.uk and to get involved in the biggest conversation about our health and care service since its foundation in 1948.

Question put and agreed to.

7.38 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 29 October 2024

[CAROLYN HARRIS *in the Chair*]

Diabetes Treatments

11 am

Carolyn Harris (in the Chair): I will call Sarah Bool to move the motion, and then call the Minister to respond. There will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up, as is the convention.

Sarah Bool (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered diabetes treatments.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. On 21 May 2021, my world changed forever when I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at the age of 33. While my diagnosis was a shock, given its late onset, the feelings of fear, disbelief and sadness are shared by all those diagnosed—young or old, with type 1 or type 2.

Diabetes is a complicated condition that has been done the great disservice of being stigmatised through misunderstanding. It is not necessarily that we have eaten too many sweets or not looked after ourselves. Type 1 is an autoimmune condition—we did nothing to cause it—and people can develop it later in life; Mr Speaker and I can attest to that. Type 2 is not just for the over-40s and the unfit; someone can be slim and active, like Sir Steve Redgrave, and still be diagnosed. That is why I have secured today's debate. Breaking down the stigma and investing in early treatment of diabetes is so important to allow patients to live fulfilled lives, and to do so in the most long-term, cost-efficient manner for the Government.

Our understanding of how to treat diabetes has come on leaps and bounds since the discovery of insulin back in 1921, but there is still so much more that we can do. Some 5.6 million people in the UK are diagnosed with diabetes. That includes 4,329 people in my constituency of South Northamptonshire—more than 6% of the population. However, last year, just 54% of my constituents with diabetes received all eight of their essential checks, which are important for identifying and preventing complications.

The total cost of diabetes to the NHS is estimated at £10.7 billion, and 60% of that is spent on the costs of diabetes complications. Every week, complications from diabetes lead to 2,990 cases of heart failure, more than 184 amputations, 930 strokes and 660 heart attacks. Those should be preventable with the right education, the right support, and the right attitude from individuals and the Government.

There is so much that I could talk about on diabetes, but this is a short debate, so my initial ask of the Government, on type 1, is that we end the postcode lottery, with equitable treatment for those living with diabetes wherever they live in the UK.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for securing the debate. I declare an interest: I am a type 2 diabetic. In our discussion before the debate, I informed the hon. Lady that, when I was first

diagnosed some 18 years ago, believe it or not, I was at least 17 stone and probably getting bigger by the minute. I went on a diet because that was what the doctor recommended; I am down to a nice trim 13¼ stone.

I am thankful for the NHS and the treatment offered, but there is a clear disparity between the treatment offered in different areas of the United Kingdom. Does the hon. Lady agree that diabetes does not have to be a death sentence, but does not have to adversely affect quality of life either? We must ensure that, no matter where someone is in this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, they should get a level of diabetic care that enables them to live life to the fullest. Does the hon. Lady agree?

Sarah Bool: Absolutely. I totally agree, and the hon. Gentleman makes a very powerful point. It does not have to be a death sentence; it can even lead someone to No. 10 Downing Street, if they are Baroness May, so it should not prevent anyone from achieving anything.

Going back to my asks for type 1, we must also commit to greater access to technology for diabetes, such as hybrid closed loop technology, and increase awareness of the condition and treatments in schools and among the public. We also want to see the expansion of early testing for type 1 diabetes to identify children who are living with the condition and to make sure that they and their families get the right support.

I apologise in advance to hon. and right hon. Members if I suddenly start to beep during this debate, or in the Chamber in the future. They can be assured that it is not because I am some form of 21st century R2D2; it is because I wear an insulin pump and sensors. When my blood sugar is running low, it will alert me so that I can consume a lifesaving sugary treat. This hybrid closed loop system has dramatically improved the quality of my life with type 1. It does not just benefit adults with diabetes like me; there are parents of young children with a HCL who feel they can finally sleep at night without fear of missing a nighttime low blood sugar for their little ones.

Type 1 is also a condition that creates a serious mental burden on those who live with it and their loved ones. As a condition where someone's pancreas stops working and no longer produces insulin, it requires constant thought and calculations alongside normal activities. Each day, a person with type 1 is assessing how many carbohydrates there are in their food and how much insulin they should dose, taking into account whether they have exercised, will be exercising, or generally rushing around; how hot or cold it is; how tired they are; how stressed they are, with public speaking adding to the mix for me; for women in particular, what their hormones are doing; and, when they have low blood sugar, how quickly they can access a sugar supply.

My insulin pump and sensor have ensured that many of those burdens have been eased. I just wish that more of my fellow diabetics had the same opportunity. I know of one lady from the south-west of England whose local integrated care board did not prescribe HCLs, so she had to move to London, away from her support network, just to access that vital technology. That cannot be right. As part of building an NHS fit for the future, Ministers should ensure that wherever someone is in the UK, they can access vital treatments for diabetes, such as the HCL.

[Sarah Bool]

There are other treatments that the Government should commit to fully exploring, such as early detection and new drugs. As with my diagnosis, more than 80% of type 1 diagnoses occur in people with no known family connection to type 1 diabetes. Many people are not aware of the four “T” symptoms that they should look out for: thirst, toilet, tiredness and thin. Early detection is vital in preventing complications such as diabetic ketoacidosis, which one in four children with type 1 are diagnosed with, and which can be lethal. Early detection can also identify people who would benefit from early intervention clinical trials and treatments.

The ELSA study is a programme funded by Breakthrough T1D that offers children between the ages of three and 13 a simple finger stick blood test to determine their risk of developing type 1 diabetes. The study is currently open to families across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with over 20,000 children having been screened so far. I ask that the Government work to have the programme expanded and implemented on the NHS nationwide, as it could drastically reduce the instances of future complications from type 1.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way again. One of the things that we have noticed back home in Northern Ireland is that even if someone gets a type 1 diabetes diagnosis early on, it does not mean that their life is over—they can still go on. We have a high prevalence of young children in Northern Ireland who have type 1 diabetes, and for them it is rather scary but also a fact of life. I have seen some of those young boys and girls growing up and the diabetes has not affected their life at all. It is important to know that those being diagnosed early with diabetes can have a normal life and family.

Sarah Bool: I absolutely concur with the hon. Gentleman; people can live a fulfilling and fulfilled life, but they do need a little more help along the way. If we get that at the right time, it can literally transform a life so that they can live like everyone else.

One of the promising new treatments coming forward is teplizumab, which will delay the onset of type 1 in children by an average of three years. Approved by the Food and Drug Administration in the US in 2022, it is about to start a technological appraisal by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. In conjunction with the national early detection programme, teplizumab could drastically reduce the complications associated with type 1.

With the rise of social media, we have seen an ever-growing societal preoccupation with body image. Earlier this year Baroness May and Sir George Howarth released a parliamentary report into type 1 and disordered eating, also known as T1DE. T1DE is an eating disorder where someone might restrict their insulin to lose weight or experience an eating disorder such as bulimia or anorexia alongside type 1. Evidence suggests that up to 40% of women and girls and up to 15% of men and boys with diabetes experience some form of disordered eating, so we really must continue the work of Baroness May and Sir George in raising the profile of diabetes and its complications.

On type 1, I ask the Minister to ensure that the Government work with the NHS to increase awareness of the hybrid closed-loop technology, particularly among lower socioeconomic groups, and to fund its roll-out nationally; to provide comprehensive training for healthcare practitioners on HCL technology; and to establish a national diabetes registry to support technology adoption and track health outcomes.

Turning to type 2 diabetes, right hon. and hon. Members will have heard a lot about and might even have been tempted by Ozempic and Wegovy, known as the GLP-1 medications—seemingly magic solutions that have helped many in the public eye to shed unwanted pounds. However, that class of medication is an important treatment for those with type 2 diabetes as it is prescribed to lower blood glucose levels. My concern, and that of some of my constituents who have written to me, is that there is a real risk of a shortage of those medicines for type 2 diabetics while they are being prescribed for weight loss. It is therefore essential that the supply of those drugs is protected for diabetics. Will the Minister take action to ensure that everyone with or at risk of type 2 diabetes can access the medications that they can benefit from?

Alongside medications, we should ensure that newly diagnosed type 2 diabetics are given the right support. In some cases it is possible to put type 2 into remission, so it is essential that access to evidence-based services such as the NHS path to remission programme is increased for people in the first three years of their diagnosis. Likewise, people under the age of 40 with type 2 are at increased risk of developing diabetes complications, but are less likely to receive their essential care. The NHS type 2 diabetes in the young programme—T2Day—provides extra support for that group, including confirmation of diagnosis, additional checks, contraception and pre-conception planning, and assessment of cardiovascular risk. The Government must commit to sustainable long-term funding for the programme to ensure that the rise in type 2 diabetes in working age adults does not lead to a drastic increase in serious complications.

There are also inequalities across the diagnosis of diabetes. Those living in deprivation and people of black and south Asian ethnicity are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes but less likely to receive their diabetes care, and they go on to experience worse health outcomes. As the Government develop their plan for the NHS, they should use health inequality impact assessments for all diabetes-related policies to understand how reforms affect different groups.

As right hon. and hon. Members might have worked out by now, I could speak about diabetes all the way to the moment of interruption this evening, but I will draw my speech to a close. Acting as our own pancreas is hard and our illness requires 24-hour attention. Diabetes treatment is relentless, but so are we.

11.14 am

The Minister for Secondary Care (Karin Smyth): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. I welcome the hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Sarah Bool) to this place, as I have not had a chance to do that. I thank her for securing the debate and sharing her own personal experience. She spoke powerfully about her fear, disbelief and sadness at her own diagnosis.

More than 4.9 million people in the UK have diabetes and 2 million people are now at risk of type 2 diabetes. The impact on the health and wellbeing of the nation and on the lives of people with diabetes and their families cannot be overstated. The hon. Lady has put a superb case this morning. A central mission of this Government is to build a health service and care system fit for the future. As part of that, tackling preventable ill health such as type 2 diabetes is crucial. At the same time, we want to ensure that people with types 1 and 2 diabetes receive the best possible care so that they can live healthier lives wherever they live in the United Kingdom.

As the hon. Member for South Northamptonshire mentioned, a central factor to people with diabetes living well is ensuring that they have access to annual diabetes reviews that cover the eight processes recommended by NICE. Annual diabetic reviews are associated with reduced emergency admissions, amputations, retinopathy and mortality. However, in 2019 only 42% of people with type 1 diabetes received all eight health checks, and that figure dropped significantly during the covid-19 pandemic. The NHS has worked hard to recover these services, and the proportion of people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes receiving all eight care processes reached 43.3% and 62.3% respectively in 2023-24. Although that is an improvement, in order to drive faster uptake the NHS will invest £14.5 million over the next two years to support up to 140,000 people aged between 18 and 39 to receive additional tailored health checks from healthcare staff. That will include support to help break down any stigma associated with the disease and support people with diabetes management through blood sugar-level control, weight management and cardiovascular risk minimisation.

I want to draw attention to what the hon. Lady said about stigma, because it is important. My best friend from university was diagnosed in her early 20s, which was some time ago—she will not thank me for mentioning that. I have family and constituents who have type 1, and I have learnt a lot from them about how important it is to look after oneself and get the care that one needs. I also commend Baroness May and Sir George Howarth. They were a formidable duo in Parliament, raising awareness of what is possible. They were both great servants of their respective parties, and I know they will continue that work.

Technology also plays a critical role in helping people with diabetes to live healthier lives, and I am pleased to hear of the personal impact a hybrid closed loop system has had on the hon. Member's life. As many will be aware, NICE has made recommendations on offering real-time continuous glucose monitoring and hybrid closed loop technology to adults and children with type 1 and type 2 diabetes. The NHS is making progress, with over 65% of people with type 1 diabetes using glucose monitoring to help manage their condition, and I expect to see similar rapid progress for people with type 2 diabetes.

Following NICE's final guidance in December 2023 on HCL systems, NHS England has developed a five-year national strategy with guidance for NHS providers on a phased uptake for delivering this life-changing technology to eligible diabetes patients. I am sure the hon. Member and others will be watching that roll-out closely. It started this April with an initial focus on children,

young people, pregnant women or those planning to become pregnant, and adults already using pumps who want to transition to a HCL system. The longer implementation period is because of a need to build essential workforce competencies in specialist adult services. To ensure that patients are safe, NHS trusts should only provide HCLs if they have access to specialist, trained clinical staff experienced in providing insulin pumps and continuous glucose monitors for type 1 diabetes. I know that waiting to access this technology is causing many people distress, and I assure the hon. Member that NHS progress in delivering these technologies is a matter of importance to this Government.

I also thank the hon. Member for raising the important issue of type 1 and disordered eating. NHS England has provided funding for eight integrated care boards to support the development and establishment of type 1 disordered eating services in every NHS region. NHS England is drawing on learning from the existing services, other emerging evidence and the findings of a recent parliamentary inquiry to ensure that all areas of the country are supported to improve care for those identified as having type 1 disordered eating.

On type 2 diabetes, the hon. Member expressed concerns about access to GLP-1 medications, such as Ozempic. Following intensive work with industry, the broad supply position for GLP-1 medications in the United Kingdom has improved. However, global supply issues remain for specific medicines, including Ozempic. We continue to work closely with manufacturers and others in the supply chain to help ensure the continued supply of GLP-1 receptor agonists for UK patients, and to resolve the remaining supply issues as quickly as possible, for example by asking suppliers to expedite deliveries.

I now turn to prevention and to the support available for people to put their type 2 diabetes into remission, which, as the hon. Lady outlined, is possible. In fact, I canvassed somebody last weekend who was very proud of their ability to do that. It is great work. Lord Darzi's report on the NHS, which was published last month, noted the worrying increase in the prevalence of people with type 2 diabetes and the necessity of prevention.

The prevention of diseases, including diabetes, is a priority for this Government. The Healthier You NHS diabetes prevention programme supports people at risk of developing type 2 diabetes to make lifestyle changes, either through face-to-face group programmes or digital services. The programme reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes by 40%. The programme has also been working to raise awareness among the diabetes healthcare professional community about the growing numbers of children and young adults with type 2 diabetes, and we have heard about that today.

Healthcare professionals need to understand the more aggressive nature of early onset type 2 diabetes, compared with older onset type 2 diabetes, to support earlier diagnosis. Further, given the inequalities in who develops type 2 diabetes and the poorer outcomes for those of south Asian and black ethnicity, which were also mentioned by the hon. Member, the NHS has established a focused engagement campaign, using social media and more traditional approaches to raise awareness and boost the uptake from those groups.

Living with type 2 diabetes is not inevitable if early action is taken to live a healthier life. As the hon. Member said, the NHS type 2 diabetes path to remission

[Karin Smyth]

programme is a joint initiative between NHS England and Diabetes UK. It provides a low calorie diet and support to people who have been recently diagnosed with type 2 diabetes who are living with obesity or are overweight. This year, the programme has been expanded to make it available across all England, enabling more people to benefit and to recover from type 2 diabetes.

The hon. Member asked specifically about the ELSA study, which I understand is recruiting 20,000 children in the UK, to better understand the potential benefits of screening for type 1 diabetes. I understand that the University of Bristol, in my home city, is also undertaking a similar study, looking at the risk of type 1 diabetes in adults. The Government look forward to seeing the outcome of both of those studies, to help inform future policy making.

By moving from sickness to prevention, the Government want to shorten the amount of time people spend in ill health and prevent illnesses before they happen. That is one of the goals of reforming the NHS, which is part of the Government's 10-year plan. I know that the hon. Lady will contribute to the debate in the rest of this Parliament.

Question put and agreed to.

11.22 am

Sitting suspended.

IPP Sentences

[VALERIE VAZ *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Southgate and Wood Green) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered imprisonment for public protection sentences.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. Imprisonment for public protection sentences, which were introduced in 2005 by the Criminal Justice Act 2003, are cruel, unjust and damaging to those who are still serving them. They were meant to be used to protect the public against criminals who had committed one of 96 offences and who were thought still to be a danger after the minimum term or tariff of the original sentence had expired. No level was set for that tariff by the legislation and the open-ended nature of the sentences led to some catastrophic results.

The House of Commons Library, in its excellent briefing paper for this debate, noted one instance where the courts applied an IPP sentence to someone who had served a minimum term of just 28 days. The misapplication of, and erroneous logic behind, IPP sentences resulted in widespread criticism and to the Government being challenged in court over restrictions on ways that IPP prisoners could demonstrate that they were no danger to the public.

Following a joint report from His Majesty's inspectorate of prisons and HM inspectorate of probation that highlighted the low levels of IPP prisoners being released, as well as the unsustainability of IPP prisoners adding to the burgeoning prison population, a ministerial review was carried out. Eventually, after further court cases and public pressure, IPP sentences were abolished on 3 December 2012. By then, more than 6,000 prisoners had received IPP sentences. Fast-forwarding to the present day, according to Ministry of Justice statistics as of June this year there were 1,132 IPP prisoners who had never been released, and a further 1,602 who had been recalled for breaching their licence conditions, making a total of 2,734 IPP prisoners still in our prisons.

Criticism of IPP sentences has come from far and wide. In August of this year, Dr Alice Jill Edwards, the UN special rapporteur on torture, said:

"IPP sentences are inhuman treatment and, in many cases, amount to psychological torture."

Former Lord Chief Justice Lord Thomas described them as "morally wrong" and "inherently unfair". Even Lord Blunkett, who was Home Secretary when IPP sentences were brought in, described their introduction as "the biggest regret" of his political career, which in some cases had led to injustice.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Did the hon. Gentleman hear Lord Blunkett on the media today saying that one of the alternative options should be secure therapeutic units?

Bambos Charalambous: I thank the right hon. Lady for her intervention. She is right, and one of the biggest impacts of IPP sentences is on the mental health of prisoners. I will come to that later. She makes a good point with which I agree.

Afzal Khan (Manchester Rusholme) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and congratulate him on securing this important debate. I want to raise the case of my constituent whose son is serving an indefinite IPP sentence and suffers from long-term psychiatric conditions. She feels he is in the wrong institution, unable to access the specialist support he urgently needs. Does my hon. Friend agree that such cases underline the urgent need for a review of IPP sentences, particularly given the crisis in overcrowded prisons?

Bambos Charalambous: My hon. Friend is right. There is a special need for prisoners to receive support. Keeping IPP prisoners incarcerated for longer than they should be is adding further pressure on our already overcrowded prison population.

In a recent written response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Riverside (Kim Johnson), the Minister confirmed that there are still five serving IPP prisoners who were given a minimum term of less than six months but have served more than 16 years. There are a further 15 with a tariff of between six months and a year who have not been released after 16 years. There are a further 47 in the same position whose tariff was between a year and 18 months.

Among the 1,132 IPP prisoners who have never been released is one of my constituents. Ongoing legal proceedings preclude me from naming him, although I can say that in 2006 he was sentenced to serve a minimum of 10 years for robbery under an IPP plan but has now served 19 years. He is now 42 years old and has missed the funeral of his grandfather, along with countless other family occasions. That has had a serious impact on him and his family.

The psychological harm experienced by IPP prisoners and their families has been well documented by the British Psychological Society, which refers to the heightened risk of self-harm and suicide that IPP prisoners face as a result of their hopelessness and their perpetual state of anxiety at the prospect of additional years in prison. The deterioration of IPP prisoners' mental health is illustrated by the Royal College of Psychiatrists case study in which a 17-year-old was given an IPP sentence for street robbery of trainers and given a one-year tariff but spent 10 years in prison, during which time he lost both his living relatives: his mother and grandmother. His mental health deteriorated so badly that he had to be transferred to a secure NHS mental hospital.

Having spoken to some of the family members of people currently serving IPP sentences—I met them at lunchtime today, and many are in the Public Gallery—I have heard at first hand about the impact that this unbearable situation has on family members, but the impact on IPP prisoners is far more profound. According to the United Group for Reform of IPP, or UNGRIPP, which is campaigning to bring about change to IPP sentences, 90 IPP prisoners have committed suicide since the sentences were introduced, with nine of those suicides occurring in 2023. Considering that the prison population last year was approximately 87,000 and IPP prisoners were only 3% of that total, it is staggering that IPP prisoners accounted for 10% of all self-inflicted deaths in prison in 2023.

One example is the tragic suicide of Scott Rider in 2022. In 2005, he had been sentenced to an IPP sentence, with a minimum tariff of 23 months. Seventeen

years later, he was still in prison. He was one of the longest serving IPP prisoners at the time of his death. Following a three-day inquest into his death, the senior coroner for Milton Keynes, Tom Osborne, said in his regulation 28 report to prevent future deaths:

“On any consideration of the circumstances of Mr Rider's death one has to conclude that his treatment was inhumane and indefensible and that if action is not taken to review all prisoners sentenced to IPP then there is a risk of further deaths occurring.”

He added:

“Mr Rider was one of many IPP prisoners struggling to progress”

and, at the time of his death, he had served 17.5 years and had

“given up all hope of release.”

The loss of hope of ever being released is certainly one of the big factors behind the high levels of suicide and self-harm among IPP prisoners. Even when IPP prisoners have been released on licence, the draconian licence conditions have led to prisoners being recalled for minor breaches of their licence, such as being late or missing an appointment. As I have mentioned, there are currently 1,602 IPP prisoners who have been released on licence but recalled.

I am sure that we all agree that the current situation cannot continue, so what is to be done? In September 2022, in its excellent report on IPP sentences, the Justice Committee, chaired by Sir Bob Neill, made several recommendations to remedy the damage done by the sentences. The three main recommendations can be summarised as follows. No. 1 involves a refreshed action plan for IPP sentences, better access to prison programmes to help IPP prisoners to progress and better support for prisoners who are suffering with their mental health because of these sentences. No. 2 involves better training for Parole Board members overseeing IPP prisoners' parole hearings, more support for IPP prisoners in preparing for parole hearings, a reduction of the qualifying licence period and better support for prison leavers. No. 3 is resentencing. In paragraph 152 of its report, the Justice Committee said:

“Our primary recommendation is that the Government brings forward legislation to enable a resentencing exercise in relation to all IPP sentenced individuals... This is the only way to address the unique injustice caused by the IPP sentence and its subsequent administration, and to restore proportionality to the original sentences that were given.”

The Committee also noted that there is precedent for resentencing retrospectively, but that it would require primary legislation. Former Lord Chief Justice Lord Thomas emphasised his support for this approach.

I acknowledge the steps that this Government and the previous Government have taken to tackle some of the problems caused by the licence conditions of IPP sentences. Particularly of note is section 66 of the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, which creates an automatic termination process for IPP licences in certain circumstances, starting from this Friday, 1 November. At lunchtime, I had the pleasure of meeting a former IPP prisoner who will benefit from this measure, which means that he will no longer be on an IPP licence and will be able to be at large freely. The Act also allows for reviews by the Parole Board in certain circumstances from 1 February 2025.

However, resentencing would be the most effective way to deal with the legacy of IPP sentences. I am aware that it is not without its problems, but it is the only just

[Bambos Charalambous]

and fair way to deal with this appalling situation, which, if left unresolved, will lead to more IPP prisoners self-harming and taking their own lives.

Prior to this debate, some of the IPP reform campaigners met Lord Woodley to discuss his private Member's Bill on resentencing IPP prisoners, which reflects the Justice Committee's recommendations on the matter. I hope Ministers will meet Lord Woodley to discuss his proposals, because there needs to be a review of IPP sentences, and all options need to be considered.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister advise me on what steps the Government are taking to reduce the number of IPP prisoners in our prisons? What support mechanisms have been put in place to help IPP prisoners who are struggling with their mental health, including those who have been institutionalised, to help them overcome the barriers that may adversely affect their parole hearings and to prepare them for a return to life outside prison? Will the Government reconsider their position on resentencing IPP prisoners? At a stroke, that would rectify this injustice once and for all. Will the Government at least carry out a review to see what the barriers to resentencing are? That is the one thing that all commentators think needs to be done to resolve the injustice caused by IPP sentences.

I thank UNGRIPP, the Howard League—which runs an excellent advice line for family members of IPP prisoners—the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the British Psychological Society. I also thank the House of Commons Library for its excellent briefings ahead of the debate. Most important are the family and friends of IPP prisoners who are incarcerated and those who have endured IPP sentences. Finally, there are those who unfortunately bow to the pressure of hopelessness, as there is no end to their sentences in sight, and, sadly, end their lives in prison. I hope that change will come and that IPP sentences will finally be gotten rid of from our prisons and confined to the dustbin of history, where they belong.

Valerie Vaz (in the Chair): I expect to call the Lib Dem spokesperson at 3.28 pm.

2.43 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) for securing this debate. I think I have attended every one of these debates over a number of years. I declare an interest: I am an honorary life member of the Prison Officers' Association and a member of the justice unions parliamentary group, which contains the probation officers, the prison officers, PCS, representing the civil service, and others dealing with this issue.

Here is the tragedy: after every debate, expectations are raised that perhaps there will be some Government movement, but there has not been, so we have lost more lives and many more people have self-harmed. The briefing from the wonderful UNGRIPP shows that in 2023 there were 1,866 self-harm incidents among IPP prisoners. As my hon. Friend said, there have been 90 suicides. People see no hope in their future; they are the most insecure prisoners. Many prisoners I have

dealt with know their sentence and know what they have to do to get out, and they do their best. There are others who think they will never get out, but at least they know the situation. With IPP prisoners, there is an uncertainty, which contributes to that lack of hope. Professional prison officers from the Prison Officers' Association tell us clearly that it is almost impossible to help or manage these prisoners because they have no hope. They lose confidence in whatever rehabilitation scheme they have been placed on, because every time they go on them, they are still not released. As a result, they are simply returned to despair.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green said, His Majesty's inspectorate of probation made clear recommendations about its concerns for these prisoners, and the Justice Committee set out a whole series of recommendations that I believe overcome the doubts that have been put forward by successive Government Ministers and which I hope we do not hear today. Ministers' fear that if we release any of these prisoners and something goes wrong, the Government will get the blame.

The Justice Committee considered the issue from a political perspective, asking, "How can we manage this?" The idea was to go through that process, to ensure that there is support and preparation for rehabilitation and release; and that there is professional expertise, brought together on a panel, to examine case-by-case what needs to be put in place to secure the release of these prisoners so that they are safe and society is safe. Give Bob Neill his due—he worked really hard on a cross-party basis to achieve consensus among the Committee on a contentious issue; and the justice unions group and the POA completely endorsed and advocated its recommendations.

By refusing to act on those Justice Committee recommendations, which are so reasonable, the state is committing a crime and perpetrating an injustice against these individuals. It isn't just me who thinks that; David Blunkett, who brought these measures in, said—if I remember rightly—that the situation was a stain upon our justice system and that there needed to be action. I commended the last Government when they reformed the licensing arrangements, and that move has benefited some people, but it has been of no benefit whatsoever to the 2,734 that are still locked away.

What we expect from this Government—our Government, I have to say to the Minister—is a programme of work that takes the Justice Committee's recommendations and looks at the practical action that needs to be taken to achieve them. Part of that could be the Imprisonment for Public Protection (Re-sentencing) Bill, which Tony Woodley has brought forward and for which I think there would be overwhelming support in this House. As a result, we might give some justice to those people who have suffered such significant injustice. We have had many cases before us where someone has committed a relatively minor crime and been sentenced to a year in prison, but 10 years later they are still inside. Many of these people are serving between 10 and 18 years, having been sentenced only up to four years for a crime they committed.

We have a responsibility on our shoulders to honour the recommendations from the Justice Committee—recommendations that its members worked so hard on—and to implement them. There is a sense of urgency

about this. I do not want to be here in six or 12 months' time saying that we have lost more prisoners as a result of self-harm and suicide. What has happened to the families? The irony in all this is that, as prisoners tell us, it is not just the individual who is serving the sentence; it is their family as well. It is their children, their mothers, their fathers: their whole family is destroyed as a result. So for God's sake—for humanity's sake—let us address this matter now and let us do it as a matter of urgency.

2.49 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Vaz. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) on calling this important debate at the start of this Parliament. I also endorse the comments made about the Justice Committee, and its incredible work scrutinising this issue and coming up with workable recommendations. work scrutinising this issue and coming up with workable recommendations.

My constituent, who lived in York before being taken into custody in 2005—19 years ago—was given an imprisonment for public protection sentence on 22 January 2007. His original tariff meant that the Parole Board could have released him on 26 May 2009, but he is still there. It must be one of the most egregious cases in the system.

IPP sentences were introduced through the Criminal Justice Act 2003, despite warnings that they would be an affront to justice. They were reformed in 2008 and abolished in 2012, and a total of 8,711 sentences were imposed.

My constituent's family have been superb and have met me, to keep me informed of the progress for my constituent—apart from that there is no progress, because we do not know what happens next. There have been incidents and consequences, but he is seriously unwell, because he never knows the date of his release or how the injustices he has now served will ever be undone. To incarcerate someone indefinitely comes at significant cost—it is beyond comprehension. My constituent's mental health has significantly spiralled, as he cannot see an end to this nightmare.

As we have heard, reports have shown that 90 people have taken their own lives while on an IPP sentence. There have been 1,866 incidents of self-harm; the figure is around 2,000 incidents of self-harm every year, across many years, among those on IPP sentences.

The nature of an indeterminate sentence is profound and we understand that denying somebody release has a huge impact. It is often denied as they are not engaging, as my constituent did not for some time, with psychiatric services. He just could not—yet that delayed his progress towards release. After getting a sentence of two years, four months and nine days, he has now served a sentence of 19 years, and his hope is diminishing as he continues to wait for the Parole Board to do justice. He was just 24 years old when a single incident occurred; now 43, having completed course after course after course, he is yet to be released.

The Justice Committee report highlighted the inconsistencies in the way IPP prisoners are treated, the failure of the Parole Board to properly stratify risk, and the conditions that prisoners have to satisfy in order to be released. As a result, we see people languishing in their cells without hope of ever getting out.

The Parole Board needs to be given the scope to properly look at this measure. That is why I support the recommendations in the Justice Committee's report on resentencing. It is not just people who are incarcerated who are on an IPP sentence; on their release, people continue on that sentence in the community, and for the smallest misdemeanour can easily be recalled. There is no consistency. People may miss appointments and therefore be recalled. We heard in evidence to the Select Committee how small some of the misdemeanours were that meant people were recalled back into prison.

We need to find a way out of this situation. The report calls for resentencing and the reduction of the recall period to five years from the current 10 years. Will the Minister support that change? If not, I ask him to give us a full explanation as to why.

This all comes in the context of significant current pressure on the courts. Perhaps a specialist court is needed to review all these cases, to ensure that the decisions are expedited in the resentencing and ensuing release process. We need to ensure that people have the right support to go back into the community, given that the Probation Service is at absolute breaking point, not least as it is having to deal with early releases at the moment. Again, a specialist focus is required. For example, my constituent has been in prison for 19 years, so a lot of steps need to be taken to ensure that when he is released, he is safe to himself, that he gets the mental health support he requires, and that the family also get support over that period. We must recognise the huge vulnerability of these individuals at that time.

We also need to ensure that the process is robust and consistent—we have seen inconsistencies in the judgments of parole boards, causing further frustration for many people on the inside—and that there are allocated safe places, where people can start to rebuild their lives. My constituent is fortunate to have family who are prepared and a place to go, but many people do not have those associations because it has been so long since they were on the outside. We need to make sure that real expertise in this area is brought in.

When we hear places like the European Court of Human Rights deeming such sentences to be in breach of article 5, on the basis of protection of unlawful deprivation of liberty, the Government cannot sit on their hands. They must act swiftly; and being new in government brings the opportunity to ensure that they do.

How is the Minister is going to review the programmes that people on IPP sentences and others are placed on in prison? The Select Committee heard evidence that many are not fit for purpose nor evidence-based. How do we ensure that the focus of those programmes is on rehabilitating people ready for their future life, and that they are not just a process that prisoners have to go through, serving no benefit?

The Lord Chancellor and the Minister have to rebuild the criminal justice system—we recognise that. The most important thing is reducing the offending rate and ensuring that we do not continue to see the current levels of reoffending. There are some good models out there, including my local prison, Askham Grange, which has the lowest reoffending rate in the country. With that, there is a proper process in place so that the residents—as they are given the dignity of being called—are given support when coming out and going back into employment and civil society. That invest-to-save model

[*Rachael Maskell*]

needs funding and support. As we transition services, we need to ensure—particularly for those serving IPP sentences, but also across the wider criminal justice system—that the right support is put in the right place.

Ultimately, I turn to the matter of our psychiatric services, because my observation is that many prisons have now become a place where people with significant and severe mental health challenges have to be; it is a failure of our mental health services that they are there at all. Many on IPP sentences fall within that category. If there is a resentencing process, which I hope there is, can we ensure that we also look at mental health support? For many people, perhaps hospital is a more appropriate place than prison. I look forward to the Minister's response.

2.58 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr iawn. I congratulate the hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) on securing this debate, and it is an honour to follow the speeches so far. I rise as the co-chair of the justice unions parliamentary group, and I am obliged to speak in this debate because IPP sentences have been raised time and again at our meetings by the trade unions, especially the Prison Officers' Association and the National Association of Probation Officers. What those unions say is that their members, prison and probation officers, have been placed in an intolerable position because of IPPs. They are made to administer that sentence, which is tantamount to torture, to many of the most vulnerable and damaged people they manage, both in and out of prison.

If we are to be honest, we must first admit it beggars belief that we are still having to discuss this matter today. I will not reiterate the 2022 Justice Committee report recommendations, but it should be noted that the Committee recommended that the Government convene an "expert committee" to advise on any resentencing exercise. That point needs to be repeated—it has possibly been lost in recent debate—because it would of course be up to the Government to appoint such an expert committee, which would include a judge to explore resentencing, and to decide whether to follow its recommendations.

As explained by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, which I thank for its briefing, the expert committee

"could recommend, for example, a staggered release schedule to give probation adequate time to prepare, or prioritisation for those with the shortest tariffs or longest time served over-tariff, or even partial resentencing starting with those previously considered safe for release by the Parole Board."

That last option would of course include prisoners who had previously been released but since recalled, often for no further offence. The expert panel might recommend any of those models or something else entirely, but—this is important—the Government would be free to pick and choose the option that is most palatable politically and manageable in the present crisis of prisons and probation. That is why the Minister has nothing to fear from a resentencing exercise along those lines, as suggested by the Justice Committee.

It is no wonder that the United Nations special rapporteur on torture, Dr Alice Jill Edwards, who I had the pleasure of meeting last year with the justice unions,

has called for "adequate and appropriate reparations" for IPP prisoners and their families to compensate them for an "inhumane" punishment that

"often amounts to psychological torture".

She also warned that

"citing public safety as the reason not to immediately resentence IPP prisoners...is misleading",

because

"the UK, like any society with a strong rule of law, has measures to protect the community after prisoners are released."

That is fundamental to a society that believes, as I am sure we all do, that that is how justice should be served. I therefore urge the Minister to listen to the UN and not to ignore such international opinions, as his predecessors were sometimes prone to do.

I also put on record my support for the private Member's Bill introduced in the other place by Lord Woodley, the Imprisonment for Public Protection (Re-sentencing) Bill, which is listed for Second Reading next month. The Bill, which mirrors the amendment moved by Sir Bob Neill to the Victims and Prisoners Bill in the last Session, calls on the Government to set up an expert committee to advise on resentencing and then enact its advice. I urge the Government to back this important Bill or, if they find the full-fat version of resentencing too much to take, to move an amendment in Committee to make it palatable. I most certainly agree with commentators such as Peter Stefanovic that this is a matter of conscience, and that all parties should therefore allow a free vote on IPP reform.

Finally, I will say something through the Chair but directly to people serving on IPP in prison or in the community, and to their friends and families. I know that many of them are watching and listening to this debate, and I know that there are some in the Gallery now. When I speak to them, I want them to know that there are many of us here in Parliament who will not stop calling out this injustice. In both the Commons and the Lords, cross-party parliamentarians will stand up for them. On the left and the right, on the Front and Back Benches, they have politicians in Parliament who will not give up until the problem that Parliament created back in 2003 has been fixed. I do not want them to lose hope, but I do not want to give them false hope either. I do not want them to think that Lord Woodley's Bill—I know that he will not mind me saying this—will in itself make resentencing a reality. No—the reality is that the power lies with Government, not with Backbench MPs, nor with Lords or Ladies or anyone who is not in government. It is up to the Government to change the law. I am not sure it really looks like the Government presently have the political appetite for resentencing, shameful though that may be.

We should not therefore think that resentencing is just around the corner, even when we consider the Prime Minister's background in criminal justice and the comments from Lord Blunkett recently, but please do not give up hope now. Hope is a precious thing, and pressure from campaigners pays off. For example, we have licence changes coming into effect on Friday that will mark the end of a living nightmare for at least one person, who I thank for sharing his story with me earlier. I do not need to remind Members that it was a Labour Government who introduced this sentence, which is tantamount to torture, and a Tory Government who

abolished it, albeit in a botched way. We have a golden opportunity to end this living nightmare for so many prisoners and their families once and for all. I urge the Minister and his new Government to take courage and do the right thing by justice. Diolch yn fawr.

3.5 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): As always, it is a real pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Vaz. I thank the hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) for setting the scene so well, and all those who contributed.

We do not have this sentence in Northern Ireland, but I have met some of the groups that have been lobbying here, and they have given me some idea of the process. I want to make a few helpful contributions to this debate and endorse ideas that others have put forward.

There is definitely a need for reform and a review of the IPP sentence system. Others with much more knowledge than me—especially the hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green—have outlined that well. In Northern Ireland, of course, some prisoners are in shockingly similar positions, so I want to add to this conversation.

It is a pleasure to see the Minister in his place. He and I have been friends for many years. We were brought together not just because we are MPs but because we are Leicester City football club supporters; we were the Leicester City House of Commons football supporters club. There were not many of us—perhaps there are not many more now, but there are a few more Leicestershire MPs, so we have maybe half a dozen supporters now.

It is also a pleasure to see the Minister—

Edward Argar (Melton and Syston) (Con): Shadow Minister.

Jim Shannon: The shadow Minister—absolutely. We sometimes forget that time has elapsed. It is nice to see him in his place too.

It is clear that IPP sentences remain an issue. The House of Commons Library prepared an excellent briefing for us, which helped us bring together our thoughts. As of 31 March 2024, there were 1,180 unreleased IPP prisoners and 1,616 recalled IPP prisoners in custody in England and Wales—a total of 2,796. Given the accommodation issues in prisons, it is clear that we must look at this integral part of the system and the process as we try to find solutions and move forward.

As of March 2024, all but 13 unreleased IPP prisoners had passed their tariff date. The pressure caused by those sentences on the system must be addressed, but we cannot ignore the need to ensure public safety. Although the system and the tariffs must be looked at, the safety of the general public is key, so we must ensure that anybody who is released is not a danger to them.

We could get into the whys and wherefores—the reasons our prisons are overrun. That is not what this debate is about, but I have heard them all from the concerned victims of crime when the perpetrators are released early. When I ask questions of the Minister in the Chamber, I always focus on the victims, and I wish to do that today. It is very important that we do not forget them as we try to find a solution for IPP prisoners.

The main issue behind the complaints is not justice, but fear. The victims are frightened, and the necessary changes and reform must have three foundational principles: justice, rehabilitation and the victims. They are on an equal footing, although I always focus on the victims.

I understand why we are having this debate. It is incredibly difficult to factor in unended prison sentences when planning the prison system, but we must ensure justice and listen to victims' voices when we reform this system. When these people are released automatically, they must not be left in the midst of a community that has no way forward. Resettlement after prison terms have been served is an issue throughout the UK, so there are things to be done and put in place before anyone can be released from prison.

The Government need to make changes, but they must satisfy those three core principles. My plea for prison reform throughout the United Kingdom is that it must meet the principles of justice and rehabilitation. Importantly, we must listen to the voices of victims. It is not an easy task. The Minister has got a big task ahead of him. I am quite sure he will be able to respond to that, but these things have to be done correctly, wisely and sensitively. I suppose that is really what I am asking for. Now is the time to bring about those steps.

3.10 pm

Lauren Edwards (Rochester and Strood) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) for securing this debate. The introduction of IPP sentences was well intentioned but in reality it has gone badly wrong. That is not only my view but the view of Lord Blunkett, who was Home Secretary when IPP sentences were introduced.

We know that two of the key failures were that IPP sentences were intended for only the most serious violent and sexual offences but in practice captured many of the lower level criminal offences and were applied to shorter sentences, and that the practical implications of the recall provision were not properly appreciated or considered at the time of introduction. From what I understand, we have cross-party agreement on that assessment and on the intention to correct it. I view today's debate as being about how we can best and most quickly achieve that aim and address, as others have said, a gross injustice.

As a MP for only a matter of months, I am already acutely aware of the toll those sentences have taken, not only on the prisoners who are affected but on their family members. I have at least two constituents who are currently recalled to prison because of non-criminal breaches of their licences and who are dealing with post-traumatic stress and other mental health challenges. That is driven to a significant extent by the uncertainty about whether they will ever be released or even about when their next parole hearing will be. As I and others have mentioned, that also significantly affects the family. I am sorry to say that I have been made aware that one of their partners has committed suicide in recent days. Her family's view is that her losing her partner and her main source of support, while he was on one of those sentences, has been a contributing factor.

I know the Minister and the Secretary of State are taking action to implement the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, passed by the last Government, and I really welcome that.

[Lauren Edwards]

The new automatic termination process and the presumption to terminate, and reducing the associated qualifying periods, will help a significant number of those currently on IPP licences. I ask the Minister to consider what additional steps the Government could take to accelerate the safe release of IPP prisoners who are still in custody, and to prevent the recall merry-go-round which many have experienced.

Recalled prisoners are a growing proportion of the total number of IPP prisoners in England and Wales. Many of the reasons for recall speak more to the need for mental health provision than for a recall to prison. For instance, one of my constituents was recalled for things he said to the police during a mental health crisis while intoxicated. Having served 17 years on an IPP sentence, he will now be in prison for an indeterminate length of time while waiting to be seen by the Parole Board, having committed no further criminal offences.

As far back as 2008, the chief inspectors of prisons and probation were highlighting the lack of resources necessary to rehabilitate IPP prisoners and the enormous strain IPP sentences placed on the prison system and the Parole Board. We know we inherited from the last Government a prison estate and a criminal justice system that is now in even worse shape. It is teetering on the edge and requiring the early release of some prisoners where it is considered safe to do so. I certainly welcome the action the Minister and his colleagues have taken to begin to clean up the mess.

Last week in the main Chamber we were told that IPP sentences would be excluded from the sentencing review announced by the Secretary of State. I understand the reasons why, but the actions that are being taken for those on IPP sentences and the new sentencing review must speak to each other, particularly where they are addressing common challenges such as the need to focus on rehabilitation and support in the community and to free up prison places across the prison estate.

Key to this will be the IPP action plan. We have a plan, but as yet no report to Parliament on its effectiveness. My understanding is that that was due in March, but was delayed to May by the previous Government and has still not been published. I therefore urge the Minister to bring forward that publication as a matter of urgency, together with the annual report by the Secretary of State on steps taken to support those serving IPP sentences with their rehabilitation and progress towards release.

I also urge the Minister to consider the ways in which the IPP action plan could be improved, reflecting on some of the feedback on its inadequacy that has been highlighted by previous Justice Committees and other civil society organisations. We must understand the adequacy of the current support available to prisoners serving IPP sentences or who have been recalled and have clear measures of assessment. We cannot continue to have IPP prisoners languishing in our overcrowded jails.

As of March this year, 80% of unreleased IPP prisoners had been in prison for over twice their original tariff length. I previously mentioned that IPP sentences had been attached to offences other than the most serious offences that were intended in the original legislation.

I note that around 190 IPP prisoners are still in custody more than 10 years after completing their original tariff of two years.

As the Justice Committee, the Howard League for Penal Reform and the Prison Reform Trust have said, there are high rates of self-harm and recall to prison among IPP prisoners. That should cause us to look very closely at the adequacy of the support they are receiving, both in prison and when out on licence, and make improving it a priority for the new Labour Government. It is self-evident that those two things are linked, and that it will be very difficult for IPP prisoners to show that they no longer present a threat to the public if they are not receiving intensive support to deal with the psychological effects of believing they may never leave prison despite, for instance, having passed the end of the two-year tariff more than a decade previously. Lord Moylan has in the past described IPP sentences as

“a form of mental torture”,

as other Members have referenced today. I agree with him that we have a moral responsibility to administer justice to IPP prisoners, who have been neglected for too long.

Some Members have today raised resentencing. I know from her answer to my question in the Chamber last week that the Secretary of State is not in favour of resentencing. However, it is not clear to me why it could not be done in a way that balances the protection of the public with justice for the individual offender, as recommended by the Justice Committee in the past, via an expert committee that could correct any disproportionate sentences while considering public safety. A wide range of respected organisations consider that that could be done and I would welcome more clarity from the Minister on that point.

Just as I opened with words from Lord Blunkett, so I will end with them. He has described the current situation concerning recalled IPP prisoners in particular as “unequal”, “unjust” and “immoral”. The coalition Government took the right step in ending IPP sentences in 2012, but they left unfinished business. Those still serving IPP sentences, or who have been recalled, need a system that will be fairer to them and give them the necessary support to leave prison while preserving public safety. It is our issue to fix as the new Labour Government.

Valerie Vaz (in the Chair): I call the Lib Dem spokesperson.

3.18 pm

Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD): Thank you for calling me to speak, Ms Vaz. I also thank the hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) for securing this debate on a hugely important subject. As the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for mental health, I will start with a story that illustrates the issues that many have been touching on about people not knowing when their release date is going to be and how it can affect mental health.

Many Members will have heard of Tommy Nicol. He is a tragic illustration of what can happen when the mental health needs of IPP prisoners go unmet. Tommy was sentenced to four years for robbery, but he served six years without hope of release. The Parole Board then recommended that Tommy complete a course of

therapy, but there were no services available. When he subsequently moved prisons to access better services, he self-harmed and set fire to his cell. That then landed him in isolation, where he became psychotic and inflicted more self-harm. Just three days after being moved into isolation, he tragically took his own life.

Despite the clear warnings that Tommy was psychiatrically unwell, no mental health assessment was ever carried out and there was zero mental health support during his time in isolation. The consultant forensic psychiatrist who gave evidence at the inquest said that the IPP sentence had contributed to Tommy's death, as he had completely lost hope. Tommy had made a complaint a few years previously that his lack of a certain release date was the

"psychological torture of a person who is doing 99 years".

We know that individuals serving IPP sentences often end up extremely unwell, with high rates of suicide and self-harm. It is hard to imagine being locked behind bars for maybe 22 hours a day without hope of release. Most of us here seem to agree with Tommy that that amounts to psychological torture.

Today we are focusing on the critical issue of IPP sentences, but to understand the impact they are having, it is worth considering them in the broader context of the state of our prisons. HMP Winchester in my constituency serves as a stark example of the ongoing crisis. Just last week, it was placed under the urgent notification process following an inspection by HM inspectorate of prisons. The findings paint a troubled picture: the years of underinvestment have left lasting physical and psychological impacts on both prisoners and staff. Resources for rehabilitation and education are severely lacking. That only perpetuates the high reoffending rates, which are bad for the prisoners and costs taxpayers even more in the long run.

If rehabilitation is the fundamental purpose of prison, how can we expect individuals to reform when faced with conditions like those reported last week in HMP Winchester? Consider these distressing statistics: 47% of prisoners report easy access to drugs; 41% return positive results on random drug tests; many are sleeping in cramped and dirty cells; self-harm and suicide have become normalised and prisoners spend up to 21.5 hours each day confined to their cells, with only 2.5 hours outside. Those conditions, marked by violence, isolation and pervasive drug use, paint a bleak reality that makes rehabilitation nearly impossible.

Individuals serving IPP sentences are suffering immensely, with mental health issues running high and suicide and self-harm rates elevated. IPP prisoners are two and a half times more likely to self-harm than those serving other types of sentences, and we know that prisoners in general are more likely to self-harm than the general population. Despite that, the recent independent sentencing review excludes IPP sentences entirely. It is profoundly unjust that some individuals with lesser offences are stuck in IPP limbo, while others who committed more serious crimes are being released early under the Government's current policy. Reforming IPP sentences could alleviate prison overcrowding, improve mental health outcomes and enhance safety, yet those reforms remain absent.

The Lib Dems urge the Government to establish an expert committee to advise on how we can swiftly resentence individuals still serving IPP terms. Addressing

the crisis in our prisons, at HMP Winchester and all the others, is essential. We must right the wrongs of IPP sentencing. If our goal is rehabilitation, we should be providing the resources and the conditions necessary for these individuals to re-enter society as productive citizens, not leaving them scarred by indefinite incarceration.

The Secretary of State has assured us that the independent sentencing review imposes no constraints, and yet a glaring oversight persists: the exclusion of IPP sentences. Nearly 3,000 individuals remain incarcerated without a defined release date, some for lesser offences than those who have recently been released under the current policy. Reforming these sentences is not only a step towards justice, but a practical partial solution to overcrowding. As mental health spokesperson, I am particularly concerned about the deterioration of IPP prisoners' mental health. As the hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green mentioned, we are worried about how that may affect any subsequent parole hearings. We ask the Government why they have chosen to exclude IPP sentences from the review, and whether that that decision will be reconsidered.

Valerie Vaz (in the Chair): I call the Opposition spokesperson.

3.24 pm

Edward Argar (Melton and Syston) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz, and a privilege to speak in today's debate. Doing so from the Opposition side of the Chamber takes some getting used to, though I fear I may have time to get used to it. I am very pleased to see the Minister here; I know him well and he is a thoroughly decent and able man, so it is a pleasure to see him back in the House after a brief absence from this place.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) on securing this debate on an issue on which there are strong and sincerely held views. I know the hon. Gentleman well. He spoke eloquently and with typical decency and humanity. Before moving to the substance of the debate, as a Leicestershire MP I say to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) that he and the Minister might have another ally in their footballing cause in this House.

[CLIVE EFFORD *in the Chair*]

As we have heard, the IPP sentence has understandably been called a stain on our justice system, not least by my predecessor in office, the former Lord Chancellor Alex Chalk, among others. It is a sentence that can keep people essentially in limbo in what could be termed preventive detention, not because of something they have done, but because of something that they may do.

The sentence was brought in under the previous Labour Government by the then Home Secretary, David—now Lord—Blunkett. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to him for what he has done subsequently. He has become one of the greatest advocates for reform, which speaks of his integrity. It takes a big person to acknowledge the botched introduction of the legislation in 2005 and the error that was made; it speaks well of him that he has been willing to do so.

A decade on from the 2012 abolition, the Justice Committee report of September 2022 was hugely important in what it said and the look it took at this issue. It made

[*Edward Argar*]

a number of constructive recommendations, which the previous Government considered very carefully. I am pleased that in the final days of the previous Parliament, a consensus was reached that enabled the then Victims and Prisoners Bill to progress into legislation. I am grateful to the now Government for the constructive approach they took in those final days. Changes to the IPP sentence were a key part of that.

The hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green and the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) called for those changes to be enacted. That has already been done through that legislation, reducing the licence period from 10 years to a review at three years, reflecting what the Justice Committee said—although going a bit further than the five years it suggested—with the Parole Board then considering the termination of the licence. There is a presumption of termination, but it is a rebuttable one were there to be any other considerations to be taken into account. Were that not acted on after the three years, after a further two years the Secretary of State must terminate that licence, unless there had been a recall during that period. Those changes have already been made, and I believe the implementation was carried out relatively recently by the new Government.

That new test creates a presumption for licence termination unless public protection considerations mean that the Parole Board deems that licence to be needed. There is a hugely difficult balance to be struck, rightly, between the challenges the hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green, among others, set out and the challenges that the sentence poses—to hope, and to the ability to see a way forward and make progress, for those serving way beyond the time that would be handed down under the current sentencing regime for the equivalent crime.

That must be set against public protection considerations, which must also be at the heart of the approach. Where the Parole Board has deemed it will not agree the termination of the licence, that is because the Parole Board has refused on the grounds of public protection. We have heard today of the huge impact that the nature of that uncertainty, lack of hope and clarity has on those serving IPP sentences.

That lack of hope has an impact on those people's mental health. The nature of the sentence has a huge impact not just on individuals but on their family, friends and others. The right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) set that out very eloquently, as he does. I must always be careful in lavishing praise on the right hon. Gentleman, as it will probably not do my political career much good, but I found myself reflecting carefully on what he said because he made his point in a measured, and very human, way. This is why the changes contained in the Victims and Prisoners Act were needed.

However, although the Justice Committee recommended resentencing, that would potentially see those whom a parole board had very recently considered not safe to release on public protection grounds released immediately, even if that went contrary to the board's view. Just last week, in her response to questions following the statement she made to the House, the new Lord Chancellor set out her view that His Majesty's Government continue to oppose resentencing, as set out in the Justice Committee's report.

The hon. Member for York Central highlighted the huge importance of progress—of people being able to see their progression towards release and the termination of their licence. Engagement and support is absolutely central to that. The changes to licence times, and the approach to licence termination, will help people progress, but it is important that we reflect, as the hon. Member for Strangford said, not just on those IPP prisoners but on the victims of those crimes, and it is right that we consider both in the round.

Before I turn to that, I think we are beginning to see some progress. When this matter was debated in the context of the Victims and Prisoners Bill, the figures were that around 3,300 IPP prisoners were still detained; the latest figures from the House of Commons Library show that there are now just under 2,800. That is a degree of progress. Equally, it is important to remember that at that time about 1,200 had never been released or had the opportunity to make progress and be released, so more progress needs to be made.

I will put a number of questions to the Minister, and I expect he will respond in his typically helpful and constructive manner. Can he set out what progress is being made on the action plan? I think the hon. Member for Rochester and Strood (Lauren Edwards) touched on this, but my understanding is that, with the passage of the Victims and Prisoners Act through Parliament, it was deemed that there might be an interaction between that and the action plan. That explains the delay: the plan would have been published earlier this year, but the changes made in the Act were—and are—significant. I would welcome the Minister's reflections on that.

The Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Winchester (Dr Chambers), clearly and eloquently set out the importance of mental health considerations in this context. Mental health can have an impact both on those with an IPP sentence and on their families and friends, and there is a need for mental health support and care to enable that progression, both inside prison and on release so they can continue to abide by the terms of the licence. What support is available to IPP prisoners before they appear before the Parole Board to best demonstrate what they have achieved?

If victims anticipate a release date further in the future, they might well be concerned about what happens if a licence is breached, or if there is suspicion of that. How is that reported—to probation, or to the police—and how is it acted on? What action would be taken? Once a licence is terminated, would the victims' understanding be right that at that point they have no further options, because that person is deemed to have served their time and to be a free citizen?

To conclude, Mr Efford, I am conscious that the previous Lord Chancellor continues to look very carefully at the issue. We saw the approach he took in the Victims and Prisoners Act, and he was clear that he would always continue to look carefully at any changes recommended by Committees or others, ensuring that balance between justice for IPP prisoners and addressing the concerns of victims and public protection. Will the Minister confirm that he and the new Lord Chancellor will continue to adopt a pragmatic and measured approach in considering this incredibly challenging issue?

3.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Sir Nicholas Dakin): It is a pleasure to serve under you in the Chair, Mr Efford. We have had a full and informed debate, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) for securing it and setting it off in such a positive way. He drew our attention to the issues and reminded us, as others did, of Lord Blunkett's words about IPP sentences being the "biggest regret" of his political career. We all need to roll up our sleeves and work across the parties. I welcome the fact that the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Melton and Syston (Edward Argar), recognised how we, in opposition, worked constructively with the Government. He is now doing the same. The problem belongs to all of us and we should put our shoulders to the wheel to resolve it in the best way possible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green also drew our attention to the heart of all this: these prisoners often feel a loss of hope and that they are in a cycle of despair. It is our responsibility to do all we can to break that cycle. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) spoke with deep understanding and eloquence. He drew attention to the way in which prisoners often self-harm and the need for programmes to be focused precisely on the needs of individuals to bring about practical action. I hope that is where we are going now with the action plan and the dashboard behind it, which follows each individual prisoner so that the right approach can be taken for them and so that they and the prison authorities know what they have to do to allow people to move to the next stage so that there is, we hope, a positive outcome for everybody.

My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) spoke about people languishing in their cells without hope. That is a depressing picture and we all have a big responsibility to turn back the clock so that it is no longer the case. The right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts)—I pronounced her constituency wrong but did my best, so I hope she will forgive me—drew attention to the comments of the special rapporteur. Lord Timpson met the special rapporteur yesterday, so we are taking those issues seriously as we try to move forward.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke with his usual warmth and passion. He drew attention to the important principles of justice, rehabilitation and the needs of the victims, and the need to balance them as we move forward. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Lauren Edwards) focused on the words of Lord Blunkett, but also drew our attention to the way recall has been used in a way perhaps not anticipated at the outset. I hope that what happens later this week will help remedy some of that. The Lib Dem spokesman, the hon. Member for Winchester (Dr Chambers), gave us Tommy's harrowing story. Sadly, there are many stories like that, and our job is to try to ensure that there are not more in the future.

A lot of the history has already been dealt with, so I will not go back over what has been covered so well by others. The Government recognise the challenges faced by those serving IPP sentences, and it is absolutely right that the sentence was abolished. More than 5,000 people are still serving IPP sentences. For those serving the

sentence in prison, the Government are determined to give them the support and opportunities they need to make further progress towards a safe, sustainable release. For those serving the sentence in the community, an end to the sentence is now within their grasp.

The debate is timely, as I was pleased to meet the IPP Committee in Action with Lord Timpson today—I see members of the group in the Public Gallery—in what I felt was a positive meeting. That does not mean that everything was where we wanted it to be, but it was a constructive, positive meeting, as we tried to work with people with genuine concerns and experience to get better outcomes.

This Friday, we will implement the first phase of changes to the IPP licence period in the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, which we supported in opposition, and we are determined to implement those vital provisions at the earliest opportunity. We will also publish an updated IPP action plan shortly, which will continue to focus on the rehabilitation of IPP offenders through frontline delivery in our prisons and in the probation service. It remains the case, however, that supporting IPP offenders continues to present a number of challenges, particularly when it comes to those who have never been released. In addition, we must never lose sight of the paramount importance of protecting the public, which the right hon. Member for Melton and Syston spoke about so sensibly.

The changes to the IPP licence in the Victim and Prisoners Act will mean that this Friday those who were first released at least five years ago—or four years ago for those convicted when they were under 18—and who have spent the last two on licence without recall to custody will have their licence automatically terminated on 1 February 2025. The qualifying period for when the Secretary of State must refer an IPP licence to the Parole Board for consideration of licence termination, which is currently 10 years, will be three years, or two for those convicted when under 18. Commencing the new measures means that the IPP licence will end automatically for around 1,800 people on 1 November. In addition, 600 people will be referred to the Parole Board to consider licence termination on 1 February 2025. We anticipate that the changes, once fully implemented, will reduce the number of people serving IPP sentences in the community by around two thirds.

I recognise that the changes will not automatically result in any change to the status of those serving IPP sentences in prison. For that reason, the Government are determined to give those people every chance to make further progress in reducing their risk and eventually obtaining a release direction from the Parole Board in a way that prioritises public protection. As hon. Members have said, there is a responsibility on us to provide hope, but also to ensure that hope is realistic and proper.

The IPP action plan is one of the first steps in delivering that. The refreshed plan, which my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green asked for, places greater emphasis on effective frontline delivery in our prisons to ensure that prisoners serving IPP sentences have robust and effective sentence plans that they are actively engaging with, and that they are in the correct prison to access the right interventions and rehabilitative services. Lord Timpson, the Minister for prisons, probation and reducing reoffending, is determined to use his role to achieve that, including by ensuring

[Sir Nicholas Dakin]

that HMPPS delivers effective sentence planning and timely prison transfers. Lord Timpson would also remind us that in the Timpson business he had 30 IPP prisoners as good, effective colleagues, so he has lived experience of working hard to deliver for people in this area.

Those efforts will ensure that IPP prisoners can get to the right place to pursue the programme of intervention that they need to reduce their risk and make further progress towards a future release by way of the direction from the Parole Board. Around 30% of IPP prisoners are not currently in the correct prison to start the next formal intervention specified in their sentence plan. We are clear that that must be addressed as a matter of urgency, notwithstanding the challenges brought about by the current population pressures, which the Government are taking decisive action to tackle.

Rachael Maskell: My constituent has been waiting 17 years for release. Can the Minister provide a timeframe by which my constituent can expect to hear what the justice system further expects of him before he gets that release?

Sir Nicholas Dakin: Each case is different, so I come back to the importance of individual plans for individual prisoners, and the fact that they need to know, from conversations with the prison authorities, exactly where they are and what intervention is there, and they can see themselves progressing positively towards a positive outcome. It is impossible to give a timeframe on each individual case, but I would hope that each individual would have a feel of what the timeframe might look like for them.

Every prison now has a dedicated full-time neurodiversity support manager, and each has attended a bespoke awareness session on the IPP sentence and its impact on those serving it. Those managers are working with frontline staff to help them improve their support and communication with neurodiverse IPP prisoners, fostering good relationships and effective support for improved prospects of progression. We will continue to focus on delivering good education training and work opportunities in prison to build skills, alongside support for IPP prisoners to access employment and accommodation on release.

The IPP action plan is reviewed annually, and the Government will continue to scrutinise thoroughly progress made. To increase accountability, next summer the Lord Chancellor will be laying before Parliament the IPP annual report, which will detail the activity that has been undertaken to support those serving the IPP sentence, and hopefully address the points that have been made about where individuals lie in relation to confidence and assistance. If the anticipated progress is not being made, we will then consider what more we must do to drive the progress that we are determined to see. We will not accept no progress; we expect and demand progress, and that is what we will be looking for.

I appreciate that those still serving the sentence in prison will consider that they have not really benefited from the previous IPP action plans—there is some scepticism. This Labour Government will not allow that to be the case in future. We will robustly drive meaningful actions to deliver actual changes to how well IPP prisoners

are protected and supported. That includes supporting those who have never been released, and those who have been recalled to custody. Recall remains a vital function in managing the risk of released IPP prisoners. The thematic review from His Majesty's inspectorate of probation highlights the fact that decisions to recall IPP offenders have been proportionate and necessary, and that must continue to maintain public protection.

The Government's overriding priority remains the protection of the public—I was pleased that the Opposition spokesperson, the right hon. Member for Melton and Syston, reiterated that in his comments—but, as my hon. Friend the Member for York Central pointed out, that needs to be robust and consistent. It is vital for public confidence and protection that those serving the IPP sentence in prison are released only following a thorough risk assessment that finds that their risk has reduced to the point where they may be safely managed in the community. That is a judgment for the independent Parole Board, which has also recognised that a greater focus on the IPP cohort is necessary. The board has set up a dedicated IPP taskforce so that IPP cases are handled and reviewed by Parole Board members with the appropriate knowledge, experience and expertise of the IPP sentence.

Legislating to give every IPP prisoner a definite release date and post-release licence would result in most of them being released automatically—we are coming on to the issue of resentencing, which I know is an issue of huge contention and concern—but, in many cases, the Parole Board has repeatedly determined that those individuals are too dangerous to be released, not having met the statutory release test. In those circumstances, sadly, public protection has to take priority.

The alternative would be resentencing via the court, which would likely result in most offenders still in custody being released without any licensed supervision, despite the Parole Board having assessed in the past two years that those individuals should remain in custody for the protection of the public, having not met the statutory release test. Either approach, sadly, would pose an unacceptable level of risk to members of the public, and, in particular, to victims. I am especially concerned that resentencing could result in dangerous IPP prisoners being released, without a licence period, into the community.

John McDonnell: I do not want to disagree with my hon. Friend, but that is a distorted reading of the Justice Committee report. It actually saw resentencing as enabling a refocusing on these particular prisoners, and an expert panel was to be involved to ensure that there was not a mass release in that way; there would be a staggered release, with all the expertise and support available. I think that the Minister has misread the Justice Committee report and should revisit it.

Sir Nicholas Dakin: I will very happily revisit the report as my right hon. Friend advises, but the reality is that we need to crack on with this. We need to get things to a better place as quickly as possible, and that means having the right support available to support each individual, to move them on their way. There may be a way of resentencing happening, but it is complicated and it has significant risk, which is why we are not going there. People released in those circumstances would not be subject to any licence conditions, including those that

protect victims, for example by prohibiting contact with victims and enforcing exclusion zones. I do not accept that that is an acceptable position for victims.

On IPP offenders in the community, a resentencing exercise would also halt the risk management and support for these individuals, some of whom will be at the critical moment of having been recently released from custody. The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 makes significant changes to the IPP licence period and allows for the termination of the IPP sentence in a safe, sustainable way, ensuring that the public and victims are best safeguarded. It is about balance, and I recognise that there are very strong arguments—and good arguments—for the balance to be elsewhere, but this is where the Government want to place the balance at the moment.

Rachael Maskell: The big issue, which I think all colleagues across the Chamber have been raising consistently in this debate, is people's mental health. Continuous uncertainty will continue to mean people having very poor mental health, including self-harming and, tragically, losing their lives. Will the Minister ensure that he puts time frameworks around what he is talking about, so that people can start planning in their mind what their future looks like? At the moment, they are still looking down a very dark hole.

Sir Nicholas Dakin: Each IPP prisoner should know what they need to do in order to make progress through the system or towards the community, and each IPP prisoner should also know what the system should be doing to support them. That is the question, really, and I look towards friends and family because they are a massive resource in this respect. If individual IPP prisoners do not know what they should be doing in order to move on the journey towards release, or they do not know what the system should be doing to support them on the journey towards release, which includes support on mental health and other support of that kind, then there is an issue that we need to focus on and deal with. That is my answer to that point.

I will come on to the questions asked by the Opposition spokesperson, the right hon. Member for Melton and Syston, about what progress is being made on the action plan. I hope I have managed to cover off in my response the fact that the action plan is central and progressing in the way that we would wish. I have just mentioned mental health support. In relation to the licence breach, where the licence is still in force and victims become aware that an offender has breached a licence condition—for example, if they have entered an exclusion zone—they may report it to the police or their victim liaison officer. Where the licence is terminated, all licence conditions end, including exclusion zones.

John McDonnell: This debate has been helpful in expressing the concerns that people have. I am worried that we have been in this situation many times before,

relying on an action plan that is never implemented effectively. I hope the Minister is saying that this one will be, but I must say that I have some scepticism, given the resources within the prison network and system at the moment. It is worth revisiting the discussion about the Justice Committee recommendations. Will he meet with a number of us from both Houses to talk through those and see whether, as we monitor this action plan, we can actually prepare a fall-back if it does not work?

Sir Nicholas Dakin: I am happy to meet my right hon. Friend and colleagues across both Houses with Lord Timpson to discuss progress on this in broad terms, because we can work together. We all want improvements, and we want this long-standing injustice to be put right for the future, and if we work together we are more likely to achieve that. I thank everybody who has spoken in this most timely and helpful debate, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green, who secured it.

3.55 pm

Bambos Charalambous: I also thank colleagues who have taken part in the debate, which has been thorough and thoughtful. There have been great contributions from everybody. I also have an apology from the Justice Committee, which is in its first meeting right now so its members could not be present, but would have liked to attend, so we would have had more voices around this Chamber.

I welcome many of the comments made by the Minister, particularly those about the action plan and the dashboard for prisoners. They need to know what is happening, so I welcome that. I also welcome the fact that they need to be in the correct prisons in order to progress and the fact that they will have dedicated time to see support workers and get the right education and training to be released. I look forward to seeing the action plan when it is republished, and I am keen to see what progress it makes, because we want to see progress and ensure that IPP prisoners are no longer suffering and are able to get on with their lives. It impacts not just them, but their families. If this does not work, I certainly think we need to revisit the resentencing option.

One point made by numerous Members in the debate was about the recommendations of the Justice Committee, which talked about having an “expert committee”. It is about looking at and resentencing each individual case, which would be very time-consuming, but the right and just thing to do. We will see where we go, and we will monitor the progress made on this by the Government. If progress has not been made, we will come back and seek to look at other alternatives, but I welcome the measures put in place so far.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered imprisonment for public protection sentences.

Lower Thames Crossing

4 pm

Jim Dickson (Dartford) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the potential merits of a new Lower Thames Crossing.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Efford. I start by thanking the colleagues from neighbouring constituencies in Kent, Essex and the wider Thames estuary who are present in the Chamber. I also thank representatives of businesses across our region for joining us in the Public Gallery; there is an impressive number of people from Kent and Essex here to show their support, from the private sector, Government-sponsored boards and a variety of other organisations. They have come together in support of the lower Thames crossing, and the economic and skills potential that it would create for Kent, Essex and the UK economy.

I understand that the planning decision on the crossing is, as the Secretary of State for Transport has made clear to me, a quasi-judicial one, and that the Minister may not be at liberty to comment further than the written ministerial statement issued on 7 October. However, I am not here to talk about the planning process; we are here to talk about the merits of the lower Thames crossing proposal, the delivery of which not only is vital to my constituents, but will add £40 billion to our economy and be vital to the delivery of our Government's core missions.

Before I come to the merits, it is worth reflecting on the impact of having only one crossing—a single point of failure—over the Thames east of London, effectively creating the largest bottleneck in the UK. It is nearly a given that every Dartford resident's life will be disrupted in one way or another because of traffic gridlock caused by tailbacks from the Dartford crossing. The crossing operates continually over capacity, struggling daily with 50,000 vehicles on top of the capacity for which it was designed, so disruption is an everyday issue.

When the crossing goes wrong, as it did earlier last week, it goes disastrously wrong. Last Monday, a major technical fault at the tunnel left Dartford at a complete standstill for nearly 30 hours while repairs were made to one of the two tunnels. Trips that should have taken 10 minutes took four or five hours. That has a real impact on the lives of my constituents. It impacts residents trying to get to work, stifling local trades and businesses. Brian, a constituent I have been in contact with following Monday's chaos, is a self-employed plumber from Swanscombe; the traffic meant that he could not get to his customers and lost out on a full day of work.

Children across my constituency are regularly late to school or lose out on extracurricular activity by being stuck in traffic. Rajiv, another constituent, wrote to me about his 12-year-old daughter, who arrived back in Greenhithe at 8 pm last Monday tired, hungry and confused, having left her school in Northfleet four hours earlier. For those unaware of the geography, that is a journey of 4 miles. A school bus service for children with special educational needs and disabilities was cancelled, which meant that those young people lost out on a full day of learning.

The disruption also impacts the health and wellbeing of residents. People miss out on GP and hospital appointments, and live in worry that, as it has before, traffic could cause a delay in getting to A&E should an

accident happen. Another constituent of mine, a lorry driver with a pre-existing heart condition, made the decision to take a lower-paid job driving vans on one side of the river, as he was worried that if he got stuck in traffic and needed an ambulance it would not get to him on time.

With stories like those, it is no wonder the lower Thames crossing has such strong support in my community, with over 70% of those consulted backing the new route. It has huge support from business, with 73 organisations nationwide, including the Port of Dover, the British Chambers of Commerce and some of the UK's biggest retailers, saying that the crossing must go ahead. There is clear support for the crossing. The need for it is clear to residents and businesses, and it has been for a long time.

Jen Craft (Thurrock) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. I will keep my intervention brief; suffice it to say that my constituents perhaps do not support the lower Thames crossing quite so wholeheartedly as he does. Does he agree that the crossing will mitigate the problems he has set out for only five to 10 years at most, and then we will be back in our current situation?

Jim Dickson: I thank my hon. Friend for that interesting intervention. All the calculations indicate that on the day the lower Thames crossing opens, there will be a 20% reduction in vehicles using the Dartford crossing, and that after 15 years that reduction will still be at around 14%. The crossing should also help to cut some traffic on the A13 in her constituency and from junction 30 of the M25, so there are advantages for her constituents as well as a clear advantage for mine and for the UK economy.

James McMurdock (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Reform): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate; a lot of people across Kent and Essex are very invested in the issue. I will use a number that he gave to make my point. A 14% reduction in roughly 10 years' time, when the current traffic volume is around 200,000 vehicles, is a reduction of 30,000. We are already 50,000 over capacity, so we will be spending £10 billion to be 20,000 vehicles per day over capacity. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is making an important point and something needs to be done, but does he agree that the crossing is not ambitious enough, given its tremendous impact on the way of life in Essex and its limited impact on the actual problem?

Jim Dickson: The hon. Gentleman seems to be saying that the lower Thames crossing project, which would take 20% of traffic out of the Dartford crossing and retain 14% of that reduction after 15 years—to get the figures right—should be bigger and wider. That is certainly a point of view. I am happy with the proposals as they stand. I would rather not make the crossing bigger and wider and therefore potentially create additional disruption and environmental impact. All those things are under control with this project, and I would not like us to go back to the drawing board and start the process again; that could take another 15 years.

This is a long-term project. The last Labour Government identified the need for a lower Thames crossing 15 years ago and the project has been in conception since, but, broadly speaking, it has been sat on for the last 14 years. The route has been subject to lengthy consultation—three

separate consultations, to be precise. After years of engagement, legitimate concerns have been worked through, and the crossing is the best solution to the lack of road capacity across the Thames, which costs our economy £200 million a year in lost time alone.

As a Government of growth, we now just need to get on with the job and get the crossing delivered. Why? Because it would add £40 billion to the economy—it is precisely the kind of long-term project that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is talking about—and there are arguments for how it will contribute to all five of the Government's missions for change. I will briefly list them. The crossing will be critical in kick-starting economic growth in the south-east of the UK. Once built, it will double capacity over the Thames east of London, creating another direct connection between channel ports, the midlands and the north. That will mean another road route for goods to flow to and from Europe, whereas right now, unlike nearly every other European nation, we have only one.

The project will also reduce the number of vehicles using the Dartford crossing, as I said in response to the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (James McMurdock), by around 20%, with 13.5 million fewer vehicles using the crossing each year, vastly improving journey times and reliability. It will also improve resilience across the major road network, providing new junctions with the A2, the M25 and other roads. There is also an opportunity to kick-start further progress in the Government-backed Thames estuary growth area, creating 1.3 million new jobs and £190 billion-worth of growth by 2050.

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): The hon. Gentleman will be aware that it was the vision of the Thatcher Government in the 1980s that took the area of Docklands and transformed it into Canary Wharf. There have been similar attempts over the years to do that with the Thames estuary, because there is such enormous economic potential; it would be transformative for the hon. Gentleman's constituents, for mine and for the entire region. It would reflect a dearth of ambition if we did not see the same level of effort and ingenuity going into this project, because the project would be transformative. This is not just about daily problems for our constituents; it is about that economic transformation, which would have a lasting impact for our country.

Jim Dickson: I thank the hon. Member for her intervention. She is completely right. The project has the potential to really kick-start the growth in the Thames estuary that has started but needs extra investment in order to succeed. In addition to the points she makes, we should think about the Thames freeport in that context; it could generate £2.5 billion additional growth and attract £4.5 billion in public and private investment.

Dr Lauren Sullivan (Gravesham) (Lab): I want to focus on the merits of the lower Thames crossing for Gravesham, where one in five people have no qualifications and two in five live in relative poverty. Is my hon. Friend as outraged as I am by the announcement that the skills hub for the south part, in Kent, is to be in Maidstone, and not in Gravesham, where it could address some of those issues?

Jim Dickson: I thank my hon. Friend for pointing that out. The skills element is absolutely critical. The skills hub will be in Maidstone, but will be available to

everyone across the region. The further education sector has come together as a consortium to make sure that 16-plus residents across the region benefit. I have spoken to at least one major construction business today that has been looking to start a skills hub in my hon. Friend's constituency and would be very happy to do so upon the announcement of the start of this programme. There are lots of opportunities, both in Maidstone and in her constituency, for new jobs and new skills opportunities for residents. That is an extremely important point.

The crossing has already been through the planning process and a delivery team is ready. That means that the project is shovel-ready and could be under construction shortly after decisions on planning and funding are made. We could be reaping the benefits very soon after a May 2025 decision.

Lauren Edwards (Rochester and Strood) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the lower Thames crossing has the potential to boost skills and economic growth not only in Dartford, but across Kent, and in particular in Medway, the area that I represent? In recent years, I have had many helpful conversations with the lower Thames crossing team about ensuring that opportunities for skilled jobs in construction, in green industries and in steel can be accessed by my constituents in Rochester and Strood. Some 192 businesses in Medway have already registered on the lower Thames crossing supply chain, so this is potentially a huge opportunity to boost skills and economic growth in the region.

Jim Dickson: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and for her efforts to bring skills and opportunities together with the investment that we hope to see from the lower Thames crossing. She is absolutely right that there are numerous opportunities, including a dedicated T-level, apprenticeship and graduate set of schemes. Through the lower Thames crossing team, we are also developing the first green workforce in the estuary and helping the estuary in north Kent to become a high-skills economy, in contrast to the situation at the moment, where some parts do not have those skills and opportunities.

Speaking of a green-skilled workforce, the lower Thames crossing will play a vital role in Britain becoming a clean energy superpower. It is leading the way in cutting carbon out of infrastructure, with its contractors already committed to reducing carbon by 50% with measures such as low-carbon concrete and steel, and eliminating diesel from the construction fleet. The crossing will replace up to 20 million litres of diesel with clean hydrogen power and ensure that its heavy machinery is powered in that way. The scale of hydrogen purchases will kick-start development of a hydrogen ecosystem in the Thames estuary, which the Thames Estuary Growth Board says has the potential to attract £2.2 billion of investment, create 9,000 new highly skilled jobs and 5,300 jobs in downstream automotive manufacturing, and boost the economy by an extra £3.8 billion. These clean energy initiatives will help transform our construction industry into a world leader in delivering low-carbon infrastructure.

Jen Craft: I thank my hon. Friend for being so generous in giving way a second time. I want to clarify the claim that the lower Thames crossing is a piece of green infrastructure. Does he agree that the more roads

[Jen Craft]

we build, the more people will use them? That will lower our air quality, particularly in Thurrock and the surrounding areas. It also flies in the face of our commitment to net zero, given that more people will be using vehicles that cause pollution.

Jim Dickson: We cannot address a bottleneck such as the one at Dartford, where the air quality is terrible, simply by allowing the situation to continue. We need additional capacity to spread that vehicle movement across more than one part of the Thames. That is what this proposal is about. There are many plans within the lower Thames crossing project to mitigate any environmental impact, such as by more than replacing the trees that are lost. The hydrogen economy means that it will be a low-carbon project. The new habitats that are created as a result of the replanting will be bridged, and will therefore be able to spread across the north and south banks of the estuary; that will ensure that they are preserved.

The lower Thames crossing will also create safer and stronger communities by increasing skills and job prospects, and it will contribute directly to the Government's mission to reduce the cycle of crime and prioritise rehabilitation. Just last week, the lower Thames crossing, north Kent's own Gallagher Group and Flannery Plant Hire launched a new skills hub—an initiative designed to tackle our construction skills shortage by engaging new people through pilot courses. The first pilot has started. The 20 individuals involved include six prisoners who, upon their release, will have a guaranteed interview in the construction industry. The aim is to expand that skills hub throughout the build. Think how much of a difference this project can make to a local community when it is actually engaged in the construction.

Kevin McKenna (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend very much for securing this really important debate. I have spent far too much time snarled up in traffic between my constituency, Sittingbourne and Sheppey, and Dartford, so we need a big change in the north Kent transport networks. Given that this proposal has been around for a long time, what changes does he think need to be made to it to get it over the line now? We have a bit of time before it comes up for full consideration in the spring. Given that it has struggled to convince everybody, what beneficial changes could be made to it?

Jim Dickson: At the moment, the project is attempting to receive a development consent order from the Government; that will be adjudged in May. The project is a result of three separate consultations and something like 350,000 pages of a planning application, so it really is not for me to suggest changes, but it is important that local people not only feel the benefit in goods and vehicles flowing north and south more freely, but in skills and investment in their local communities.

Finally, on the Government's five missions, the lower Thames crossing will create a healthier and happier local population. In the long term, the growth generated will support our vital public services such as the NHS. Its impact in reducing congestion drastically will be felt by my Dartford constituents, who will not experience the everyday disruption to their lives that they do right now—

James McMurdock: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jim Dickson: I would like to make progress, because the Minister needs to speak.

The project will tackle the air pollution, the missed hospital and GP appointments and the strain on wellbeing that being in constant gridlock brings. The case for the lower Thames crossing is compelling, and the merits are huge. It will relieve the congestion in Dartford, which has affected the local community and held back local trades and businesses—it simply cannot continue. The project has overwhelming support from the business community, as can be seen today. I am happy to confirm that, alongside the businesses represented in the Public Gallery today, I have formed a business consortium, which is working closely with the local community to do everything we can to get spades in the ground.

Tomorrow the Chancellor of the Exchequer will present her first Budget to the House, with growth and infrastructure at the fore as key themes—as, rightly, will be the financial challenges our Government face and the importance of leveraging private capital where we can. The Chancellor said last week that we need to:

“invest in things to get a long-term return for our country and for taxpayers”

when it comes to infrastructure. The previous Government spent 14 years talking about this project, for which there remains huge and increasing support. As a party of growth, Labour now needs to deliver. I and the consortium of businesses stand ready to work with the Government to get this vital piece of national infrastructure built as soon as possible.

Clive Efford (in the Chair): I am aware that there are a number of people who have asked to speak. This is a half-hour debate. I will call the Minister now and if she gets through her speech she may be able to take interventions. There is no other way to do this, I am afraid.

4.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood): Thank you, Mr Efford. It is always a pleasure to see you in the chair. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Jim Dickson) on securing this debate on an issue which I am well aware is of great importance and interest to him and his constituents.

It is great to see quite a number of those constituents here today, to see other hon. Members, and to see very many people in the freight and logistics sector too, on whose behalf my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford has spoken with great passion. I would also like to thank him and other hon. Members here today for their engagement on this matter so far, including my hon. Friends the Members for Gravesham (Dr Sullivan), for Rochester and Strood (Lauren Edwards) and for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Kevin McKenna). I know that they are working very hard on behalf of their constituents.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford has written to my Department several times on the issue of congestion at Dartford, as well as on progress on the application for a development consent order for the lower Thames crossing, a nationally significant infrastructure project connecting Essex, Thurrock and Kent.

The application for the lower Thames crossing development consent order was made under the Planning Act 2008 by National Highways, submitted to the planning inspectorate in October 2022, and accepted in November 2022. The appointed examining authority began its examination in June 2023 and concluded it in December 2023. The Secretary of State received the examining authority's recommendation report on 20 March this year, with a statutory deadline of 20 June for a decision. Following a written Ministerial statement in May, the statutory deadline was extended to 4 October due to the general election. The deadline has since been further extended, to 23 May 2025, to allow more time for the application to be considered, including any decisions made as part of the spending review.

As with all nationally significant infrastructure projects, this is a complex scheme. There can be detailed matters that need to be worked through even after an examination has closed to ensure a legally robust decision is made. The Government recognise that transport infrastructure is vital for growth and acknowledge the critical role that roads play in our national transport system, facilitating the movement of people and goods that underpin the UK economy.

James McMurdock: Will the Minister give way?

Lilian Greenwood: I am afraid not. I am very short of time.

Decisions on development consent orders are made as quickly as possible, including ahead of any statutory deadline when appropriate. I recognise the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford has made regarding congestion at Dartford and the very significant impacts on the lives of his constituents. I am aware of the incident that caused the closure of the Dartford tunnel on 20 and 21 October, and National Highways have assured the Department that a full investigation is continuing.

As my hon. Friend knows, I visited the Dartford crossings myself recently and I appreciate how quickly queues can build and the impact those have on local people and businesses. National Highways are clear that the purpose of the lower Thames crossing is to relieve demand on the existing Dartford crossings, to improve connectivity between our ports and the rest of the UK, and to provide development opportunities across the Thames estuary in Essex, Thurrock and Kent.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that large schemes such as this have the potential to impact on a significant number of people as well as on the environment. There will always be a wide variety of views, and I note the contributions by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jen Craft) and the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (James McMurdock). May they be assured that the final decision on the application will be based on a full consideration of the evidence presented by all parties.

While I am not involved in the decision on the development consent order for the scheme under focus, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford has acknowledged, given the decision on the application is currently under consideration in the Department, I cannot take part in any discussion on the pros and cons of the proposal, however tempting that may be. That is to ensure the process is correctly followed and remains fair to all parties.

I note, however, that much focus has been given recently to the cost of delivering large-scale infrastructure projects. The planning system plays a vital role in ensuring the right scheme is delivered. The Government are absolutely committed to reforming the planning system to support the transformation of transport infrastructure to work for the whole country. Streamlining the delivery process, reforming compulsory purchase compensation rules, improving local decision making and increasing capacity in the system through the planning and infrastructure Bill will all help to accelerate the delivery of the critical transport infrastructure that this country needs.

I recognise the importance of the issues raised today and the request that my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford made to discuss funding. I will certainly speak to my Treasury colleagues, and I hope I can help to facilitate the meeting that I know he would want.

Dr Sullivan: Gravesham is going to suffer from poor air quality, a lack of housing through workers coming into the area, increased congestion and loss of ancient woodland. Yet there is a lack of investment in training and skills in the area affected most by the crossing. Does the Minister agree with me that Gravesham residents deserve to be fully supported and the effects mitigated?

Lilian Greenwood: It is important that the views of my hon. Friend's constituents are considered alongside those of all people in any decision about a scheme of this sort.

James McMurdock: Will the Minister give way?

Lilian Greenwood: I will, very briefly.

James McMurdock: I recognise the points being made and I do not want to speak against them for the sake of it. However, I am conscious that with nearly 15 years of planning, five years of construction and, with the Minister's numbers, another five years until we have a 14% reduction at best, which would still put us over capacity, is that not a quarter of a century of wasted opportunity? Given the scale and cost, does she agree with me that we have to get this right?

Lilian Greenwood: I certainly agree that we have to get this right, and that is the purpose of the process, which I know is a frustratingly long one.

Daniel Francis (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that we also need to look out for businesses in my constituency of Bexleyheath and Crayford? Currently, when there is congestion, they end up travelling 28 miles—instead of six miles—to the Blackwall tunnel and back again, and a 10-minute journey ends up taking them an hour. We therefore need to look at options for river crossings through both south London and Kent as we move forward.

Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend has very effectively put the views of his constituents on the record.

Finally, I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford is reassured that my Department fully appreciates the importance of the proposal to his constituency and that it is being thoroughly considered. I thank him for securing an opportunity to discuss the issue and all hon. Members who have participated in today's debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Zero Emission Vans

4.30 pm

Sarah Edwards (Tamworth) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the transition to zero emission vans.

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Efford. Vans are the workhorses of the UK economy, with one in 10 workers, across a range of industries, relying on a van for their job. From engineering to construction, and from food delivery to emergency and rescue services, many of these industries are part of the backbone of our economy, and we must support them as we make the journey to net zero.

Currently, emissions from vans are increasing year on year, which contributes to the detrimental impacts of climate change across the UK and globally. In my constituency of Tamworth, residents have been hit by flooding for centuries, but it is in recent decades that extreme flooding events are becoming more common, and the flooding season is now lasting three months instead of one, putting a huge strain on our rural economy's farmers and on our food security. Those floods, which have left people in our rural villages isolated and trapped, have been a key issue, blocking routes for vans and HGVs, with fleets forced to do 15-mile diversions to get back on track. The devastating effect of climate change is impacting both residents and businesses, and we must take every step we can to reduce emissions.

We must do that by using zero emission vehicles. Since 1990, emissions across the UK fleet have risen by 63% via the increased use of diesel vans. In our bid to reach net zero, we must explore the challenges within this sector and address the limitations on infrastructure, including the hurdles and higher costs. We must move some of our most polluting vehicles off our roads and move towards cleaner, more environmentally friendly vans. We cannot do that unless there is a step change in the approach to investment and infrastructure, and we must ensure that we do not leave small and medium-sized enterprises behind in the process. In this debate, I shall argue that the 4.25 tonne e-vans should face the same rules and regulations as the 3.5 tonne diesel vans, and that more should be done to deal with the ad hoc installation of the electric infrastructure needed to lay the foundations for our transition towards a net zero economy.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Member for Tamworth (Sarah Edwards) on introducing this issue. I spoke to her before the debate, and I understand that she is bringing forward something that we all need to endorse, right across this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We should encourage local councils to deal with the vans that they have, and ensure that they move towards electric fleets. Does the hon. Lady agree that the Government and the Minister might need to be involved in some way to ensure that there are incentives to make that happen, whether through low finance deals or grants? If we can get the councils to do it, that makes it easier for the rest of us to follow.

Sarah Edwards: Absolutely. It is incredibly important that we involve councils, because they can help and go a long way in ensuring that that infrastructure is there, and they can actually fund some of the changes. I think that is a well-made point, so I thank the hon. Member for his contribution.

While the move to zero emission vans is vital, it does not come without challenges. Currently, the target for zero emission vans is about 70% by 2030, and operators need support with that. Small and medium-sized enterprises are already struggling with the weight of increasing energy costs. In order to support them through this transition, there must be targeted incentives and a roll-out of suitable infrastructure, but there is no protection for businesses from energy costs.

Businesses in my constituency and across the country have seen their bills increase fourfold, with many going under as a result. Their energy rates are linked to credit ratings, and new businesses often do not get the best rate until year three and onwards. Without those bills receiving the scrutiny that residential bills have had during the energy crisis, many business owners simply do not have the capital available to invest in greener solutions. If and when they do, they find that it is not just the cost but the time for the grid upgrade to take place, and in some cases businesses have been told that they cannot draw the power that is needed.

On my recent visit to Brakes in my constituency—the UK's leading wholesaler, responsible for 70% of the food delivery to businesses and organisations, including hospitals and care homes, which operates 365 days a year on a just-in-time operation—it cited progress on installing chargers for its 7.5 tonne refrigerated vehicles, but it wanted to go far further in its bid to go green. Battery technology at present is not able to provide enough power for both refrigeration and long distance, limiting the types of vans and trucks that can be used by the industry. The company is unable to install additional green infrastructure due to the roof being unsuitable for solar installation, and would struggle at present to draw the power needed from the grid for its ambitions. The grid upgrade simply is not possible, so that business ambition is being stifled by the lack of infrastructure that it can tap into.

The challenges of infrastructure regulation, affordability and availability of suitable projects is holding back businesses in their move towards e-vans, which in turn slows down the laudable goal to reach net zero. A giant leap is therefore needed to move the market from the 5.9% of e-van sales that we saw last year for the UK to meet its emissions targets.

The average e-van costs around 50% more than a diesel option, which is a huge financial burden for a small or medium-sized enterprise that is keen to move towards greener ways of working, but is struggling to bear the upfront costs of the new vans and the uncertain energy costs. Diesel options are outperforming the e-vans currently on the market. From range to charging speed, operators are paying more for less. Although running costs can be lower, these are being undermined by the huge costs of charging at public charging stations.

My constituent, David Furnell from Evolution, explained that the installation of EV chargers often requires upgrades to power supplies, which can be costly and take months and in some cases years to complete, to bring a power supply up to the standard ready for installation for EV charging. There are limited incentives for small businesses to install this type of infrastructure, with larger private companies often bridging the gap and getting energy supplies up to the standard needed.

At present, schools are receiving a higher incentive for the installation of charging infrastructure, whereas commercial premises are receiving a much smaller incentive

through the workplace charging scheme. Schools can get 75% off the cost of a buy-and-install charge point up to a maximum of £2,500 per socket. In contrast, the EV infrastructure grant for small and medium-sized enterprises gives them money off the cost of wider building and installation work, which is needed to install multiple charge points. The grant covers 75% of the cost of the work, up to £15,000, and they can get £350 per charge point socket installed and up to £500 per parking space enabled with supporting infrastructure. Although that grant is a good step, it is not considered large enough to incentivise SMEs to accept the risk and financial burden of installation and transition to net zero.

If we are to move towards the widespread use of zero emission vans, we must ensure that infrastructure such as charging facilities is available and affordable and, crucially, in the right places. The burden of cost for both the installation of EV chargers and the upgrade to power for e-vans falls at the feet of small and medium-sized enterprises, which is no way to drive our journey to net zero and grow our economy. We need a spatial strategy to assist with this, and one which does not rely upon solely the private sector and those who may have the capital to invest.

In the 2023 Logistics UK van report, a third of respondents cited power supply infrastructure as one of the biggest challenges for fleet electrification. A large percentage of van users do not have access to a home driveway to charge, and often public charging bays are not physically designed for vans. There are also nitty-gritty challenges, such as a lack of standardisation of payment methods and the inability to pre-book specialised bays. As a result, there is uncertainty for businesses regarding their ability to keep their vans on the road and moving. Many businesses, particularly our SMEs, need the highest levels of confidence that their vans will be on the road and earning throughout the day.

Many businesses, particularly our SMEs, need the highest levels of confidence that their vans will be on the road and earning throughout the day. For those fortunate enough to access private charging options, the cost of grid connection upgrades, the complexities of landlord sign-off and planning approval processes can cause issues. Both access to power and its cost are key challenges in this debate and can be difficult obstacles to overcome.

Those challenges are not limited to the transition for zero emission vans. The logistics industry is essential to our economy, and many companies operate fleets with vehicles of varying sizes, providing different coverage for different parts of the business operation. The heavy goods sector currently accounts for just under 20% of UK transport CO₂ emissions, yet only 0.8% of heavy goods vehicle fleets are zero emission. For HGV fleets, there are limited options for the heaviest vehicles, and those that are available are expensive. The Road Haulage Association anticipates that the overall cost of decarbonisation for HGVs will likely exceed £100 billion. Electric trucks are at least three times the price of an equivalent diesel. The RHA also estimates that up to £2 billion of investment in energy infrastructure is needed to power zero emission vehicles. Since 2014, the logistics sector has invested an additional £2.2 billion in new HGV fleets to reduce their nitrogen oxide pollution. It seeks to replicate that for CO₂ emissions, but there is

a lot of work to do when the target for phasing out new diesel HGVs below six tonnes is 2035 and the target for all HGVs is 2040.

Regulation is also a big challenge in this transition, particularly regarding the weight of vehicles. A battery is heavier than fuel, and for e-vans to be able to perform like diesel vans they will be heavier. E-vans, weighing 4.25 tonnes, also face HGV MOTs, because their weight tips them into the next category of commercial vehicle, and this regulation places significant burden and additional expense on operators, impacting their downtime. It also means that there is less choice and flexibility, as fewer testers are qualified to do an MOT on an HGV. Logistics companies argue that 4.25 tonne e-vans should face the same rules and regulations as 3.5 tonne diesel vans. They are delivering the same amount of goods, but their battery puts them outside current legislative parameters. The vehicles are now classed as HGVs, meaning that they must be driven in a fleet with an operator licence and those driving them must have HGV qualifications, which cost money and time in training and must be kept up to date. No one wishes these safety requirements to be removed for HGVs, but the technical point of the weight difference between the e-van and the standard diesel van should be reconsidered as a large financial barrier to what looks externally to be an identical vehicle. It is important that these issues are considered by hon. Members and noted as a policy that has limited the transition to zero emission vans.

Various countries are successfully leading the way in the transition to electric vehicles. The Netherlands' e-van share is more than double that of the UK. Its clear policy framework for urban logistics has introduced a number of zero emission logistic zones, starting from January 2025, and as a result the wider policies supporting its transition are leading the way among European countries for electric van uptake. We see a similar use of policy in the US, which is supporting the transition to electric vehicles under the EV acceleration challenge. Since 2021, electric vehicle sales have tripled in the US, and the number of publicly available charging ports has grown by more than 40%. The US's Inflation Reduction Act 2022 has added and expanded tax credits for purchases of new and electric vehicles by taxpayers, and provides a \$7,500 tax credit for every new green vehicle weighing up to 14,000 lbs, which equates to approximately 6.3 metric tonnes. Above that weight, it is \$40,000 per vehicle. The UK could consider whether, in order to get growth, we need additional support for businesses that assist the Government in their ambition for a greener economy that promotes growth throughout the UK. If we are to transition successfully to zero emission vans, we must consider the blueprints in other countries and their successes and failures as the UK plans for growth.

Although we can incentivise businesses to move towards the use of zero emission vans, we must ensure that sufficient infrastructure, legislation and policy are in place to support that. The challenges around charging facilities, cost and infrastructure are large but not insurmountable, especially when the earlier we invest, the earlier the payback begins. The new partnership between this Government and businesses could help to transform the van sector, tackling a huge environmental impact and growing our economy. I thank hon. Members for their contributions to this debate and the Chamber for its consideration of this important topic.

Clive Efford (in the Chair): I remind Back Benchers that if they intend to speak in the debate they should stand in their place, to give the Chair a chance of knowing who intends to contribute. I call Chris Bloore.

4.45 pm

Chris Bloore (Redditch) (Lab): Thank you for your chairmanship, Mr Efford, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Sarah Edwards) for securing the debate. My remarks will be brief, as she covered much of what I was going to say. I want to be clear on the point about making it easy for us to have the infrastructure in this country for businesses to take advantage of electrification. We must make it easier, quicker and cheaper to install charging points that are suitable for vans. In the Logistics UK van report 2023, a third of respondents cited power supply infrastructure as one of the biggest challenges for fleet electrification. The physical layout of public charging spaces is often designed for cars, not vans, meaning that, even if there is a charging point, most van users miss out.

I welcome the consultation over the summer on the first electric vehicle charging infrastructure strategy for Worcestershire. That will set out how my county council and its partners intend to support the transition to electric vehicles. I agree with my hon. Friend that we must do more to encourage small businesses to install charging points that are fit for the future.

We have heard from many colleagues about the vital role that vans play in businesses across the country, and the contribution that electrification would make to meeting net zero targets. I hope that the Minister will be able to give an assessment of the country's current charging infrastructure and its ability to meet electric fleet and e-van business operations in the future.

4.46 pm

Mr Paul Kohler (Wimbledon) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Efford, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Tamworth (Sarah Edwards) on securing this important debate. As we have heard, the current state of the electric van roll-out is simply not good enough. We are way behind what is needed to meet the target of 100% electric vehicle sales by 2035. Currently, less than 2% of light goods vehicles are electric, while so far this year, little more than 5% of new registrations are electric. That is behind not just the Government's zero emission vehicle mandate of 10%, but what is being achieved in comparable European countries, including, as we heard, the Netherlands, Germany and France.

Things are not improving, with worrying signs that the industry is stagnating. Since July, new electric van registrations have fallen every month. As the Climate Change Committee outlined last week, urgent action is needed for us to meet our national defined contributions under the Paris agreement. There is no time to delay. Transport is still the largest single emitter of greenhouse gases in the UK, responsible for 26% of the UK's total emissions in 2021. Decarbonisation of the sector is consequently critical to meeting our targets.

There is no doubt that the Government have inherited a mess. Broken promises and mixed messages from the previous Government discouraged businesses from the investment needed to transition to electric vehicles.

Not only did the Conservatives roll back on some of the commitments they made, but they failed to keep the commitments they retained. In March 2022, the Government of the day set out a target for 300,000 public charge points across the UK by 2030. By the end of their term, only 60,000 had been built, way behind the rate of growth needed to meet their target.

However, the new Government cannot simply blame their predecessors. If they are serious about meeting our international commitments, urgent steps must be taken now. Currently, the charging network—particularly rapid charging—is too poor for many businesses to feel confident in investing in electric vehicles. That is exacerbated by the current market, with very few vans—less than 20% of the models available—having a range in excess of 200 miles. Even basic models cost far more than their petrol or diesel equivalents.

Admittedly, the Government cannot dictate to the market, but surely they can take steps to help the situation. Increasing the charging capacity across the network, with an increase in both on-street points and ultrafast chargers at service stations, is vital to increasing business confidence in EVs. Rapid chargers, in particular, are vital for businesses, which cannot afford to waste hours waiting for vehicles to charge.

We also need clarity on what support will be given to businesses converting to electric vans in the future. The Government currently give a plug-in van grant of up to £2,500 for small vans and £5,000 for larger ones, but the subsidy is due to end next year. Will the Minister confirm that the scheme can be extended?

Vans are vital to our economy and employment, with one in 10 people relying on a van for their everyday work. In order to meet our climate commitments, the Government need to put their foot on the accelerator and work with businesses in transitioning to electric vehicles. Urgent steps are needed, and I hope the Minister will confirm that they are finally coming.

4.50 pm

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Efford. I congratulate the hon. Member for Tamworth (Sarah Edwards) on securing the debate and on her thoughtful and well laid-out speech, covering a range of really important issues. The way she has brought this debate is a credit to her. In that spirit, I hope the Minister and I can have a positive interaction and try to get some answers.

I know we can all agree that vans play an integral role in our economy, and if the UK is to decarbonise successfully, vans will need to play a central part. Any measures in service of this welcome transition must offer a pragmatic and reasonable way forward, which the hon. Lady outlined so well. It is key to remember that too speedy a transition to electric vehicles can present challenges that we may not yet be ready to address.

It is probably no surprise that I want to draw attention, first, to the measures taken by the last Conservative Government and the manner in which they did so. They spent over £2 billion to transition the UK to zero emission vehicle use, and as of November 2023, the plug-in van grant alone had supported over 40,000 electric vans and HGVs across the UK. The previous Government also acknowledged the challenges presented

by battery warranty requirements and amended battery warranty capacities, which was a welcome move. In 2023, the Department for Transport took the welcome step of announcing that the additional five-hour training requirement for drivers would be removed, and that it would make changes to towing allowances for electric vans weighing up to 4.25 tonnes. Again, the hon. Lady touched on some of the very important issues facing the industry.

I urge today's Government to continue this work and to listen to the sector. Specifically, I ask the Minister whether the Government intend to retain the changes that I mentioned and whether she will commit to the renewal of the plug-in van grant, which is set to expire at the end of March 2025. It is critical that this Government continue on the route established by the previous Government and that they do not get too tied-up in any longer-term reviews that may hold things up. I know that the Minister is widely experienced in transport from her previous role and that she will be across these important issues.

The industry and drivers would appreciate more certainty about what measures the Government intend to retain and what action they intend to undertake. I hope that the Minister will offer some specificity. I also hope that the Government will commit to engaging with the industry on a range of issues, including MOT testing and drivers' hours to further understand how the Government can pragmatically remove barriers to aid decarbonisation for fleets.

As the hon. Member for Tamworth rightly mentioned, infrastructure is crucial. As of May 2024, the Government, in collaboration with the industry, supported the installation of over 61,000 publicly available charging devices. That included more than 10,000 rapid-charge points.

The hon. Lady spoke about being able to charge the vehicles, and the infrastructure involved. That is very important, but we also need to be able to generate the electricity if the infrastructure is in place. Does the Minister intend to have a wider conversation with the Energy Secretary about how quickly the building of new turbine-run power stations will be up and running so that we can try to meet the current demand, as well that of the infrastructure that needs to be put in place? To reach 300,000 chargers by 2030, the number of public charge points installed annually must continue to grow by around 30%. Will the Minister confirm whether the Government have plans to maintain that growth year on year?

Finally—but of central importance—given that the Government have confirmed it that they are moving the date for new petrol and diesel vehicles back to 2030, can the Minister provide clarity on the timeline for vans? Changes must be pragmatic. I think the hon. Member for Tamworth will not be aware that I sat on the Bill Committee for the Energy Act 2023 in the last Parliament, and that I made the point then that we need a pragmatic approach that takes the public with us. In that spirit, I ask the Minister to reflect on how that can be achieved, communicated and properly undertaken. I ask her to consider how the concerns about the potential costs that might be put on businesses will be addressed through new employment laws, and whether that is one of the unseen consequentials after the Budget that may stop some of the investment. I am requesting that she looks

holistically at all the different aspects relating to where small businesses, in particular, may look to invest in this area.

I hope that the Minister will be able to provide some clarity on the questions I posed, and I again congratulate the hon. Member for Tamworth on a very well thought-out speech.

4.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Efford, and so soon as well. I am delighted to respond to this important debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Sarah Edwards) recently passed her first anniversary in this House, and she is proving a great champion for the people of Tamworth. I congratulate her on securing the debate and on setting out the challenges of the transition to zero emission vehicles so succinctly. I also thank other hon. and right hon. Members who have spoken and made important contributions.

I will summarise the actions that this Government are taking to address some of the issues that have been raised. The transition to electric vehicles is crucial to achieving the UK's net zero target by 2050. As well as the environmental benefits, including lower carbon emissions, better air quality and reduced noise, the transition will help us to kick-start the economy and make Britain a clean energy superpower. Transport remains the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK. The domestic transport sector produced a staggering 28% of the UK's total emissions in 2022. Road transport is responsible for 89% of those emissions, and vans are responsible for 19% of road transport emissions.

The challenge of eliminating that carbon and shifting to clean, green vehicles is immense, but it is also a huge opportunity for British manufacturers. Zero emission vans will be at the heart of the global economy, and making them in Britain will deliver well-paid green jobs for generations to come. To achieve that, we must ensure that there is certainty for industry and consumers, so that manufacturers have the confidence to invest and build vehicles here in the UK and consumers have the confidence to switch. When I talk about consumers, I mean not just individual drivers, but fleets and operators.

To provide certainty, we have stated our intention to phase out the sale of new cars solely powered by internal combustion engines by 2030, and we will set out further details on reducing emissions from vans in due course. All new cars and vans will need to be zero emission by 2035 and, of course, that is no change from the plan under the previous Government. There is a clear plan to get us from where we are today to where we need to be in a decade's time.

The zero emission vehicle mandate sets annual targets for vehicle manufacturers for the registration of new zero emission cars and vans. Those targets provide a clear investment signal to vehicle manufacturers and the charge point industry. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is no longer in his place, will be aware that the mandate is being extended to also cover Northern Ireland.

The targets for vans rise annually from 10% this year to 70% in 2030, and were determined in close consultation with vehicle manufacturers. The Government recognise

[Lilian Greenwood]

that the ZEV mandate targets are particularly challenging for vans. Industry figures for the year to September suggest that zero emission vans account for 6.2% of sales, and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth that they have remained steady at around 5% across 2023 and 2024. Clearly, we have further to go. That is why vans receive additional flexibilities under the ZEV mandate compared with cars.

Van manufacturers in 2024 can defer 90% of the target for this year to later years, meaning they can choose to sell fewer zero emission vans this year in exchange for selling more in future years as demand reaches critical mass, more models are available and prices potentially—hopefully—come down. Manufacturers can also use the carbon dioxide conversion flexibility, which allows them to sell fewer zero emission vans in exchange for reducing average emissions across their new non-zero emission vans, producing ICE vans that are less polluting. Vehicle manufacturers can therefore meet the requirements of the mandate without incurring fines, even if they do not achieve 10% of new van sales this year. However, we want to help industry to reach those targets, which is why the Government provide incentives to support the uptake of zero emission vans and trucks.

The plug-in vehicle grants, which help to reduce the up-front purchase cost of vans and trucks, have supported more than 110,000 vans and heavy goods vehicles across the UK since 2012. Although the plug-in grants are kept under review, and the Government have been clear that they will eventually end, I am constantly looking at the matter to ensure we can achieve our aspirations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth also mentioned HGVs. The phase-out date for new non-zero emission trucks is 2035 for vehicles up to 26 tonnes and 2040 for those above. The Government remain technology neutral, investing in both hydrogen and battery electrification, which is why we are providing up to £200 million as part of the zero emission HGV and infrastructure demonstrator programme. The programme will build sector confidence in the capabilities of the heaviest HGVs—40 to 44 tonnes—by supporting hundreds of battery electric and hydrogen fuel cell HGVs and kickstarting the deployment of the charging and fuelling sites. I got to ride in a battery electric HGV on a recent visit to Scania—these vehicles are here. They are not in a test phase; they are very real and available for deployment. My driver was very enthusiastic about the experience of driving an electric HGV, which, as anyone who has driven an electric vehicle will know, can accelerate really well, which is important for safety when pulling on and off roads.

We are already acting to make it as easy as possible for operators to make the switch to zero emission vans, and flexibilities are already in place on driver and operator licensing to align regulations for heavier electric vans with their petrol and diesel equivalents; as my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth said, they look exactly the same. Standard licence holders can already drive alternatively fuelled goods vehicles up to 4.25 tonnes, rather than the usual 3.5 tonnes, provided the driver has completed five hours of additional training.

Alternatively fuelled vehicles up to 4.25 tonnes are also exempt from the need for operator licences, which place additional operational requirements on

organisations operating vehicles above 3.5 tonnes. As the right hon. Member for Wetherby and Easingwold (Sir Alec Shelbrooke) said, a previous consultation sought views on the removal of the additional requirements for alternatively fuelled vehicles to access the driving licence flexibility, which included the additional five hours of training, the types of vehicles eligible for the flexibility and the towing allowance. The consultation also sought views on limiting the flexibility to zero emission vehicles only. Responses were mostly in favour of the changes, and the Government are now considering options to make it easier for both drivers and operators to move to zero emission vans. We are continuing the work of the previous Government in that respect, and reviewing options for amending roadworthiness or MOT testing, as well as drivers' hours, tachograph and speed limiter rules for those heavier zero emission vans. The Government take road safety very seriously, and reducing the number of those killed or seriously injured on our roads is a key priority. Road safety is therefore a primary consideration in assessing any changes to regulatory weight thresholds.

Let me turn to the issues about charging infrastructure. We recognise that van and fleet drivers are likely to rely on public charging infrastructure. Their needs can differ from those of private drivers because of several factors, including shift work, long journeys and the need for flexibility—and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth said, some of the vans require refrigeration units too. There are already 70,000 publicly available charging devices in the UK, which is a 42% year-on-year increase. The challenge is to continue to deliver at that rate.

For drivers who park near their home, the local electric vehicle infrastructure fund is delivering over £380 million in capital and resource funding to support local authorities to deliver the roll-out of tens of thousands of local charge points. They will support van and fleet drivers without off-street parking, helping them to charge close to home. The local authority of my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth has been allocated more than £5 million of local electric vehicle infrastructure funding. That will help Staffordshire to work with industry to transform the availability of charging infrastructure for their residents without off-street parking, including those who need to charge a van outside their home.

Cross-pavement solutions also provide a permanent option to safely charge an EV on the street outside a driver's home. We are looking at how we can support local authorities to help people access these solutions. Eligible van and fleet drivers who wish to install a cross-pavement solution can benefit from the Government's electric vehicle charge point grant. To pick up on the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Chris Bloore) about charging spaces not being appropriately set out for vans, we are continuing to communicate with charging providers about the importance of their being accessible for van drivers. Our work with the British Standards Institute on accessible charging infrastructure will also support larger bays.

Charge point provision along the strategic road network—our motorways and A roads—has significantly improved in recent years. Those charge points are essential to support drivers making long-distance journeys. There are now more than 960 open-access rapid and ultra-rapid charge points at motorway service areas across England and many more on or close to our key A roads.

The quality of charge points is also improving. The Public Charge Point Regulations 2023 were introduced in November last year, and already require all charge points to provide clear and consistent information to enable customers to compare prices easily. Additional requirements from the end of November of this year will enable van drivers and all consumers to get free up-to-date information about charge point availability, access a 24/7 free helpline and expect 99% reliability across each rapid charging network. The contactless payment requirement will simplify payments at many public charge points, including all rapid charge points, eliminating the need for drivers to use multiple apps. The regulations will improve the charging experience for all drivers, particularly commercial drivers, who spend the most time out on the roads.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth asked about the workplace charging scheme grant. That continues to provide support for businesses, charities and public sector organisations to install charge points. Since 2016 it has supported over 55,000 workplaces and offers up to £350—capped at 75%, as she said—towards the purchase and installation of charge point sockets. However, the Government know that in order to give the public confidence in making the switch to electric vans, they need to feel confident in their ability to charge those vehicles, whether at home or depot or on the road. We recognise that more needs to be done and that is why we have committed to accelerating the roll-out of charging infrastructure. We are currently considering the most effective way to do this, and we will have more to say in due course.

We recognise that grid connections continue to be a major obstacle for those wishing to make the switch to electric vehicles. My hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth

illustrated the challenge by giving the example of a business in her constituency. We know there is a need for significant reform to the grid connections process, which is why we are working with Ofgem and the network companies to make it easier. Of course, there is also a need to increase electricity generation more broadly.

The Government have a plan to deliver the UK's transition to zero emission vans by maintaining our ambitious but achievable ZEV mandate targets, reviewing measures to make zero emission vans as accessible as possible, and accelerating the roll-out of charging infrastructure. We will continue to work closely with fleet operators, individual organisations and their trade associations to understand the barriers to their uptake of zero emission vans and identify solutions to help overcome them.

I once again thank my hon. Friend for leading this important debate and I also thank the other hon. Members who contributed.

5.10 pm

Sarah Edwards: I ask that the House approve the consideration of the transition to zero emission vans.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered transition to zero emission vans.

5.11 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statement

Tuesday 29 October 2024

TRANSPORT

National Bus Fare Cap

The Secretary of State for Transport (Louise Haigh):

In his pre-Budget Speech on Monday 28 October, the Prime Minister confirmed that single bus fares will be limited at £3 until the end of 2025, as part of more than £1 billion to be invested in buses.

The current £2 cap on single bus fares had been due to come to an end on 31 December 2024. Under the plans of the previous Administration, funding for the current cap on bus fares had been due to expire at the end of 2024. From 1 January 2025 through to the end of December 2025, we will introduce a new single fare cap at £3 to ensure millions of people can access affordable bus fares and better opportunities all over the country.

This will particularly benefit passengers in rural communities and towns, and will save passengers up to 80% on some routes.

The cap means no single bus fare on routes included in the scheme will exceed £3, and routes where fares are less than £3 will only be allowed to increase by inflation in the normal way, so that some fares will remain below £3. The fare cap will help millions access better opportunities and promote greater use by passengers.

We are providing funding of over £150 million to enable the introduction of the cap. This is part of a £1 billion funding boost for buses which will be set out at the Budget to help local areas deliver high-quality, reliable bus services and protect the vital routes that so many people rely on. Improving the reliability and number of services and routes is essential to encouraging more people to use buses.

Buses are the engines of economic opportunity across the country. Our bus revolution and new buses Bill will give every community the power to take back control of their services, improve the reliability of services and turn the page on four decades of failed deregulation.

[HCWS172]

Written Correction

Tuesday 29 October 2024

Other Correction

HELENA DOLLIMORE

Topical Questions

The following extract is from Housing, Communities and Local Government Questions on 28 October 2024.

Helena Dollimore: In 2022, Lubov Chernukhin opened an amusement centre in Hastings town centre known as Owens. The project received more than £400,000 of taxpayer money as part of the Conservatives' levelling

up towns fund plans. Ms Chernukhin has also donated more than £200,000 to the Conservative party. Shortly after opening, Owens closed, and earlier this month it was covered in boarding, which now dominates Hastings town centre. Can the Minister advise me how my constituents can get their money back, and how we can ensure that money is never wasted again like that?

[*Official Report*, 28 October 2024; Vol. 755, c. 525.]

Written correction submitted by the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Helena Dollimore):

Helena Dollimore: In 2022, Lubov Chernukhin opened an amusement centre in Hastings town centre known as Owens. The project received more than £400,000 of taxpayer money as part of the Conservatives' levelling up towns fund plans. Ms Chernukhin has also donated more than **£2 million** to the Conservative party.

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Tuesday 29 October 2024

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