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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**  
(HANSARD)

Thursday 31 October 2024

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# House of Commons

*Thursday 31 October 2024*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### BUSINESS AND TRADE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### High Street Businesses

1. **Abtisam Mohamed** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on supporting high street businesses. [900967]

3. **Sojan Joseph** (Ashford) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on supporting high street businesses. [900972]

11. **David Pinto-Duschinsky** (Hendon) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on supporting high street businesses. [900985]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Gareth Thomas):** Revitalising our high streets is a priority for this Government, and I and the Secretary of State have spoken to colleagues across Whitehall to ensure that we are working together to create better conditions over the long term for high street businesses to thrive. That means addressing antisocial behaviour and crime, rolling out banking hubs, stamping out late payments, empowering communities to make the most of vacant properties, strengthening the post office network, reforming the apprenticeship levy and, as the Chancellor confirmed yesterday, reforming business rates.

**Abtisam Mohamed:** There are just short of 5,500 businesses in Sheffield Central, and more than 80% of them are micro-businesses employing fewer than 10 employees. These are the engines of local economic growth in our area, and they provide vital services in our community. Many businesses in my constituency welcome yesterday's announcement of permanently lower business rates for hospitality, retail and leisure properties from 2026-27. Will the Minister outline what further steps he is taking with the Chancellor to create a fairer business rates system, so we can ensure that our high streets thrive permanently?

**Gareth Thomas:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question, and I think this is the first time I have had the chance to congratulate her on her election to this House. She is absolutely right that if we are to see our

high streets thrive, we need to ensure there is a genuinely level playing field for businesses online and those on the high street. As the Chancellor announced yesterday, to deliver that pledge we intend to introduce permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality and leisure properties from 2026-27. To fund that, we intend to introduce a large business multiplier from 2026-27, which will apply a higher rate on the most valuable properties. That will capture the majority of large distribution warehouses, including those used by the online giants. However, we want to go further, so the Chancellor published a discussion paper yesterday asking businesses for further ideas on the reform of business rates.

**Sojan Joseph:** Small and independent shops are the lifeblood of our high streets, and they make the communities in my Ashford constituency special. Far too many high street businesses have been feeling the squeeze over recent years, which has led to empty units being an all too familiar sight. I welcome the measures announced in yesterday's Budget, particularly the reform of business rates. Will my hon. Friend update the House on what the Government are doing to empower local communities to acquire empty units?

**Gareth Thomas:** Again, I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election to this House. Colleagues across Whitehall are bringing forward plans to introduce high street rental auctions, which will bring vacant units back into use. That should make town centres more accessible and affordable for tenants. We will also take steps to crack down on antisocial behaviour. We saw a huge increase in antisocial behaviour and crime in our high streets under the Conservative party, and we are determined to take steps to crack down on that.

**David Pinto-Duschinsky:** I thank my hon. Friend for his previous answers. We are blessed with some fantastic high streets in Hendon, such as Mill Hill Broadway, Station Road and the High Street in Edgware, Watling Avenue in Burnt Oak, Brent Street in Hendon and Vivian Avenue in West Hendon. However, when I talk to business owners, they all too often tell me that they are struggling to find and retain the staff they need to grow successfully. What steps is the Department taking to make sure small businesses can get the skilled staff they need not just to survive, but to thrive?

**Gareth Thomas:** I welcome my hon. Friend's question, and I know the high streets in his constituency that he mentioned, as they are very close to Britain's greatest constituency. He will be aware that we have already taken steps to help businesses recruit more skilled staff. It is one of the reasons why we have established Skills England. We have also taken steps to reform the apprenticeship levy, and earlier this week the Prime Minister brought forward plans to help people get back to work.

**Mims Davies** (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): The anti-growth coalition on Mid Sussex district council, led by the Lib Dems, Labour, independents and Greens, is bringing in Sunday, bank holiday and evening town centre parking charges on top of a 30% rise, and there is the sword of Damocles of possible village car parking charges. Will the Minister reiterate to councils that are determined to derail his growth mission that such draconian

measures on our high streets will do exactly the opposite of what he and his Budget are apparently looking to achieve, and will he perhaps meet them?

**Gareth Thomas:** I gently suggest to the hon. Lady that those making up the anti-growth coalition are sat on her side of the House, and I gently point out to her that the highest number of businesses to go bust for 30 years was under the Conservative party last year. I would also happily ask her to use her influence with the Conservative-led council in my constituency, which is bringing in parking charges that will certainly damage the night-time economy.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome some things that the Minister has referred to regarding high street businesses, and I thank him for that, but there are many other matters. For example, in Newtownards family businesses make up a great many of the attractive high street businesses, such as Wardens, Knotts Bakery and the family butcher, and they are important, as they are in Ballynahinch. Has the Minister had the opportunity to talk to the chamber of trade in Newtownards, which is working well? Other chambers of trade in my constituency can also contribute, so has there been an opportunity to speak to them to get their ideas about the way forward?

**Gareth Thomas:** The hon. Gentleman is an assiduous champion for his constituency in this House. If he wants to bring his chamber of commerce to meet me to discuss issues in his constituency in more detail, I will happily make time to meet him and them.

**Mr Speaker:** We are 10 minutes gone and still on Question 1. We need to speed up a little bit. If the Minister could look at me, that would be helpful, so that we are going through the third person. I know that Mr Shannon is popular, but even so, it should go through me. I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Clive Jones** (Wokingham) (LD): In my constituency, the number of people shopping on our high streets has not returned to pre-covid levels, and we have lost anchor stores such as Marks & Spencer, and several banks. The Government urgently need to save our high streets, but the reduction in retail, hospitality and leisure business rates relief from 75% to 40% will come as bad news for thousands of businesses. When will the Government deliver a fundamental reform of business rates to save our high streets and end the penalising of productive investment?

**Gareth Thomas:** I am grateful for your guidance, Mr Speaker. While the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) is popular, you are much more important.

I gently point out to the hon. Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) that we have started the process of reforming business rates. We are introducing permanently lower rates for retail, hospitality and leisure from 2026-27. We have listened to businesses and kept business rates relief, and we are opening up opportunities for businesses to come forward with ideas for future reform of business rates.

## Sectoral Collective Bargaining

2. **Ian Lavery** (Blyth and Ashington) (Lab): If he will take steps to increase the use of sectoral collective bargaining. [900969]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Justin Madders):** The Government are committed to strengthening the collective voices of workers and restoring the principle that work should always pay. That is why we introduced the Employment Rights Bill, which will restore the school support staff negotiating body and introduce a framework for a fair pay agreement in adult social care. Combined with other measures in the Bill, that will empower workers, unions and employers to come together to negotiate fair pay, terms and conditions.

**Ian Lavery:** I thank the Minister for that answer. It was fantastic of the Labour Government to bring in the Employment Rights Bill within their first 100 days—an absolutely brilliant achievement. Experts say that sectoral bargaining is a force to be reckoned with for both employees and employers, so what plans might the Government have to extend sectoral collective bargaining in other sectors of the economy?

**Justin Madders:** My hon. Friend is right to say that there is plenty of evidence worldwide that collective bargaining improves terms and conditions and the overall vitality of the economy, but we must start somewhere. About 5% of the entire working population are employed in adult social care, and with a 25% turnover rate and rampant abuse of zero-hours contracts and the minimum wage laws, we felt that that sector needed the most attention first. We must make a concerted effort to drive up working conditions, because those who work in that area have been undervalued and underappreciated for far too long, and that has to change. We must focus on getting it right in adult social care, and we will see where that takes us.

**John Cooper** (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): Undoubtedly, Government legislation is empowering the unions—we saw that this week when the Secretary of State for Scotland was unable to meet CBI Scotland, an important body, because he could not enter his own building because of a picket line. We read in the papers this morning that ASLEF, a rail union, insists on using fax machines and will not allow its members to use email. How is that helping collective bargaining?

**Justin Madders:** I have to educate the hon. Member on what trade unions do. ASLEF is not a union in the adult social care sector, which is what we are talking about here. We want to work on a tripartite basis—business and workers, together with the Government—to get terms and conditions right. Given that we had the lowest increase in living standards on record under the Conservative Government, I would have thought that he would want to support that too.

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

**Gareth Bacon** (Orpington) (Con): The Government's impact assessment for the adult social care sector confirmed that collective bargaining will be very costly for business.

If pay awards match those of junior doctors, the cost of the increased wage bill will be £5.8 billion, driving up business rates, reducing employment or hours, and imposing further costs on business. Can the Minister confirm when further collective bargaining will be rolled out, to which sectors, and by how much those businesses can expect to be clobbered?

**Justin Madders:** If the shadow Minister is complaining about the state of the adult social care sector, he should look to his own party and how the sector was left to rot for 14 years. The impact assessment says that the overall cost to employers will be 0.4% overall and, as the economic analysis says, the make work pay package will help to raise living standards across the country and create opportunities for all. I think 0.4% is a fantastic achievement to get such a deal. If he does not want to support improved working conditions for people, an end to fire and rehire and better maternity protections, he should continue to vote against the Employment Rights Bill, but I do not think his constituents will thank him for that.

### Industrial Strategy

4. **Joe Morris** (Hexham) (Lab): What recent progress he has made on developing a new industrial strategy. [900974]

**The Minister for Industry (Sarah Jones):** We have made significant progress in developing a new industrial strategy and I am delighted to report to the House that we published a Green Paper on 14 October, setting out our plans for a modern industrial strategy. We have set our sights higher than the previous Government, we have thrown off their ideological shackles and we have worked in partnership with business and our colleagues across the nations and regions to set us on a path to a credible 10-year plan, delivering the certainty, drive and ambition that businesses need to invest in the UK.

**Joe Morris:** For 14 years, businesses in rural communities such as my constituency were ignored and neglected by the Conservatives in government. Will the Minister elaborate on how the industrial strategy will allow rural communities to share in the proceeds of growth?

**Sarah Jones:** The difference between a Labour Government and a Conservative Government is that we believe that growth needs to be felt in our communities, not just measured on a spreadsheet. I know that my hon. Friend is working hard in his constituency and is already campaigning on issues such as banking services, which are so important for our rural communities. He is right: the industrial strategy needs to be designed and implemented in lockstep with local leaders, mayors and devolved leaders across the country, alongside our wider plans for housing and skills, which of course will be part of the picture. I look forward to working with him on identifying the barriers to growth in rural communities so that we can break them down.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The development of marine renewable energy is getting close to commercial deployment. If we are able to get it across the line, it will bring with it a supply chain that we can build and hold in this country, with a view to exports across the world. That would surely be a great

result for any industrial strategy. What will the Government do to ensure that their industrial strategy helps marine renewables reach full commercial deployment?

**Sarah Jones:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a really good point, and I would be happy to have a proper conversation with him about it. Marine renewables are a huge opportunity for us. We can build the supply chains across the country and, of course, Scotland is uniquely placed to take advantage of that. I would love to have a conversation about it.

**Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): When it comes to an industrial strategy, in the Labour Government's first few months they have effectively shut down UK virgin steelmaking capacity, with no commitments to primary steel in yesterday's Budget of broken promises. Unlike the United States and the European Union, the Government have failed to protect our car manufacturers against Chinese state aid. They have massively increased the costs to the very drivers of industry—real businesses—of employing people. Should the Government not call it their deindustrialisation strategy?

**Sarah Jones:** The challenge we have is that we have inherited the worst living standards growth during a Parliament in modern history. We have inherited huge challenges that we have to overcome, but we are looking to the long-term with our industrial strategy—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I do not need any more. Do we understand each other?

**Sarah Jones:** I do not know whether the hon. Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) has been paying attention, but we are developing a steel strategy, which the previous Government failed to do, with £2.5 billion of funding. We put a boost of £2 billion into our car industry only yesterday in the Budget, alongside £1 billion for the automotive sector and money for life sciences. We are developing an industrial strategy for the long term for the first time and we will not follow the Conservative party, which let our industries suffer and get to the crisis point that we are now having to deal with.

**Greg Smith:** The Minister mentions the car industry. Yesterday, after the Budget of broken promises, talking about the industrial strategy, Mike Hawes of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders said:

“Delivering that strategy depends on the UK being globally competitive. Additional National Insurance Contributions will put massive pressure on the automotive supply chain which is predominantly SMEs.”

He described the lack of substantive measures to support the new car market as “hugely disappointing”, concluding that,

“the cost will soon be felt in reduced UK investment, economic growth and jobs.”

With such dire warnings so early on, is this not more evidence that Labour just does not get business and that its industrial strategy is in tatters before it has even begun?

**Sarah Jones:** For a Government who do not get business, it is surprising, is it not, that we got £63 billion of investment through the international investment

summit—twice what the previous Government managed after two years of planning it? The Government are working very closely with the automotive industry. We know that the global situation is very difficult and I talk to Mike Hawes very often, which is why we put £2 billion of funding into the Budget yesterday. It is also why we are working very closely with the sector to create the conditions we need to transition to electric vehicles and to protect our industry in a way that the previous Government, frankly, failed to do.

### E-bike Battery Fires

5. **James Asser** (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): What recent steps he has taken to help prevent e-bike battery fires. [900975]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Justin Madders):** The Office for Product Safety and Standards within my Department has been working across Government and industry to protect consumers and understand the causes of any safety issues. That has included giving consumers clear information that enables them to purchase, use and charge products safely; assessing the compliance of manufacturers and importers to ensure that products are safe when placed on the market; and a programme of work to address the sale of non-compliant products available through online marketplaces, including e-bikes and their batteries. Last week, I visited the OPSS's Teddington laboratories, where we launched the Department's new "Buy Safe, Be Safe" consumer campaign.

**James Asser:** Two weeks ago, there was a fire in a 10th floor flat in Plaistow in my constituency. Thankfully, the quick reaction of the residents and neighbours and the good work of the London Fire Brigade meant that they were all able to be evacuated quickly and there were no serious injuries. Clearly, this could have been worse. Does the Minister agree that it is a perfect example of why we need to continue to work to make these batteries safer and run awareness campaigns, so that residents understand the safety issues and how they can be mitigated, and how the batteries can be disposed of if they need to get rid of them?

**Justin Madders:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Manufacturers must already ensure that products are safe and provide instructions for safe use, including safe charging. I pay tribute to the London Fire Brigade for the work it is doing on this issue. Unfortunately, as we have heard, there are far too many fires. That is why we launched our awareness campaign last week. We are hoping, through the Product Regulation and Metrology Bill, to make sure we have powers to keep up with technological developments and ensure that e-bikes can be sold safely to consumers in the UK.

### Make Work Pay Programme

6. **Matt Turmaine** (Watford) (Lab): What progress his Department has made on delivering the make work pay programme. [900976]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Justin Madders):** As the Chancellor announced yesterday, the national living wage will rise to £12.21 an

hour, meaning that a full-time worker can earn an extra £1,400 a year. We have also announced the stopping of the use of minimum service levels and tackled late payments for the self-employed. Of course, we have now introduced the Employment Rights Bill, which will raise living standards across the country and provide better support for businesses engaged in good practice. It also makes good on our promise to the British people that we will now make work pay.

**Matt Turmaine:** I thank the Minister for his answer. In my constituency of Watford, many people are employed in the hospitality, retail and construction sectors and, with a big hospital, in the health and social sector. Will the Minister confirm that the Government's Make Work Pay plan will bring long-lasting benefits to them and to other workers?

**Justin Madders:** Absolutely. We are determined to ensure that the particular sectors that my hon. Friend mentioned, where low pay and insecurity are rife, will benefit. We are working closely with businesses and employers across the spectrum to ensure that we get the proposals right because, for too long, insecurity and low pay have been rife in the UK economy. That has to change.

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

**Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): After receiving millions from the trade union paymasters for its election, Labour is rewarding them with a package of 1970s, French-style workplace regulations, which will increase the cost of doing business in the UK to the tune of £5 billion a year, disproportionately falling on SMEs. That is before the £25 billion body blow to business delivered by the Chancellor yesterday in her anti-business Budget of broken promises. Does the Minister agree with the Office for Budget Responsibility that this Government's decisions will make workers poorer, not richer, as increased employment taxes are passed on in lower wages, and that business investment will fall, not rise, as a direct result of this Government?

**Justin Madders:** I find it incredible that the Opposition quote French-style labour laws, because when they introduced the minimum services legislation, they always held up France as the example of where that works already. I wish they would make their minds up. The implication behind the question about trade union funding says rather more about their attitude to how legislation is made in this country than ours. We do things because we believe in them. If he looks carefully at what the OBR is saying, £1,400 into people's pockets as a result of the national living wage increase is a fantastic achievement that we should all be proud of.

### Small Businesses: Scaling Up

7. **Tony Vaughan** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help support small businesses to scale up. [900979]

10. **Anna Dixon** (Shipley) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help support small businesses to scale-up. [900984]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Gareth Thomas):** Our plan for small businesses will help them to scale up and increase productivity and growth. We are doing that by creating opportunities for businesses to compete and access the finance they need to scale, export and break into new markets. Furthermore, at yesterday's Budget, we announced a small business Command Paper next year, which will set out more detail on how we will support small businesses.

**Tony Vaughan:** I welcome the Minister's answer. One way that we can support small businesses to scale up is through infrastructure investment, so that businesses can get their goods to market more quickly. Will the Department support my campaign to shift more freight from trucks to trains, starting with the channel tunnel in my constituency, where only 10% of its freight capacity is being used at present?

**Gareth Thomas:** Let me take the opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend on his election to this House. I remember well, as I am sure he does, the problems that the people and businesses of Kent had to endure when the M20 became a lorry park, thanks to a combination of poor planning by the last Government and the poor-quality trade deal they negotiated with Brussels. We certainly support the expansion of rail freight, not least as it helps to build the resilience of supply chains. I would be happy to meet him or facilitate a meeting for him with Transport Ministers, to hear more about his campaign.

**Anna Dixon:** Small businesses such as the Greek Corner in Shipley have benefited from Bradford council's business growth programme, funded by the towns fund, which provides capital assistance for businesses to create new jobs. The support measures announced yesterday in the Chancellor's Budget for local authorities and small businesses will be vital to revitalising our high streets. Does the Minister agree that local authorities working with local communities are best placed to direct investment, to help SMEs grow?

**Gareth Thomas:** Let me take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend on her election, too. I agree that local authorities working with local communities are fundamental to supporting SMEs in local economies. That is one reason why, as well as backing local authorities in yesterday's Budget, we are backing Tracy Brabin, the excellent Mayor of West Yorkshire, with funding to support the priorities of local communities in constituencies such as that of my hon. Friend. It is also why we are introducing measures such as high street rental auctions and a powerful community right to buy, so that local communities can start the process of reviving their high streets.

**Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con):** I draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. The Minister mentioned that access to finance is vital for small business, but I hope he knows that the past few days have seen chaos in the motor finance market, with a number of major lenders suspending lending entirely in response to a judgment in the appeal court. This has caused consternation across the entire business lending sector. Can the Minister reassure us that the Government are fully engaged with

the industry and the Financial Conduct Authority in sorting out an issue that could have a very, very significant impact on the entire sector and its supply chain?

**Gareth Thomas:** We are certainly looking at the issues that have arisen for the industry from the judgment. More generally on access to finance, I am sure the right hon. Gentleman will welcome our launch, at the investment summit referenced by the Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade, my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Bromborough (Justin Madders), of the British Growth Partnership, which is aimed at unlocking investment in businesses that want to scale up.

**Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD):** Economic growth happens when micro-sized businesses become small businesses. We learned yesterday that micro-businesses that employ up to four full-time workers on the national living wage will be exempt from employers' national insurance. Yet small businesses that employ five workers or more will be subject to employers' national insurance. How will that measure help small businesses in the south-west to scale up and bring economic growth to the region?

**Gareth Thomas:** I am glad that the hon. Gentleman welcomes, I think, the measures we took in the Budget to raise employment allowance to help the very smallest firms. The Federation of Small Businesses said yesterday that it will be a very big help for small firms. On his wider point about the Budget, I gently say to him, as I am sure he knows only too well, that the economic inheritance the Government face has led to our having to make some very tough decisions. If he does not support the measures we have set out in the Budget, he needs to say how he would finance the extra investment in the NHS and in industry that we have set out.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD):** Wokingham has one of the highest rates of business survival when compared with the averages for the south-east and Berkshire, but yesterday's announcement that the Government will raise employers' national insurance throws that into doubt. The hike is, plain and simple, a tax on jobs that will deal a hammer blow to our small businesses. What will the Government do to mitigate the impact on small businesses in my constituency and across the country?

**Gareth Thomas:** I say very gently to the hon. Gentleman that if he and his party are determined to oppose the measures we took in the Budget, including on employers' national insurance contributions, they need to set out how they would fund the extra investment in the NHS, the investment in the automotive and aerospace sectors, and the measures to protect and raise living standards.

### International Investment Summit

8. **Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the potential implications for his Department's policies of the outcomes of the international investment summit. [900980]

**The Minister for Industry (Sarah Jones):** We held, as we have said, an international investment summit on 14 October, 100 days after we formed the new Government. We secured £63 billion of investment, which is twice the level of the previous Government's investment summit. The investment will create high-quality, high-skilled, well-paid jobs across the country, and represents a huge vote of confidence in this new Government.

**Bill Esterson:** As my hon. Friend quite rightly said, the Labour party is now the party of business without any question. Does she agree that the measures committed to in yesterday's Budget on clean energy, carbon capture and storage and hydrogen—which were backed up, by the way, with a commitment from a Canadian investor of another £1.8 billion in offshore wind—show how much this Government are in tune with the business community? We are attracting investment and building on the investment summit, and we will deliver jobs for our constituents and our communities up and down the country.

**Sarah Jones:** I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. I also agree with the former Chancellor, Kwasi Kwarteng, in his article yesterday. I quote:

“Conservatives, like myself, should be honest”

and

“Reeves is cleaning up our mess”.

#### Night-time Economy

9. **Mr Paul Kohler** (Wimbledon) (LD) [R]: What steps he is taking to support the night-time economy. [R] [900982]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Gareth Thomas):** We recognise the important role that night-time economy businesses play in supporting local economies and communities. Healthy night-time economy businesses not only support our creative industries, including musicians, DJs and performance artists, but bolster tourism and day-economy businesses. We are focused on our five-point plan to breathe life back into Britain's high streets. That work will ensure that our high streets are great places for our businesses, supporting economic growth across the UK, including in the night-time economy.

**Mr Kohler:** I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. The hospitality industry is a crucial aspect of the night-time economy. It already faces an existential crisis, with post-Brexit labour shortages, covid debt and wage and commodity inflation. What advice would the Minister give to the hospitality industry and businesses that now face a hike in national insurance costs and, despite the headlines, a more than doubling in last year's business rates?

**Gareth Thomas:** I would gently point businesses in the night-time economy to a series of measures that we took in yesterday's Budget, including to reform business rates for the long term, from 2026-27. We listened to businesses, including those in the night-time economy, and did not abolish the business rates relief. Under the measures that we have taken, for example, the average pub with a rateable value of almost £17,000 will save over £3,300 next year.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Last Saturday night I had the opportunity to go out in York with the police. It was incredibly interesting and I am so grateful for the work that they do, and it gave me an opportunity to speak to employers. We know that, as employers, our traditional pubs are really struggling because the pubs code is not working properly. Will the Minister meet me and the Campaign for Pubs to discuss how we can improve things for those businesses?

**Gareth Thomas:** I will be very happy to meet my hon. Friend. I know from talking to pubs that they are also very worried about the rise in antisocial behaviour and crime in our high streets and town centres. She and the pubs and other members of the night-time economy that she works with will, I hope, be reassured by some of the measures that we have taken in the Budget to begin the process of cracking down on antisocial behaviour.

#### Fair Trade

12. **Sam Rushworth** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to support fair trade for producers. [900989]

**The Minister for Trade Policy and Economic Security (Mr Douglas Alexander):** I can assure my hon. Friend that the United Kingdom is committed to advancing both free and fair trade around the world that is inclusive, sustainable and seeks to reduce poverty. The UK's aid-for-trade programmes, including the new Trade Centre of Expertise announced by the Prime Minister on 24 October, build the capacity of producers, businesses and Governments in developing countries to participate in, and prosper from, global trade. I can assure my hon. Friend that the UK is committed to making the world a safe and more prosperous place through strengthening our international development work, as set out in our recent manifesto.

**Sam Rushworth:** Children from Timothy Hackworth primary school in Shildon wrote to ask me to raise fair trade with the Minister as part of their fair trade week. They included Ashton, who reminded me of the privilege that we have to serve in this place. They would also like to know whether the Minister has met representatives of the Fair Trade Foundation since his appointment, and whether he considers that Britain's leadership on fair trade policies can make a meaningful contribution to reducing poverty in sub-Saharan Africa.

**Mr Alexander:** First, let me commend my hon. Friend for his work with the local primary school. I know how assiduous he is in advancing the interests of his constituents. I can assure him that we fully understand the importance of fair trade. I have met a representative of the Fair Trade Foundation in recent weeks, and I pay particular tribute to the work that Fairtrade is doing with the Co-op. Thousands of farmers producing goods such as tea, coffee, sugar and flowers are helped by Co-ops in our high streets across the country. It is now the UK's largest seller of fair trade products, and it deserves our commendation too.

#### Inward Investment: Scotland

13. **John Grady** (Glasgow East) (Lab): What steps he is taking to attract inward investment into Scotland. [900991]

**The Minister for Trade Policy and Economic Security (Mr Douglas Alexander):** The international investment summit, about which we just heard, secured more than £63 billion, including for two significant projects in Scotland. Scottish Power, owned by Iberdrola, committed £24 billion to upgrade the UK's energy infrastructure over the next five years. Floating offshore wind developer Green Volt has selected Aberdeen for its headquarters and plans to invest £2.5 billion. That, of course, comes on top of this Government's establishment of GB Energy.

**John Grady:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. Yesterday saw the largest Budget settlement for the Scottish Government in devolution's history. The Labour party's commitment to Scotland runs through this Government. Last week, the highly respected Strathclyde University's Fraser of Allander institute reported that only 9% of Scottish businesses agree that the Scottish Government understand the business environment in Scotland. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Government understanding of business is crucial in driving investment and growth in Scotland, and that it is critical that the Scottish Government improve their understanding of the business environment?

**Mr Alexander:** Frankly, businesses in Scotland have been let down by two failed Governments. We have had a decade of division and decay in Scotland, and I am glad to see that we now have political stability, with Labour having a majority in Scotland, Wales and England. At the same time, we are committed to genuine partnership and working with the Scottish Government. I know that my hon. Friend has particular expertise in energy policy, given his past professional work. Tomorrow I will be in Torness, in my constituency, to meet EDF Energy—just one example of a business that, frankly, is being held back by the policy and approach of the present Scottish Government.

**Chris Law (Dundee Central) (SNP):** I am not surprised in the slightest to hear the disparaging comments from those on the Government Benches about business in Scotland, so I will bring the House up to speed. For the ninth consecutive year, Scotland, under the SNP Scottish Government, is the UK's top-performing area outside London for foreign direct investment, yet Brexit has reduced the attractiveness of the UK as a base for exporting to EU markets, resulting in its being overtaken by France as the leading destination for foreign direct investment in Europe. Does the Minister recognise that reversing what he seems to be married to at the moment—the Tories' hard Brexit—is the most significant step that this Government could take to increase inward investment and boost growth in Scotland?

**Mr Alexander:** As I was saying, let me deal with both the failed Governments who have been letting Scotland down in the last decade. Frankly, if the hon. Gentleman wants to advance the case that there has been a decade of prosperity in Scotland, good luck to him. The reality is that it is very hard to think of a single aspect of Scottish public life that has improved over the last 10 years. Take the case of ferries. Take the case of hospitals. Take the case of our schools or, indeed, the broader business environment.

On Brexit, I recognise that there is a need for a fundamental reset with the European Union, and in recent days I have been taking forward that work. I welcome

the work that the Prime Minister has been undertaking, but that is the task of a Labour Government. As so often on so many issues, the SNP talks and Labour delivers.

### Topical Questions

**T1. [900992] Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Clapham and Brixton Hill) (Lab):** If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Minister for Industry (Sarah Jones):** In little more than 100 days in government, this Department and its Secretary of State, who is flying to Doha today, have set about delivering on the promises made in our manifesto. We have turned up the dial on growth and published our Green Paper on the modern industrial strategy, which will channel support to key sectors, work across our nations and regions with the private sector, and deliver the conditions for investment and good jobs. We have delivered a huge vote of confidence in the UK by securing £63 billion of investment at our international investment summit, boosted by investment ploughing into our aerospace, automotive and life sciences sectors, as announced in yesterday's Budget. We have also kept our promises by publishing the Employment Rights Bill, which represents the biggest upgrade in workers' rights in a generation. We are a pro-innovation, pro-worker and pro-wealth creation Government, and are investing all our time in growing the economy for the long term and turning round 14 years of failure.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** A four-day week with no loss of pay has proven to have benefits for employers and employees alike, and a recent report by the Autonomy Institute and Alda suggests that it can have a hugely positive impact on the economy. The report concludes that Iceland's economy has outperformed most of Europe since adopting a shorter working week, and now has one of the lowest unemployment rates. With even more UK businesses beginning a four-day week trial on Monday as part of the 4 Day Week Campaign's autumn pilot, what assessment has the Department made of the Icelandic report and of the potential impact that a four-day week could have on UK businesses and our economy?

**Sarah Jones:** The Government have no plans to undertake any trials on a four-day week for five days of pay. It is for employers and employees to reach agreements that fit their specific circumstances, but we want to get the balance right and make sure that we work with employers and employees. That is why the Employment Rights Bill will support both parties to reach agreements, where they are feasible.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Secretary of State.

**Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con):** If Labour Members going back to their seat this weekend were thinking of going to a local pub for a pint and a chat with local farmers, I would think again. A publican with a mid-sized pub contacted me last night to say that because of yesterday's changes, he would be £120,000 a year worse off, moving him from profit to loss. Labour said that its plans were fully costed and fully funded. Yesterday was a massive broken promise, was it not?

**Sarah Jones:** The hon. Gentleman oversaw the worst Parliament for living standards in modern history. We did not choose that inheritance, and we have made choices. Would he rather we did not compensate for the infected blood scandal? Would he rather we did not compensate the Horizon victims, for whom there was no money in the Budget, on his watch? Would he rather we did not invest in the health service? Would he rather we did not increase the minimum wage? Would he rather we did not support carers? Would he rather we made the choices that he made, such as cutting national insurance for workers when there was no budget for that? This Government are fixing the foundations, so that we can have a bright future for all our country.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** The Government's choice was to hit businesses, and that is because there is not an ounce of business experience among them. Labour's death taxes will hit farms and businesses. Families with a typical farm will have to find hundreds of thousands of pounds or see their farms broken up and sold. The Environment Secretary said 10 months ago that he had no intentions of putting death taxes on businesses. That was a broken promise, was it not?

**Sarah Jones:** I will not take any lectures from the Opposition, who said "eff business". Conservative Members have some cheek to come at us when we are clearing up the £22 billion black hole that we inherited, and setting in train stability. I spent quite a lot of yesterday, as the hon. Gentleman would expect, talking to and having meetings with businesses about the Budget and its implications. We talked about the potential for growth, long-term stability, and changes that this Labour Government are making.

T3. [900995] **Steve Witherden** (Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr) (Lab): A study published by the Disability Policy Centre this week suggests that improving support to get disabled people, those with long-term health conditions and unpaid carers into work, and keeping them in employment, could save the Treasury £38 billion. Paying a higher rate of sick pay has been shown to increase employee retention and is key to reducing economic inactivity. What assessment has the Minister made of the impact of the current rate of statutory sick pay on employee retention?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Justin Madders):** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we need to get more people back into work, and need to support them to return. In the Employment Rights Bill, we are looking to increase the scope of sick pay to include people below the lower earnings limit, and to introduce payments from day one. We have no plans to increase the rate of statutory sick pay, but when we get the reforms through, we will no doubt look at how we can reform it for the better. My Department for Work and Pensions colleagues will consider that in due course.

T2. [900994] **Dr Luke Evans** (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): After yesterday's Budget, those running small and medium-sized businesses will see their national insurance rise and their wage bill increase. Those in hospitality, running a pub or restaurant, for example, will have a 35% reduction in their business rate relief.

To top it off, the Employment Rights Bill will bring more red tape for businesses. Those massive changes are happening very quickly. Does the Minister agree with the Institute of Directors that it is a "perfect storm" of higher taxes, higher wages and more red tape?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Gareth Thomas):** No. I gently point out to the hon. Gentleman the difficult economic inheritance that his party left this Government to sort out. We are determined to walk towards all the tough decisions his party refused to face up to in government. If he is against the increase in employers' national insurance contributions, he needs to say how he will fund the investment we announced yesterday in the aerospace and automotive sectors, and how he would fund the extra investment that we will make in the NHS and other public services.

T4. [900996] **John Slinger** (Rugby) (Lab): We will take no lectures from the Conservative party about business. Plenty of us have experience of business, and I am one of them.

Many high street businesses want to continue accepting cash. Just as importantly, so do many of my residents, particularly the elderly, disabled and vulnerable. I have spoken to the citizens advice bureau, which is hearing how concerned elderly residents are. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that the Post Office can better offer banking services on the high street to cater for the spenders and recipients of cash?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. These are topical questions, and they are meant to be short and punchy, not speeches. I am sure we can find time for an Adjournment debate for the hon. Gentleman.

**Gareth Thomas:** Given that almost 9,500 bank branches closed over the past 14 years, on the Conservative party's watch, it has increasingly been left to the Post Office to provide vital banking services on the high street. I am sure the banking industry recognises its responsibility to work with us to ensure that sub-postmasters, whose pay has not increased for a decade, and the Post Office have what they need to help meet the critical cash and banking needs of all our constituents.

**Martin Vickers** (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): Although yesterday's announcements may dampen businesses' expansion plans, many businesses in my constituency and elsewhere find it difficult to expand because of national grid connections. What are Ministers doing to engage with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and National Grid to ensure that connections are available?

**Sarah Jones:** I am glad that the hon. Gentleman asks what we are doing to engage with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, because I sit across that Department and the Department for Business and Trade. The entire point of my role is to make sure that we join up the two Departments, so that we can crack some of these problems. The grid is No. 1 on our list.

T5. [900997] **Ian Lavery** (Blyth and Ashington) (Lab): I warmly welcome the £10 billion investment in a data centre in Cambois in my constituency, but I share the concerns of many residents who believe that it is fast becoming a plug-in centre for huge infrastructure programmes. Does my hon. Friend agree that when we have huge infrastructure programmes in certain constituencies, residents should benefit from local jobs and community facilities?

**Sarah Jones:** I agree with my hon. Friend. It is essential that local communities see the benefits of landmark investments. I am pleased that Blackstone is investing £110 million in a fund to support local skills training and transport infrastructure. I am happy to have a conversation with my hon. Friend about what more can be done.

**David Mundell** (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): Farming and agricultural businesses employ thousands of people in my constituency, and they make a huge contribution to the local economy. Can the Minister set out exactly how yesterday's Budget will help them to develop and grow?

**The Minister for Trade Policy and Economic Security (Mr Douglas Alexander):** Farmers, like any other business people, need the stability that will be delivered as a consequence of our fixing the foundations, as we set out yesterday. I too represent a constituency with a number of farmers, and I am aware of the concerns that have been raised about inheritance tax, but, frankly, difficult choices had to be made yesterday because of choices that were not made by the Government in which the right hon. Gentleman served.

T6. [900998] **Becky Gittins** (Clwyd East) (Lab): Business owners in Clwyd East, in north Wales, want a Government who are serious about getting long-term, sustainable jobs into our economy—a process that we started yesterday. Our unique geography sees us lead on wind power and carbon capture, and we have a proud manufacturing base, which is already benefiting from our two Governments working together, and from a long-term sustainable plan for the future. Will the Minister work with me to ensure that businesses are well placed to invest in north Wales, both now and in the future?

**Sarah Jones:** Yes, I will work with my hon. Friend. We are delighted with the £1 billion investment secured to transform the Shotton mill site. I think that a Labour Government in Westminster and a Labour Government in Wales can work together to deliver great things.

**Josh Babarinde** (Eastbourne) (LD): Some 29% of jobs in Eastbourne, the sunniest town in the UK, are connected to the hospitality sector, but many businesses in that sector have expressed concerns about yesterday's Budget, which UK Hospitality has described as the "latest blow for hospitality". Will the Minister meet me and local hospitality businesses to discuss those concerns? I declare an interest as the patron of the Eastbourne Hospitality Association.

**Gareth Thomas:** I would be very happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and the Eastbourne Hospitality Association to discuss the concerns that he has articulated.

I gently say to him, as other Ministers have pointed out, that we faced a tough economic inheritance, and had to make very difficult decisions in the Budget yesterday.

T7. [900999] **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): I want to see Slough High Street thrive, but doors are closing, businesses are struggling and antisocial behaviour has been on the rise, especially after over a decade of neglect and lack of support by Tory Governments. What practical steps are the Government taking to ensure that high streets such as ours, in Slough, are revived?

**Gareth Thomas:** When we were in opposition, we set out a five-point plan to help with the revival of high streets. We are working to bring forward that plan. My hon. Friend will see more detail in the small business strategy Command Paper that we are committed to publishing next year.

**Lincoln Jopp** (Spelthorne) (Con): We have an anomalous situation in Spelthorne whereby people can use an oyster card to pay for six different red buses, but not the train. That is crippling small businesses and people going into London. Will Ministers in the Department use their combined might to lobby on my behalf and get me a meeting with the Minister for Rail, so that we can get Spelthorne into the correct zone?

**Sarah Jones:** I admire the hon. Gentleman's ability to shoehorn in a question on a subject that is not in the Department for Business and Trade's remit, but we are of course happy to help with his endeavours to talk to Ministers in the Department for Transport.

T8. [901000] **Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): The all-party parliamentary group on eye health and visual impairment, which I chair, recently published its report, "Changing Attitudes, Changing Lives", looking at employer attitudes towards blind and partially sighted people. We found that nearly half of employers do not have accessible recruitment processes, which means that they miss out on a wealth of talent. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how we can create a step change in employer attitudes towards blind and partially sighted people?

**Justin Madders:** I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend. Under the "Get Britain Working" plan, more disabled people and people with health conditions will be supported to enter and stay in work, and I am happy to discuss with her how we can achieve that aim.

**Alison Griffiths** (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con): The Government's own impact assessment suggests that measures in the Employment Rights Bill could cost businesses up to £4.5 billion annually and increase the number of strikes by 54%. Does the Minister expect that legislation to enhance or undermine investor confidence?

**Justin Madders:** I gently point out to the hon. Lady that that represents a 0.4% increase on businesses' total costs—a small price to pay for what the impact assessment says

"will strengthen working conditions for the lowest-paid and most vulnerable in the labour market, increasing fairness and equality across Britain. It will have significant positive impacts on workers

who are trapped in insecure work, face discrimination, or suffer from unscrupulous employer behaviour like ‘fire and rehire’ practices”.

If the hon. Lady does not support that, I am sure that she can talk to her constituents about why.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Business and Trade Committee.

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North) (Lab): On Tuesday, we will hear from Sir Alan Bates and other victims of the Horizon scandal, which continues to deepen. In September, we learned that there will be 100 more convictions quashed than we originally thought, and yesterday the bill for redress went up by half a billion pounds. Have all the victims now come forward, and are there any gaps left in the schemes for redress?

**Gareth Thomas:** I welcome the decision by my right hon. Friend’s Select Committee to take a further look at the issue. It is a priority for the Department to speed up the compensation process. Victims are still coming forward, and we are actively looking at whether all those who come forward are covered by the compensation schemes. We have asked the Post Office to write to all those sub-postmasters who have not yet come forward to see if they are eligible for compensation.

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): We should all welcome the work of both Governments that resulted in the announcement of £63 billion of inward investment into the UK. However, since then, as a number of Members have pointed out, we have had significant new regulation in the labour market and massive new taxes on businesses. If any of those investors now change their minds, will the Secretary of State come to the House and inform us, please?

**Sarah Jones:** We will of course keep the House updated on the results of the investment summit, but the £63 billion, as I said earlier, was a massive show of confidence in this new Government.

**Torcuil Crichton** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister and the Secretary of State for the work that they have put in to secure a future for the Harland & Wolff yard at Arnish in my constituency, and indeed at Methil, Appledore and Belfast. I understand that talks are commercially sensitive, but, as workers are anxious about their future, can the Minister update us on how the talks are going?

**Sarah Jones:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for the work that he is doing to represent his community. We are working extensively with all parties to find an outcome for Harland & Wolff that delivers shipbuilding and manufacturing in Belfast, Scotland and Appledore in Devon. I cannot comment further, as he says, due to commercial sensitivities, but we are working extensively with everyone to get the right deal.

**Chris Law** (Dundee Central) (SNP): The International Court of Justice judgment from 19 July this year ruled that it is the duty of third-party states not to aid or assist Israel’s “unlawful occupation” of Palestinian territory. In the light of this, will the Minister tell us whether the Department for Business and Trade has obtained legal

advice, or whether it is in the process of doing so, on the legality of the UK’s existing trade relations with Israel, and if it has, will he share it with the House, please?

**Mr Douglas Alexander:** I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we work closely with our colleagues in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office who are responsible for the international humanitarian law assessment. My good and right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has updated the House on the changed advice received by the Government, and I think that I should leave it there.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab): Will the Minister meet me to discuss how the Government could further develop an industrial strategy to bring up to 10,000 jobs in the offshore wind supply chain over the next 10 years?

**Sarah Jones:** I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend often and regularly, as we do, to talk about these matters. Of course, the offshore wind supply chain is incredibly important. We have two big announcements to that end, which she mentioned, in relation to Orsted and Greenvolt, and there is much more that we can do through the industrial strategy to keep that area growing.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): What discussions have there been with Invest NI in relation to supporting small Northern Ireland businesses in the digital evolution, to help them adapt and make improvements with digital technology to ensure the smooth running of their businesses?

**Gareth Thomas:** We have held discussions with a range of organisations on exactly that issue. I promised the hon. Gentleman earlier that I would meet him. If he wants to add that to the list of subjects that we talk about, I am happy for him to do so.

**Mr Speaker:** You do like Mr Shannon.

**Sally Jameson** (Doncaster Central) (Lab/Co-op): In Doncaster, we have an innovative chamber of commerce and a fantastic set of local businesses. As well as the much-needed upgrade to workers’ rights, can the Minister update the House on what we are doing to kickstart a skills revolution for businesses in Doncaster and across the country? Can he also update the House on what he is doing to work across Departments to ensure that happens?

**Gareth Thomas:** As others across Whitehall have already set out, we have established Skills England and begun the process of reforming the apprenticeship levy to help businesses get better access to the skills they need.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Perran Moon for the final question.

**Perran Moon** (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): I have more than 30 years of business experience, so the Conservative party’s claims that there is no business experience on the Government Benches carries about as much weight as their industrial strategy. Can the Minister confirm that prior to the election there were extensive consultations with business experts, which I bet the Conservative party wished they had done over the past 14 years.

**Sarah Jones:** Yes, indeed. I can reassure my hon. Friend that, on this Front Bench, there are Members, including me, who do have private sector experience, and who have run businesses. Of course we have had

very strong relationships with businesses, both in the run-up to the election and now, and we will continue to build on those strong relationships for the benefit of all the people across our country.

## Business of the House

10.34 am

**Mr Speaker:** Before we come to business questions, I am sure that the House will want to send our best wishes to Robin James, who retires today after 40 years, during which he clerked the Home Affairs Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Defence Committee, the Committees on Standards and the Committee of Privileges. Robin was a Clerk of the Committee that approved the building of Portcullis House, and as a Clerk to many Committees since, he has produced many thorough reports. I wish him a long, happy and fulfilling retirement.

**Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): Will the Leader of the House provide us with the forthcoming business?

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Lucy Powell):** The business for the week commencing 4 November includes:

MONDAY 4 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

TUESDAY 5 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

WEDNESDAY 6 NOVEMBER—Conclusion of the Budget debate.

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

The provisional business for the week commencing 11 November will include:

MONDAY 11 NOVEMBER—General debate on flood preparedness.

TUESDAY 12 NOVEMBER—Remaining stages of the House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 13 NOVEMBER—Debate on a motion to approve the draft Voter Identification (Amendment of List of Specified Documents) Regulations 2024, followed by a debate on a motion to approve the draft Environmental Protection (Single-use Vapes) (England) Regulations 2024, followed by a debate on motions to approve the draft Export and Investment Guarantees (Limit on Exports and Insurance Commitments) Order 2024, the draft Export and Investment Guarantees (Limit on Exports and Insurance Commitments) (No. 2) Order 2024, and the draft Export and Investment Guarantees (Limit on Exports and Insurance Commitments) (No. 3) Order 2024.

THURSDAY 14 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015 (Extension) Bill [*Lords*].

FRIDAY 15 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

**Chris Philp:** Mr Speaker, I echo your thanks and congratulations to Robin James, who retires today after 40 years of service. In this House, we all rely on the service of the Clerks, and I know that we are all extremely grateful to Robin for the work that he has done over four decades. I am sure that the whole House will also want to send our thoughts, prayers and best wishes to those affected by the terrible floods currently happening in Spain. Some British citizens are affected as well.

It is good that we will have such ample time to debate the Budget, because it raises some extremely serious issues. On 29 July, the Chancellor of the Exchequer

stood at the Dispatch Box and told us that there was a £22 billion black hole. That claim has been repeated by Labour Ministers subsequently as a pretext for the tax rises that they planned all along. The Chancellor asked the Office for Budget Responsibility to produce a report into this matter, which was published yesterday. It is called the “Review of the March 2024 forecast for departmental expenditure limits”—a snappy title. I have read that report, as I am sure others have, and nowhere does it mention £22 billion. That number is not there at all. In fact, the only reference to a number is found on page 2 and in table 1. Even the Treasury, straining every sinew, could only find numbers that added up to £9.5 billion, and even there the OBR says that

“it is not possible to judge how much of the £9.5 billion”

might actually have been realised. When the Chancellor said that there was a £22 billion black hole, yesterday’s OBR report now proves that that was simply untrue. Will she come here and apologise for providing that number to the House, given that the OBR report shows that it was simply not true, and certainly does not justify £40 billion-worth of tax rises—the largest tax rises in any Budget in history?

Let me turn to election promises and trust in politics, because when we make promises to the public, it is important that we keep them. [*Laughter.*] I do not know why you are laughing, because these are your promises. The Labour party said that its plans did not require any extra tax rises. Yesterday, the Government announced £40 billion-worth of extra tax rises. They said that there would be no increase in national insurance, but yesterday they announced a £25 billion increase in national insurance.

Let me turn now to their final fig leaf: working people. Apparently, working people would not be affected. In the last couple of hours the Chancellor herself, on the BBC, has admitted what we all knew all along: that working people would be affected, as a result of lower wages. In fact, we can quantify that, thanks to the OBR’s analysis—I am now quite a fan of the OBR. It published yesterday its “Economic and fiscal outlook”. It is 205 pages long, so some Labour Members might not have had a chance to read it all, but I have. On page 54, in paragraph 3.11, it tells us exactly how much of that £25 billion national insurance increase will fall on the shoulders of working people. The OBR says that

“76 per cent of the total”

will result in “lower real wages” for working people. So 76% of that £25 billion increase will fall on the shoulders of working people. That is £19 billion a year lower wages as a result of yesterday’s Budget. That is not me; that is the OBR. So perhaps the Leader of the House would like to apologise to those working people for the £19 billion pay cut she has just handed them.

During the election campaign, Conservative Members warned that Labour’s plans would result in a £2,094 tax increase per working household, and Labour called us liars. I remember being on the radio and the TV, and Labour shadow Ministers at the time—including the Leader of the House, I think—called us liars. We now know the truth: £40 billion a year. That is £2,173 per working household, so about £100 more than we warned. Perhaps she can apologise for that as well.

We also warned that the tax burden would increase to 37.4% of GDP. The OBR says that it will be 38% of GDP—higher even than we warned when Labour called

us liars. That is the highest tax burden ever in our country's history. So the Government were elected on a false prospectus. The OBR has now told us that will result in lower growth by the end of the forecast period and higher inflation. The truth has finally come out: the Government are going to tax more, they are going to borrow more, and they are going to spend more, and now we know who will pay: working people, to the tune of £19 billion a year.

**Mr Speaker:** Can I just say to the shadow Leader of the House that he said “you”? I am definitely not responsible for this Budget—I want to make that very clear.

**Lucy Powell:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. May I, too, join you in paying tribute to Robin James, who has been a Clerk here for over 40 years, most recently on the Committees on Standards and of Privileges, which has certainly put him in the spotlight in recent years. I know he wishes to retire to Wales, with the twin ambitions of learning Welsh and finally learning to drive. I am sure we wish him well with both those endeavours. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Jon Pearce) on the birth of his newborn daughter Connie this week.

Finally, I think, the Conservative leadership contest will finish this weekend, and it could be all change on the Opposition Benches. This could be my last exchange with the right hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp). He is well known for his ambition, and perhaps today was another audition for higher office. I am sure he would welcome a promotion, from the detailed discussions we have on restoration and renewal and House procedure, and I am that sure he will be looking forward to that. I thank him for the work that we have done together. If this is our last exchange, I will really miss his—how shall I put it?—boundless enthusiasm, because God loves a trier; let us hope the next Conservative leader does too.

As the right hon. Gentleman rightly said, yesterday we saw history made, with the first ever Budget delivered by a female Chancellor. I am so proud of my friend for smashing that glass ceiling. The country voted for change and our Budget lives up to that promise. We have made clear choices. We have chosen responsibility over recklessness, reliable public services over endless crises, putting working people first, investment over decline, a Budget that is now backed by the International Monetary Fund—an unprecedented endorsement of a Budget. In many ways, it is not a Budget that we expected or wanted to make, but we have had to fix the mess left by the Conservative party—[*Interruption.*] I know that Conservative Members do not like to hear it, but they were not straight with people before the election.

The Office for Budget Responsibility, which the right hon. Gentleman quoted, has made it clear that, had it known the true state of the public finances in March, its forecast for the previous Government's plans would have been “materially different.” I do not usually agree with the former Chancellor, Kwasi Kwarteng, but perhaps the right hon. Gentleman should heed his advice today. He said that the situation Labour inherited was “structurally difficult.” In other words, we are clearing up the Conservatives' mess.

I am a little confused, Mr Speaker. Does the right hon. Gentleman now accept that there was a black hole, but disagrees on the amount, or is he still in denial that

there was even a black hole at all? It is ironic that the Conservatives spent all week undermining the OBR, but are now trying to hide behind the OBR's figures. I am not sure—which is it? He will know that there was a huge black hole, even before the pay awards that the Conservatives left sitting on their desk, and for which they set aside no money even though they knew that someone would have to pay for it.

We make no apology for the Budget, which is about long-term investment and a decade of national renewal. That is why it is right that we consider the benefits of investment and not just the cost. This country has suffered years of decline and under-investment—we were ranked second lowest for investment in the OECD. We have chosen investment, not further decline under the Tories. We have had to be honest about the difficult choices that we have made in the Budget given what we were left with. I must ask the right hon. Gentleman and other Conservative Members: how would they fix the finances left by their Government? How would they give the NHS the money that it needs? How would they get the long-term investment that the country is crying out for?

We have absolutely put working people first, and I am proud of the pay rise that the Budget gives the poorest workers next April. There are many more things to welcome in the Budget, and I am sure that the House, and maybe the right hon. Gentleman, welcomes them. They include one of the biggest ever increases in NHS spending to deal with the record waiting lists that the Conservatives left behind, much-needed funding for special educational needs and disabilities education, a boost for carers for the first time since the 1970s, fixing the schools that the Conservatives left to crumble, more affordable social housing, money to tackle the cladding crisis, ushering in a decade of national renewal, and investing in the jobs of the future in clean energy, tech, aerospace, automotive, transport, life sciences and much more.

In particular, and I must say this because it needs underlining, this Government have finally put aside money to pay compensation to the victims of historical injustices, including infected blood and the Post Office Horizon scandal, and to deliver fairness for the miners' pension scheme. Honestly, the most shameful part of the Conservatives' recklessness with the country is that they promised many times that victims of those injustices would receive compensation, but they put aside not a single penny—not a single budget line to pay for it—in any of their costings.

We cannot in one Budget undo the 14 sorry years of Conservative under-investment, stagnant growth, falling living standards and crumbling public services, but this Budget makes a very good first step forward.

**Jon Trickett** (Normanton and Hemsworth) (Lab): Yesterday, a large number of women lobbied Parliament. They represent a generation of women—just women, not men, which is perhaps not too odd given the values of the Conservative party—who suffered a great injustice in the Pensions Act 2011. They call themselves the Women Against State Pension Age Inequality Campaign, or WASPI. Government inevitably takes time—estimates must be made and legal advice taken—but I would be grateful to the Leader of the House if she indicated when we might hear a statement on the WASPI situation,

[Jon Trickett]

or have the opportunity to debate it, so that we can give some hope to thousands of women, including 4,500 in my constituency.

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend has long campaigned on these issues, and has asked about them before. He rightly raises the campaigners' points; he will be aware that the report is detailed and substantial, requiring the Government to give proper time to considering all its findings. I assure my hon. Friend that as soon as that proper consideration has been given, Ministers will come to Parliament to report on it.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Marie Goldman** (Chelmsford) (LD): I also express my sympathies with the people of eastern Spain on the tragic scenes we are seeing there. I understand that a 71-year-old Briton may also be among the dead, and we expect the numbers to go up. It is perhaps timely that a general debate on flooding is coming up. I welcome that debate, and look forward to hearing what is discussed.

There is much in yesterday's Budget that the Liberal Democrats welcome. In particular, we welcome the additional funds for the day-to-day NHS spending. We have long been campaigning for that, and we very much welcome it. However, there are patients in hospital who are well enough to leave, but cannot do so unless they get the care they need. Unfortunately, the £600 million that was announced for social care will not touch the sides of what is needed to make that system work properly and alleviate the pressures on the NHS. Will the Leader of the House set aside Government time for a general debate on how best to reform social care?

**Lucy Powell:** I join the hon. Lady and the shadow Leader of the House—I meant to do so earlier—in expressing the Government's condolences to, and support for, those in Spain who have either died or lost all their belongings and their homes in the recent Spanish floods. As she says, we have a general debate in two weeks' time on flood preparedness, partly in response to so many questions coming forward on that topic during this Session.

I thank the hon. Lady for her words about the Budget. There is a lot of good news in the Budget that her party should welcome, given how much campaigning they have done on many of these issues. They should be grateful for some of the measures, particularly the biggest ever cash increase in the earnings thresholds for carer's allowance, for which her party has campaigned. As the hon. Lady says, we have announced a huge funding boost for the NHS and an extra £600 million for social care. She is absolutely right, though, that these issues will take time to work through, and will need further reform and investment to deal with going forward. The ageing population and the crisis in social care are inextricably linked to the future of our health service.

**Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I have many tower blocks in my constituency, and too many constituents find that their lifts are regularly broken and are not getting fixed. This is not just down to individual landlords—it cuts across the piece. Is it not time for a debate in Government time about how

the four main lift companies organise their structures and maintenance contracts? This is stopping people from living their lives, and very often leaving them trapped in or outside their flats.

**Lucy Powell:** As an MP who also represents a number of people who live in tall buildings, I completely hear what my hon. Friend is saying. This is a very important matter, and I am sure that if she were to apply for a debate, it would get a lot of attention.

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

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): The good news is that the Backbench Business Committee will be meeting on Tuesday. We are open for business, and a steady series of applications has started, particularly from one of our long-term season ticket holders. We are going to be open for requests for 90-minute or half-day debates; it would be very exceptional for us to grant a full day's debate. We are also going to keep a very close eye on whether those people who make or support applications actually turn up and speak in the debates that are allocated. We had a very good meeting with the Leader of the House earlier this week, and I am looking forward to her announcing time for the Backbench Business Committee to allocate debates.

Mr Speaker, you have very graciously granted us the use of Speaker's House for the Diwali reception on Monday, for which we thank you. To Hindus, Sikhs and Jains, I wish Shubh Deepavali for today, and Nutan Varshabhinandan for Saturday.

**Lucy Powell:** I, too, welcome the formation of the Backbench Business Committee, and I welcome the conversations we have begun to ensure that we work together on the allocation of time for Backbench Business debates and others that may be granted by the Government. On the application from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), I am sure he will definitely be in attendance for that debate, should the Committee grant it. There is no question about that, and I expect it will be on the freedom of religion or belief, which is a common theme of his questions in these sessions.

I join the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) in wishing everybody a happy Diwali.

**Noah Law** (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): I am delighted that the Chancellor's Budget included a significant real-terms funding increase for local authorities, giving them more to invest in vital community services and infrastructure.

I, too, express my condolences to the victims of flooding in Spain. One of my constituents has experienced significant flooding issues after the road outside her property was resurfaced in a way that directs water directly into her home, instead of towards the river. After raising this with Cornwall council, she was told that nothing could be done. Does the Leader of the House agree with me that it is incumbent on local authorities to ensure that every penny of taxpayers' money is spent as effectively as possible to address serious issues such as the flooding experienced by my constituent?

**Lucy Powell:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising important matters relating to his constituency, which is absolutely what he should be doing. He is right to say that the Conservative party starved local government of funds over recent years, which has left communities paying the price. That is why I am really proud that, in yesterday's Budget, we saw a significant real-terms increase for local government spending power over the coming years, and they will be having multi-year funding settlements.

My hon. Friend raises a good point about flood resilience. He will know that we have set up the floods taskforce. There is a debate during the week after next on these issues, and he may wish to raise that point then.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Sir David Davis—and congratulations on your knighthood.

**David Davis** (Goole and Pocklington) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Indeed, this question may be of interest to you. The Leader of the House has ministerial responsibilities, but she is also the nearest thing this House has to a shop steward in the Cabinet, and it is in that context I ask her this question.

A month ago, I wrote to the Chancellor about her cancellation of the investment opportunity fund, a decision that has put at risk an investment of hundreds of millions of pounds in a new factory in Goole in my constituency, and with it hundreds of jobs. Two weeks ago, I chased up that letter and was told I was going to get a reply; I was even given a reference number. Yesterday, at 1 o'clock on the dot, I got a timed email telling me that the Treasury was not going to answer my question and was handing it off to somebody else. This was a dishonest piece of obfuscation to avoid accountability before the Budget debate. I hope it is not a harbinger of things to come, but will the Leader of the House remind her colleagues in Cabinet of their direct responsibility to us, for our constituencies, to answer such a question and treat it properly in future?

**Lucy Powell:** I join in congratulating the right hon. Member. He raises a really important matter, and he can be assured that I take a dim view when my colleagues do not respond to parliamentary written questions or correspondence in both a timely and a thorough manner. I constantly remind—and have very recently reminded—all my Cabinet colleagues and Ministers of their duties to do so. If Members have any instances of when that has not been the case, I will take those up directly, as I will if he wants to share that one with me.

**Mr Speaker:** In fairness, as the right hon. Gentleman has brought me into this discussion, I am also concerned. I expect Ministers to reply to hon. Members of this House, whatever side they are on. Worse than that, to transfer such a question to someone else at the last minute is totally unacceptable. Ministers are accountable to this House. I fully support the Leader of the House, and I will work with her to make sure that all Members get such letters on time. Let us get that message back to Ministers—I am sure those on the Treasury Bench are listening—and I hope that a reply is being sent as we speak.

**Liz Twist** (Blaydon and Consett) (Lab): I recently had the privilege of visiting the newly created Ryton heritage garden, which includes a memorial to Her late

Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and of cutting the ribbon. Brighten Ryton is an amazing organisation that does much to help our local community, and I particularly thank Terry Docherty who led the project. May we have a debate in Government time on the importance of local community organisations in supporting our areas?

**Lucy Powell:** I join my hon. Friend in congratulating all those who work at the heritage garden in her constituency, and particularly Terry Docherty—it sounds as if he has done an immense job for her constituents. This topic is raised regularly, and now that the Backbench Business Committee is established, I am sure it would consider an application for a debate on the involvement of local community activists and the importance of volunteering to our communities.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (North Cotswolds) (Con): I know that you, Mr Speaker, take a close interest in the enormous restoration and renewal project in this House, which is estimated to cost at least £10 billion of anybody's money—[*Interruption.*] At least. We are currently spending £2 million a week on maintenance in this place, a large chunk of which is taken up by the costs of preparing for restoration and renewal. I put it to the Leader of the House that we need to get on and make some decisions on this matter, because otherwise we face some catastrophic failure in one of our services in this House—a flood, a fire, or something. We have been talking about this since 2014, and it sets a bad example to the rest of Government if we cannot even manage our own affairs.

**Lucy Powell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue. Mr Speaker and I discuss this matter regularly, and we share the concern about it, as do many others across the House. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that this building is in desperate need of investment and of restoration and renewal. He will be aware that three options for how we take the project forward will come to the House early next year, and I will play my full part in ensuring that we restore and renew this fantastic building.

**Alice Macdonald** (Norwich North) (Lab/Co-op): My constituent Claire's son Elliot was diagnosed with diplegic cerebral palsy at the age of four and needed a wheelchair immediately. Elliot is now eight, and his chair desperately needs adjusting. However, due to the waiting list for reablement services, Claire and Elliot have had to wait over six months. May we have a debate in Government time on the provision of reablement services?

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend raises an important matter about reablement care and services, and it is another shocking symptom of the state of care and the NHS in our country. That is why the Budget yesterday was so important for renewing our national health service. The Budget debate next Tuesday will be on fixing the NHS and reforming our public services, and that might be a good moment for her to raise the matter.

**Ben Maguire** (North Cornwall) (LD): Given long-standing community concerns in my constituency about road safety, the extremely high rate of fatalities on the A30 at the Plusha junction, and the need for a graded

[Ben Maguire]

junction at that location, may we have a debate in Government time on how National Highways and the Government can better work together to deliver critical infrastructure projects to reduce accidents and fatalities on our busy A roads?

**Lucy Powell:** I thank the hon. Member for that question. As he will be aware, yesterday we announced additional funds for road and other infrastructure, which will play an important role. We will deliver an updated strategic framework for road safety shortly, and I will ensure that Ministers come to the House regularly to report on that.

**Ms Polly Billington** (East Thanet) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will be aware of how much coastal communities such as mine depend on bus services, not least to get to vital healthcare, and I am grateful to the Chancellor for finding the money to retain a cap on bus fares. In east Kent, however, our orthopaedic centre is in Canterbury, yet there is now no direct bus service from Ramsgate or Broadstairs, making access harder for the very people with mobility issues who need such services. Will the Leader of the House find Government time to debate access to healthcare via sustainable, reliable, safe and affordable transport?

**Lucy Powell:** That is an excellent question, and I am glad that my hon. Friend has raised the issue of the bus cap. She will be aware that the Conservatives budgeted for the cap to last only until December, and it is this Government that have extended it, albeit at £3, beyond that date. We will bring forward further bus regulation to ensure that local areas such as hers, and neighbouring authorities, can once again take control of bus routes, fares and timetabling to meet the needs of their communities.

**Alicia Kearns** (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): My heart goes out to the family of the British national killed in the flooding in Spain in the last few days.

The National Farmers Union described yesterday's Budget as "disastrous", the Country Land and Business Association described it as "a betrayal" and farmers across Rutland and Stamford are in distress, as my inbox shows. Whether on agricultural property relief or charging full road tax on double cab pick-up trucks, which was hidden in the Budget, the NFU says that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs does not care. Will the Leader of the House advise me on when the next chance to raise this breach of previous promises will be, or will she secure a meeting with the Minister for my local farmers?

**Lucy Powell:** I am sorry to hear of the reaction of the hon. Member's local community, but we did have to make some difficult choices in the Budget. We recognise the important role that farmers play in supporting their local communities, providing food security and the many other contributions they make to our country. It is worth noting, for her and her constituents, that three quarters of farmers who are currently entitled to receive the full relief on inheritance tax will still get it after the Budget. It is the top 25% that will not. I am sorry to say it, but she will remember that her party lost the support of farmers, and that is why my party now has more than 100 new Members representing rural constituencies.

**Dave Robertson** (Lichfield) (Lab): Since 2011, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service has lost 437 full-time equivalent firefighters. More than that, the number of on-call and retained firefighters has dropped by more than 60% from 483 to just 189. That is a significant drop in the amount of fire cover, and the cuts have been 1.5 times deeper than in any comparable rural fire service. Does the Leader of the House agree that it is a pressing issue, and will she consider a debate on the adequacy of fire cover across the country?

**Lucy Powell:** I know from my own constituency that such matters are raised all the time. Fire cover, and having adequate fire officers, is very important to local communities. Budgets have been cut in recent years and I know that Home Affairs Ministers take that very seriously. Home Office questions are coming up shortly, and I am sure that my hon. Friend would get a good response.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Debates in this place are increasingly punctuated and populated by references to outside bodies, from the Environment Agency to Network Rail, and from the Migration Advisory Committee to the much mentioned Office for Budget Responsibility. None are elected or accountable to the people we serve—we do not really know who they are. May we have a debate on the increasing blob activism that threatens the separation of powers? We know about judicial activism, but this activism is just as dangerous. Those bodies wield immense power, and Ministers elected to govern should not be stymied, hampered, cowed or chastised by people with no democratic legitimacy.

**Lucy Powell:** The right hon. Gentleman is well known as a blob activist himself—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I do not mean it that way. I mean against the blob: I am sorry to be misinterpreted. If he is referring to the important financial—[*Interruption.*] This will start me off laughing now—

**Sir John Hayes:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I think the Leader of the House needs a few moments to calm down.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Leader of the House.

**Lucy Powell:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that. Perhaps that joke should have referred to one of the prospective leaders of the—no, I will not go any further.

The right hon. Gentleman refers to some very important independent financial institutions that offer this country the financial stability for which is renowned around the world. When we ignore those institutions, as the former Prime Minister Liz Truss did, we see who pays the greatest price for that. Those institutions play an important role, but he is right to say that they should be accountable to Parliament, and it is my expectation that those bodies appear regularly before Select Committees.

**Rachel Hopkins** (Luton South and South Bedfordshire) (Lab): Five-year-olds in the most deprived areas of Luton are two and a half times more likely to have experienced dental decay. I pay tribute to organisations such as the Dental Wellness Trust, which does great work on children's oral health in Luton and beyond. I welcome our Labour

Government's plan to fix dentistry, including the provision of a supervised tooth brushing programme for three to five-year-olds. Will the Leader of the House provide Government time for a debate on the positive impact these measures will have across the country?

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight the dire state that NHS dentistry fell into under the previous Government, and the really high levels of poor oral health that many of our children face. Poor child oral health remains one of the main reasons for admission into A&E and other services, and that is why this Government are committed to tackling it. Further work was announced in yesterday's Budget. My hon. Friend will know that there is a debate next week on fixing the NHS, and I am sure she will want to raise these issues there.

**Ellie Chowns** (North Herefordshire) (Green): This week, the international community is meeting in Colombia to discuss and drive forward nature protection. Here in the UK, we know that nature is under pressure and declining, and I believe it is a point of agreement across the entire House that agriculture has a crucial role to play in protecting nature. Yet yesterday's Budget set out a 2% real-terms decrease in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs budget over the next two years. May we have a debate in Government time on the vital role of nature-friendly farming and the importance of Government support for it?

**Lucy Powell:** I share the hon. Lady's concerns about nature and the wellness of our nature in this country, and we are committed to those issues. That is why we have brought forward many plans in recent weeks and will continue to do so in future weeks. There were many things in yesterday's Budget that will work towards that aim. I would have thought she would welcome our drive to being the clean energy superpower that we want to be, and all the benefits that that will bring in the future.

**Chris Bloore** (Redditch) (Lab): The Leader of the House will remember from her visit to Redditch the real anger on the doorstep from my constituents about waiting times in Redditch and in Worcestershire as a whole. Yesterday's announcement by the Chancellor will make a real difference to the people my right hon. Friend spoke to, who have been waiting too long for the treatment that they deserve. Will the Leader of the House give us some time to talk about how the changes announced yesterday will make a real difference to those people's lives?

**Lucy Powell:** I know from my visit to Redditch with my hon. Friend that he campaigned brilliantly in the general election and before that on bringing change to the NHS in this country and on reducing waiting times and waiting lists. Yesterday, thanks to his campaigning and that of many others, he saw the single biggest boost to our NHS funding since 2010, outside of covid. That will begin the process of rebuilding our NHS, as his constituents want.

**Steff Aquarone** (North Norfolk) (LD): Residents in North Norfolk are worried about the impact of flooding as we enter the winter months, and I welcome the general debate planned for 11 November. Tomorrow,

I am holding a meeting of key agencies with responsibility for water management and almost 200 of my constituents. The Broadland Futures Initiative is likely to report later this Parliament on the future scenarios facing the area, which I know deeply concern both me and the hon. Member for Broadland and Fakenham (Jerome Mayhew). Once it is published, will the Leader of the House allow us a debate in Government time on this important report to ensure that we have a safe and secure future for this treasured national park and low-lying Norfolk more broadly?

**Lucy Powell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for the work he does locally on flood resilience and for raising this matter. We wanted to have the debate next week in part because it is raised during business questions so often. I will, of course, make sure that the relevant Minister comes to this House or gives a statement to it when the report is published.

**Abtisam Mohamed** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Reforming the leasehold system is a priority for me in Parliament, because I have many leaseholders in Sheffield Central living in unaffordable homes and struggling to extend their lease or pay their monthly bills due to high, inconsistent and unfair charges. As an example, one of my leaseholders had a service charge of £1,800, which was increased to £6,000 as a result of building safety issues that were certainly not their fault, rendering their property unsellable. Will the Leader of the House share when the Government will bring forward secondary legislation to implement provisions of the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024, to give leaseholders greater powers, rights and protections over their homes?

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise what I know will be a big issue in her constituency, as it is in my own. The plight of leaseholders over recent years—soaring service charges and many living in unsellable, unsafe homes—is shocking and unacceptable. That is why this Government will enact the previous Government's Act at pace and finally bring an end to the feudal leasehold system with our forthcoming Bill.

**Dr Luke Evans** (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): Farmers woke up today broken and devastated after yesterday's announcement by the Government. We only have to look across social media to see farmers speaking about the impact of the hike in tax on generational farming. Farmers are among those who suffer most from mental health problems, given the problems of a tough harvest. This concoction has come together under this Government. Will the Leader of the House ask the Environment Secretary to make a statement on Monday? Will she write to the Health Secretary to ensure a ringfenced fund for all those farmers who will suffer and will be unable to pass on their family farm to the next generation? The impact on food security will be severe and shocking.

**Lucy Powell:** As I said, this Government are incredibly committed to our farming and rural communities, to ensure food security. We have had to make some difficult decisions in this Budget, but I gently say to the hon. Gentleman that he should be careful in scaremongering about the reality of what is happening. As I said, three quarters of those currently entitled to the full relief will still be entitled to it following the measures in the

[Lucy Powell]

Budget. He might reflect on one reason why so many rural constituencies chose Labour MPs at the last election: the president of the National Farmers' Union described decisions by the previous Conservative Government as "morally bankrupt".

**Lucy Rigby** (Northampton North) (Lab): Next year, England will proudly host the women's rugby world cup. Franklin's Gardens, home to our mighty premiership champions Northampton Saints, is set to stage several matches, including a Red Roses game. There is huge excitement in our town and beyond about the opportunities that England hosting the games will provide, including the opportunity to grow grassroots participation in the women's game. Might the Leader of the House consider scheduling a debate in Government time on how we can capitalise fully on this opportunity, and expand support for and participation in the women's game?

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend is right to raise this issue. Those kinds of events inspire participation and interest in the women's game and more broadly. That is why this Government are committed to a curriculum review, putting physical education and sport back at the heart of our curriculum. Initiatives such as Sport England's This Girl Can campaign continue to inspire many young women and girls to get active and get involved. I am sure that they will look closely at what she said.

**Claire Young** (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Small community pharmacies have been pushed to the brink in recent years. On a visit to Abbotswood pharmacy in my constituency, I heard how the current funding formula has led to a real-terms cut of 30% since 2015, and how it punishes rather than rewards pharmacies for providing extra services. Will the Leader of the House grant a debate in Government time on the role of pharmacies and how we can better support them to do their vital work?

**Lucy Powell:** Community pharmacies, as the hon. Lady rightly says, play a very important part in ensuring that health services are in the community and provide preventive support for local communities. That is why the Government are rebuilding our NHS. Community pharmacies will play a very important part in that. There is a debate next week on fixing the NHS, where I am sure the Health Secretary will be keen to hear her thoughts about community pharmacies.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): In Sudan, 25.6 million people are facing acute hunger, 10.7 million people have been displaced since last year, and the World Food Programme is saying that it is a race against time to stop the famine from escalating. It is a very grave situation, so can we have a debate in Government time to put a spotlight on what is happening in Sudan and the UK's response?

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend raises a really important matter and I think that is why Mr Speaker granted an urgent question on it earlier this week. There is a lot of interest in this House and it was raised with the Prime Minister yesterday at Prime Minister's question time. We continue to monitor the situation very closely. I will

ensure, as I always do, that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Minister and Secretary of State do come to the House regularly to update us on these matters.

**Martin Vickers** (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): Last Friday, along with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) and council leaders, I met National Highways specifically to raise the issue of the A180, but also access to the major ports of Immingham and Grimsby. Irrespective of the amount of National Highways' resources, surely the input from local representatives is important. Can we have a debate about how National Highways prioritises its various spending programmes?

**Lucy Powell:** The hon. Gentleman raises a good point about the A180 in his constituency. He will be aware that in yesterday's Budget a significant increase in investment in our roads was announced. There are also significant growth deals and devolution plans to ensure that local people are delivering the local transport needs of their area. I am sure he can raise these issues at Transport questions or in the forthcoming Budget debates.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Chris Vince.

**Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for letting me speak. [Interruption.] Genuinely, thank you very much. It is your job, but I appreciate it.

Two weeks ago, at my surgery, I met medically retired chief fire officer Rod Wainwright. Rod was one of the first attenders at the terrible tragedy of Grenfell seven years ago. Subsequently, he has been medically retired because of post-traumatic stress disorder. He did not get the support he asked for from the fire service and the in-house counselling was not enough, and he has subsequently had issues with his pension. Rod blames himself for not being able to save more people on that terrible evening. Does the Leader of the House agree that it is people like us, in this room, with suits on, who are to blame for the terrible tragedy of Grenfell, not heroes like Rod Wainwright? Does she agree that further debate needs to be had to support heroes like Rod?

**Lucy Powell:** I thank my hon. Friend for that very powerful question and contribution. I am really sorry to hear about the suffering that his constituent Rod Wainwright continues to suffer, having been in attendance at the Grenfell tower tragedy. The Prime Minister has made it clear that he still feels that survivors and the bereaved have been let down badly before, during and after, and that includes those who attended as fire officers and others. There will be another debate on the Grenfell inquiry report in due course and I will make sure he is aware of that when it happens.

**Tessa Munt** (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): In August, the Ministry of Justice informed Bristol Crown court that it would have to close courtrooms and save over 400 sitting days before March 2025. Last week, the difficult decision was made to remove 40 trials listed between now and the end of March. All the witnesses and defence had been told that their trials would take place. Most have been waiting over a year—two years, in some cases. Many of the 40 cases are rape and serious sexual offences cases where the accused is on bail. The cases will not be relisted until at least October 2025.

May we have a debate, so that the victims of rape and sexual abuse can understand why justice is so dreadfully delayed, and how the Government will tackle the court backlog?

**Lucy Powell:** The hon. Lady raises a really important point. She will know that this Government are committed to ensuring that there is justice for women and girls who are subject to rape and violence. It is a scar on our society that that still takes so long. She will know that the court backlog that she describes is another part of the legacy that this Government are trying to deal with, along with the prisons crisis and others in our criminal justice sector. We will have Justice questions next week, and I am sure that the Secretary of State will be pleased to answer her questions then.

**Lee Pitcher** (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): Last weekend, I had the privilege of attending the Pride of Rossington awards, where I met many talented and amazing constituents who, every day, give back to their community by the bucketload. I was thrilled to learn that five remarkable athletes from Andy Crittenden's martial arts centre in Rossington—Heidi, Joe, Millie, Ella and Millie-Leigh—will be competing in the WKC world championships this week. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating all the entrants and winners of the Pride of Rossington awards, and in wishing our athletes from Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme the very best of luck in the world championships?

**Lucy Powell:** I join my hon. Friend in congratulating those remarkable athletes and all those who took part in the Pride of Rossington awards ceremony in his constituency. I am delighted to wish the very best to his five constituents who are taking part in the WKC world championships.

**Mims Davies** (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): We have heard concerns about family businesses, and other Members have spoken this morning about working farming businesses. Could the Leader of the House use her good offices to put forward the priorities of family businesses? The assault of the Budget of broken promises has left many of my constituents with family businesses very concerned. They are working people too, and they are worried about their rights and their future. Given the Government's interest in granting general debates, will she consider giving time for a discussion of the wide-ranging needs of family businesses?

**Lucy Powell:** The hon. Lady will be aware that the debate on the Budget will continue today and next week. If she is asking about farming businesses and the inheritance tax changes—I think she is, tangentially—I will just repeat what I said to her colleagues earlier: this Government are committed to food security and our rural and farming communities, and that is why three quarters of those who currently receive the full relief will still get it after the changes. We are bringing about many other things that will help the farming community, including a settlement that will provide £5 billion over two years for farming and land management, which will help restore stability in the sector.

**Chris Webb** (Blackpool South) (Lab): May I start by wishing my wife and all those celebrating today a happy Diwali?

In Blackpool, we were promised a £300 million regeneration project—the biggest regeneration scheme in over a century—but unfortunately we have heard over the last few days and weeks that that is not going to happen. It is vital that such schemes happen in Blackpool, and many businesses and individuals have come to me since asking for a state-of-the-art stadium-arena, similar to the Co-op arena in my right hon. Friend's Manchester Central constituency. Will she allow a debate in Government time on how the Government can support local seaside towns like mine, with private business, to get the infrastructure they desperately need?

**Lucy Powell:** I am sorry to hear of the decision in my hon. Friend's constituency, but he will know that, unfortunately, many of the commitments made by the previous Government to support projects like the one he mentioned were commitments of fiction, because there was no money whatsoever allocated to them. This Government take supporting our communities incredibly seriously. That is why we have boosted local government funding, and why we are continuing our drive to devolution.

**Jim Allister** (North Antrim) (TUV): The Windsor Framework (Retail Movement Scheme: Plant and Animal Health) (Amendment etc.) Regulations 2024 have been laid before the House. They impose EU obligations on not just Northern Ireland but the whole United Kingdom. Could we have a debate in Government time on the back-door creep of EU regulations? The unelected House has already debated this matter; should not the elected House?

**Lucy Powell:** We have debated these matters at length over many years. I will look into the statutory instrument to which the hon. and learned Gentleman refers, but as he knows, we are keen to ensure that controversial statutory instruments are considered on the Floor of the House, for greater scrutiny.

**Irene Campbell** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us time to debate the awful situation of the SNP ferry fiasco, which impacts on the towns of Ardrossan and Brodick, and my constituency of North Ayrshire and Arran more widely? The Ardrossan to Brodick ferry route has been in place for around 190 years. Owing to SNP mismanagement and a lack of robust negotiation, this vital route is now in jeopardy. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating members of the Save Ardrossan Harbour group, who are fighting hard to save this crucial local service? The ferry situation in Scotland is extremely serious, and it is about time it was brought to the House.

**Lucy Powell:** I certainly congratulate my hon. Friend's constituents on the work they are doing to save this local service. She is absolutely right to say that the Scottish National party Government of Scotland have overseen huge mismanagement when it comes to the long-awaited ferry services. They are late and over budget, and they just add to the £5 billion of taxpayers' money that the Scottish Government have wasted on pet projects.

**Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): Further to the questions from my hon. Friends the Members for Rutland and Stamford (Alicia Kearns), and for Hinckley and Bosworth (Dr Evans), yesterday's Budget was a

[Greg Smith]

full-frontal financial attack on our farmers. The Leader of the House has declined to ensure a statement on the subject, but we have four more days of debate on the Budget. That means that there are eight opportunities for the Environment Secretary or the Minister with responsibility for farming to open or close debate on one of those days, so that MPs on both sides of the House can fully hold the Government to account on their plans for farming. Will the Leader of the House ensure that the Environment Secretary or Minister for farming opens or closes debate on one of those days?

**Lucy Powell:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, he can raise any matter relating to the Budget in any of those debates, and a Cabinet Minister will respond. Just as I took issue with his colleagues, I take issue with him for his characterisation of the issue. We are committed to supporting farming, and farming communities. We have a settlement that provides £5 billion over two years for farming, and we are prioritising the farm recovery fund. I am afraid that this stands in stark contrast to what the Conservatives did for farmers with their botched Brexit deal, the phasing out of farming payments and so on. It is no wonder that Labour won so many rural constituencies at the last election, and we will continue to support those constituencies going forward.

**James Naish** (Rushcliffe) (Lab): I have visited Cotgrave community garden in my constituency several times, and it is doing a fantastic job of addressing food insecurity, promoting nutrition education and enhancing mental wellbeing in our community. Does the Leader of the House agree that it is important that this House considers how such organisations are put on a secure financial footing, so that we can support the long-term sustainability of community-led initiatives?

**Lucy Powell:** I join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Cotgrave community garden in his constituency. As has been mentioned in business questions many times, including today, the role that community volunteers play in making our communities great places in which to live, work and raise a family is absolutely vital. The Chair of the Backbench Business Committee is still in his place; as I said earlier, this type of issue would make for a very good Backbench Business debate.

**John Cooper** (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): I am aghast to hear that it is scaremongering to talk about the damage being done to agriculture. I can tell the House that the howls of concern in Dumfries and Galloway are real. We really need to discuss this issue, because Britain cannot live by air-freighted mangetout alone. The Budget imperils food security in this country, and we must have action on that. It is incredible that the Environment Secretary seems so uncaring. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) asked, can we please have the Secretary of State in the House for the Budget debate?

**Lucy Powell:** The Environment Secretary will be here for questions in a couple of weeks' time, and he comes to the House regularly. I have to say, I find that some of the questions this morning are scaremongering. We have made it clear that three quarters of the farming

businesses that are entitled to the full relief will still get it after this Budget. We are talking about the top 25%, and there is not a cliff edge in any case. We are fully committed to farmers, the farming community and food security in this country—I certainly do not buy imported mangetout, as the hon. Gentleman may occasionally—and that is why the settlement announced yesterday provides £5 billion over two years for farming and land management, and why we have prioritised the farming recovery fund.

**Kirsteen Sullivan** (Bathgate and Linlithgow) (Lab/Co-op): Recently, we welcomed Restart a Heart Day to raise awareness of lifesaving skills. That same week, five boys from my constituency, including two from Blackburn United community sports club, discovered someone in an emergency situation, put them in the recovery position, called an ambulance and retrieved a defibrillator. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the boys on their swift action and clear thinking, and will she allocate Government time to debate vital first aid training in local communities?

**Lucy Powell:** I also pay tribute to those boys, who rushed towards danger, rather than turning away from the moment they faced. My hon. Friend raises an important point about first aid training and the now extensive use of defibrillators, which really are lifesaving.

**John Milne** (Horsham) (LD): I draw the House's attention to the neglected issue of water neutrality, which is often confused with nutrient neutrality, but which requires different solutions. For the last two years, the local planning authority in my constituency has faced the impossible task of obeying two entirely contradictory laws. One says that we have to build more than 900 houses a year, and the other says that we cannot build anything because of water neutrality considerations. The bizarre legal stand-off causes enormous difficulties. Will the Leader of the House find time to debate the issue of water neutrality, so that we can find a fair and rational solution for my community?

**Lucy Powell:** The hon. Member raises an important point, and I am sure that the House will debate these issues in the coming weeks. We are considering such matters in our forthcoming planning and infrastructure Bill, and as he knows, there are forthcoming pieces of water regulation, and he may want to raise that point during debate on those.

**Markus Campbell-Savours** (Penrith and Solway) (Lab): In 2019, the Keswick Flood Action Group set out how Thirlmere reservoir could be managed to greatly reduce the impact of major flooding, like that seen in the town during Storm Desmond. Will the Leader of the House make time to debate how water companies' infrastructure could be better used to prevent flooding in Penrith and Solway, and many other constituencies?

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend raises a matter that is important for his constituency. That is one reason why today we were pleased to announce next week's flood preparedness debate, in which I am sure he will want to discuss these issues. It is also why the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has been taking swift action on water reform to ensure that our water companies play their part.

**Clive Jones** (Wokingham) (LD): The Conservative party undercut farmers when they signed the UK-Australia trade deal, which allows for imports that use practices banned in the UK. The Environment Secretary promised that he would prevent farmers and the UK's environmental and welfare standards from being sold out. Will the Leader of the House bring her colleagues together to set out how they intend to review the Australia free trade agreement, and can there be a debate in Government time on this matter?

**Lucy Powell:** It seems that a number of issues for the Environment Secretary are being raised this morning; I will make sure that he is aware of them all, including the important point from the hon. Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones). He rightly points out that the farming community and farmers in this country were really let down by the previous Government as a result of the botched Brexit deal and other matters. This Government are working at pace to ensure that we put food security and the future of our farmers back on the front foot.

**Mr Mark Sowards** (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): I recently met business leaders at the excellent White Rose business park in my constituency. They told me that one of their key priorities as they expand is recruiting well trained, well skilled and well educated staff. We welcome their expansion. Will my right hon. Friend make Government time for a debate on the need to work with councils, mayors and, crucially, businesses to deliver a stronger, upskilled workforce?

**Lucy Powell:** I congratulate White Rose business park, in my hon. Friend's constituency, on its excellent work. This Government will ensure that we have a skilled workforce for the future. We are pursuing a range of measures, such as setting up Skills England, as announced in yesterday's Budget. There is more money for further education, which is vital, and we are reforming the apprenticeship levy. As he describes, devolving these areas to local councils and mayors will ensure that local skills provision is available for all.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Father Marcelo Pérez, a priest and prominent figure in Mexico's Chiapas state, was killed while travelling to his parish. Father Marcelo was deeply respected for his lifelong dedication to advocating for peace, justice and indigenous rights in a region heavily impacted by organised crime and violence. His loss has deeply shaken his community and underscores the dangers faced by those who challenge violence and defend human dignity in Mexico. Will the Leader of the House join me in condemning such violations of the freedom of religion or belief, and will she ask the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to raise this issue with its counterparts in Mexico?

**Lucy Powell:** The hon. Gentleman raises another important issue, as he does every single week, this time concerning the freedom of religion or belief in Mexico. I will miss him next week, when we are not here for business questions. He is a doughty campaigner on these matters, and I look forward to him being a regular attendee, and raising many similar issues, in the forthcoming Backbench Business debates.

**Andy MacNae** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Lab): Businesses and commuters in Rossendale and Darwen are hampered daily by seemingly never-ending disruptive roadworks. This is not just an annoyance; it is actively holding back growth in the constituency, with major employers considering relocation. Yesterday, I attended an excellent Westminster Hall debate on this subject and was pleased to see strong cross-party consensus on the need for action. Does my right hon. Friend agree that now is the time to properly address poorly planned and overrunning roadworks? Will she provide time for further debate, if needed?

**Lucy Powell:** As ever, my hon. Friend raises a topical matter, and I know that it frustrates many constituents and Members alike when roadworks are seemingly endless and not co-ordinated. In yesterday's Budget, the Government provided a huge boost to road maintenance budgets, which I hope will help. Additionally, we are consulting on proposals to increase penalties, and even apply charges, when works overrun.

**John Slinger** (Rugby) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Councillor Ish Mistry and everyone involved in the wonderful Diwali celebration on the streets of Rugby on Sunday? Our diverse community is strengthened by the council's community warden service, which does much enforcement and referral work in partnership with our police and our Rugby First business improvement district rangers. Will the Leader of the House consider a debate in Government time on the role of this vital ecosystem, which sits beneath policing and criminal justice in the public's consciousness?

**Lucy Powell:** I join my hon. Friend in congratulating all those involved in Rugby's recent Diwali celebrations. He is right to talk about the vital role of neighbourhood policing. We are taking forward our neighbourhood policing guarantee, because it is vital that people feel safe in their local community.

**Jake Richards** (Rother Valley) (Lab): Last week, I had the privilege of visiting Wales primary school in my constituency and meeting its year 6 class, who are making sure that their school is an eco-school. They are taking part in a number of initiatives in their community, such as litter picking and recycling, and they even told me off for not recycling sufficiently—I have taken steps to make up for that. Will the Leader of the House join me in praising the year 6 students at Wales primary school? Will there be time in the House to debate how we can encourage sustainability across our education sector?

**Lucy Powell:** As Members of Parliament, we can all agree that there is no better occasion than a good telling off by a year 6 class. He is right that COP29 starts in Baku very soon; the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero will update the House on the progress of COP29 as soon as he can.

**Sam Rushworth** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): International Men's Day, on Tuesday 19 November, celebrates the contributions made by men, and raises issues affecting men's health and wellbeing, and gender equality, which

[*Sam Rushworth*]

are important to men and boys in my constituency. Will the Leader of the House make Government time available to debate issues affecting boys and men?

**Lucy Powell:** International Men's Day is an important opportunity for us all to celebrate the contribution men make to our society. It might not be quite as much as the contribution of women—no, I am joking. Men make a very important contribution, and, as my hon. Friend says, the day highlights mental health issues. Suicide is still the biggest killer of men in this country, and we should all be very conscious of that. International Men's Day would make an excellent subject for a Backbench Business debate—the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee and I were discussing such debates only yesterday—so I encourage my hon. Friend to make an application to the Committee.

**Paul Davies** (Colne Valley) (Lab): This week, I had the pleasure of receiving a letter from Sycamore class of Slaithwaite Church of England junior and infant school. Inspired by Marcus Sedgwick's novel "Floodland", the students expressed their concerns about climate change with remarkable insight and passion. The children's genuine concern and thoughtful suggestions highlighted the urgency of addressing climate change. It was inspiring to see young minds so engaged and determined to make a difference. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the students of Slaithwaite Church of England junior and infant school on their excellent work? Will she encourage schools across the country to educate pupils about climate change and the actions needed to address it?

**Lucy Powell:** It sounds as if my hon. Friend also got a good going over by some pupils in his constituency—a good education for him, I am sure. I join him in congratulating the students of Slaithwaite Church of England junior and infant school on their work. Climate change education and action inspires the next generation, and we will continue to support it.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** The Chamber is filling up nicely for the last contribution. I call Lee Barron.

**Lee Barron** (Corby and East Northamptonshire) (Lab): I am proud to be the last man standing, Madam Deputy Speaker.

On 3 June 2024, the Environment Agency granted a permit for the Corby incineration plant, despite there having been no public consultation since its original permit was modified. We now know that incinerators are widely regarded as the dirtiest form of waste disposal. Does the Leader of the House agree that it is time for a debate to review the conditions under which such licences are issued and amended, especially in residential areas?

**Lucy Powell:** Concerns about local incinerators often come up at business questions, so a debate would be well attended, were my hon. Friend to apply for one. He is right to point out that operators of incinerators must use the best available technology to minimise emissions and meet strict emissions limits. Where that is not happening, he absolutely should be raising it with the Government.

# Ways and Means

## Budget Resolutions

### INCOME TAX (CHARGE)

*Debate resumed (Order, 30 October).*

*Question again proposed,*

That income tax is charged for the tax year 2025-26.

And it is declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

11.48 am

**Jeremy Hunt** (Godalming and Ash) (Con): It is a pleasure to open this day of the Budget debate with you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, for what will be my last contribution as shadow Chancellor. I am aware that that may be a relief to Members on the Government Benches, and possibly to those on the Opposition Benches as well.

Yesterday's Budget was the biggest tax-raising Budget in British history. It was a huge tax on business and takes our tax burden up to German levels for the first time. After the pandemic, the previous Government also put up taxes, but we started to bring them down, because higher tax leads to lower growth. Indeed, the Office for Budget Responsibility said that yesterday's £40 billion of tax rises would lead to lower pay, lower living standards, higher prices and more expensive mortgages. Without remorse and without hesitation, a triumphalist Government have ripped up the pre-election promises that they made in the biggest ever assault on our economic competitiveness since the 1970s.

Let us look at the promises cast aside so casually. The Chancellor said that she would not change the debt target, because she was "not going to fiddle the figures or make something different to get better results". Yesterday, she did exactly that. In May she said that Labour policy

"will be fully costed and fully funded. No ifs, no ands, no buts"—and no additional tax rises. A total of 30 times this year, she promised not to do exactly what she did yesterday. She even said that she wanted to bring the burden of tax down. Ordinary families, small businesses and working people believed her. Yesterday, they were betrayed.

It went further. When we said in the election that taxes would go up by £2,000 per household over four years, the Leader of the Opposition at the time accused the then Prime Minister of a deliberate lie. Three months on, they will go up not by £2,000 over four years, but by £2,000 every year. Paul Johnson called it a

"straightforward breach of a manifesto commitment".

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has today said:

"The continued pretence that these changes will not affect working people risks further undermining trust."

The OBR said that 76% of the impact of the national insurance rise would pass through to lower wages.

And because the Government planned this all along, we now know why they rushed so fast to concoct the fiction of a black hole—something that was not corroborated by the OBR yesterday. It was cover not just to raise national insurance, but to impose countless other tax rises on working people: capital gains tax up;

energy taxes up; stamp duty up; and taxes on family farms up—something we will oppose, for the sake of farmers up and down the country.

Working people whose wages the Chancellor promised to protect will see them go down; businesses whose profits fund new investment will see them raided; markets to which she promised stability are absorbing the biggest tax-and-spend Budget in a generation; and all of us on the outside are left wondering which is worse, the damage to the economy or the damage to trust.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): There is not one person on the Opposition Benches who is not concerned about the inheritance tax changes. If I am honest, I do not think there is one Member on the Government Benches who represents a farming community and is not also worried. The measure has been universally condemned by all the farmers I have spoken to, and I live in a farming community. The National Farmers Union, the Ulster Farmers Union and others are up in arms about this inheritance tax. The sum of £1 million draws everybody into that scheme, and because of that, we must vote against it. I say to those on the Government Benches: guys, you have got it wrong, and this time you will be condemned. When it comes to election time, the people who you have hurt will remember.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Please stop using "you", Mr Shannon.

**Jeremy Hunt:** I thank my hon. Friend—I say "my hon. Friend" because he is a great friend to us—for what he has said and I could not agree with him more. When we talk about stability, anybody who has run a business knows that the most stable businesses in the country are family businesses that are passed from generation to generation. This is not just about farms, but about any small businesses that are passed down through the generations. This is a hammer blow to their plans to invest for the future.

I wish to move on, because the main argument that the Government make—I am sure that we will hear this from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—is that all this is necessary to improve public services. We on the Conservative Benches want to say, right up front, that it is absolutely right to prioritise public services. As Health Secretary, I negotiated an increase in the NHS budget of £20 billion a year, and, in this year's Budget, I increased it by a further £6 billion. Many times I said as Chancellor that I wanted to avoid austerity cuts to public services. We would have done so this time, not by using tax rises that harm working families and businesses, but by taking difficult decisions on welfare reform and productivity—decisions that were ducked yesterday.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (North Cotswolds) (Con): May I suggest that the difference between my right hon. Friend's Budget and this one is that, although he gave considerable extra increases to the national health service, he coupled them with a need to increase productivity? There was no word in yesterday's Budget about increasing productivity in the health service.

**Jeremy Hunt:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, but there was an even more basic difference between our Budget earlier this year and this one: as a result of

[Jeremy Hunt]

measures in our Budget, the growth rate went up, whereas as a result of measures in Labour's Budget, the growth rate went down.

Reducing the number of working-age people claiming health-related benefits back to pre-pandemic levels would save £34 billion a year. It would bring more people into the workforce and improve the wellbeing of the individuals concerned, but welfare reform was dropped from the King's Speech, and yesterday's Budget saw the welfare bill rise by an average of £13 billion a year. According to the OBR, increasing public sector productivity—another area that we did not hear much about—to pre-pandemic levels would raise £20 billion a year. We heard some warm words about that, but delivering it requires difficult negotiations with the unions.

That was too difficult for the Government, who cancelled plans to reduce the civil service to pre-pandemic levels, increased the salaries of train drivers by £10,000, and gave junior doctors a 22% pay rise—all without asking for a single productivity improvement in return. It was no strings for the unions, but no help for 2.5 million pensioners in poverty. The Government should be ashamed. Picking the pockets of businesses, which do not vote, is the easy path, but when it damages economic growth, the result is less money for the NHS, less money for schools and less money for the armed forces, which is why, in the end, Labour Governments always run out of money.

**Graeme Downie** (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): The right hon. Member was keen to quote the IFS earlier. Does he also agree with the IFS that “it was not credible for Jeremy Hunt to claim that planned departmental spending limits would hold” and there was “no world in which 2 per cent rises would have happened and been sustained”?

**Torsten Bell** (Swansea West) (Lab): Hear, hear.

**Jeremy Hunt:** I always listen to the IFS, and indeed to the Resolution Foundation, very carefully. I think that the IFS was right—[*Interruption.*] Let me answer the point, if I may. The IFS was right to say that it would be very challenging to hold to 1% spending assumptions, but in the Budget earlier this year I explained exactly how we would do that. I asked the NHS, “How are we going to improve efficiency so that we can live within tight spending limits?” The NHS said, “We need to overhaul the IT systems.” We gave the NHS £3.5 billion to do so, and in return it was able to deliver 2% productivity savings.

**Graeme Downie** indicated dissent.

**Jeremy Hunt:** The hon. Member shakes his head, but yesterday the Chancellor said that she was going to roll that out to the whole of the public sector. I think that it is possible to do so; my concern is that doing so involves difficult decisions, and the track record of this Government is that when those decisions involve a conversation with the unions, they run a mile.

The final spurious claim from the Chancellor was that yesterday's draconian measures were necessary because she had received the worst economic inheritance since world war two. Not a single independent economist supports

that claim, and it is not hard to see why. Inflation is at 1.7%, around half what it was in 2010. Unemployment is at 4%, nearly half the 2010 level. If the public finances were in the same state today that they were in back in 2010, the deficit would now be £160 billion higher, which is the entire budget of the NHS. Instead, we left behind a deficit that had been halved, and was lower than that of France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States.

**Luke Murphy** (Basingstoke) (Lab): If the last Government's attempts at leveraging investment into the economy were so successful, why in 2022 was the UK 28th out of 31 OECD countries for business investment? The truth is that the last Government failed to reform the economy to lever in that investment to pay for the growth in our public services.

**Jeremy Hunt:** Let me tell the hon. Gentleman exactly what happened to business investment under the last Government. Since 2010, we attracted more foreign greenfield direct investment than not just anywhere in Europe, but anywhere in the world apart from the United States and China. That was foreigners voting with their dollars as to where they wanted to invest in the world, and they said, “Outside the United States and China, there is nowhere that we want to invest more than the United Kingdom.” Compare that with what the OBR said about yesterday's Budget: business investment will not just fall, but fall by even more than the amount of the extra investment caused by public investment going up.

**Luke Murphy:** Does the right hon. Gentleman deny that business investment was the lowest in the G7 under his Government? If the Government were so successful, does he also deny that in that respect the UK was 28th out of the 31 OECD countries?

**Jeremy Hunt:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that for decades we have had lower business investment in the UK economy than our peers. That was why, in the autumn statement a year ago, I introduced full expensing, which was the big business tax request, to make it more attractive to invest in new factories, capital, machinery, here than anywhere else in the OECD, and that was widely welcomed.

The other part of our legacy—the so-called worst inheritance since the second world war—was the fastest-growing economy in the G7, and one that the IMF said would grow faster than Italy, France, Germany or Japan over the next five years. The Government probably thought it was a clever political trick to rubbish their inheritance, but trash-talking the British economy has real-world consequences. We see the sharpest decline in consumer confidence since the beginning of the pandemic. Lloyds bank, KPMG and the Institute of Directors all saying that business confidence has plummeted. The former chief economist of the Bank of England says that the Chancellor has generated “fear and foreboding” and uncertainty among consumers, among business, and among investors in UK plc. And we see higher bond yields, leading to higher debt interest payments. Careless talk costs jobs and money, and this Government have been careless.

What every economist does, however, agree is that if we are to increase our living standards to German or American levels we need higher productivity, and that

means more investment. But according to the OBR, yesterday's measures will mean lower investment overall. Higher public investment is more than offset by lower business investment because of huge tax increases. Lloyds bank said that the increase in employers' national insurance is a "handbrake" on investment. UK Hospitality said it is a "tax on jobs" and

"makes it harder to employ people and to take a risk on recruitment and expansion."

The Federation of Small Businesses says it will shrink small business employment, and the Institute of Directors has likened it to the poll tax.

**Max Wilkinson** (Cheltenham) (LD): The shadow Chancellor mentioned hospitality. Overnight I had discussions with the local hospitality industry in Cheltenham. They had two pieces of feedback. The first was that they were very worried about some of yesterday's announcements on reliefs and national insurance, and the second was that the Budget was not as bad as the Liz Truss Budget. I wonder whether he preferred yesterday's Budget or the Liz Truss one.

**Jeremy Hunt:** I actually liked neither. I was the person who reversed the decisions made in the mini-Budget, but I will say this: at least Liz Truss wanted to grow the economy and said so explicitly. What we had yesterday is a Budget where the Government's official forecaster said the impact would be lower growth, fewer jobs and lower investment.

We were promised the most pro-growth Government in history, but in just 17 weeks we have ended up with German taxes and French labour laws, higher taxes, higher mortgages, less investment, lower wages, lower living standards and lower growth, less money for public services on which we all depend, and less money in the pockets of working people—same old Labour, same old spin. It didn't end well before and it won't end well this time, either.

12.4 pm

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Pat McFadden):** The right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Jeremy Hunt) has confirmed that this is his last appearance at the Dispatch Box, at least in his current guise, so I begin by thanking him for his service to government and to the country. He and I have something in common: we both inherited an awful mess from our predecessors. He was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer as the repair man—the adult in the room—and was meant to sort things out after the disaster left by his predecessor. He was supposed to be the antidote to Liz Truss, but in recent days, he has become an ally of Liz Truss, united with her in attacking the OBR. He was brought in to praise the economic institutions, but he has ended up condemning them. However, he cannot hide from the verdict: the OBR has confirmed that the previous Government hid billions of pounds of pressures that they knew about, and the Treasury has given us a full picture of precisely what those pressures added up to.

**Alicia Kearns** (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman states that a full breakdown was provided by the Treasury yesterday, but that is just not true. In fact, the chair of the OBR said on "Sky News" last night:

"Nothing in our review was a legitimisation of that £22 billion"

claim. That was him making it very clear that the OBR does not support and has not endorsed the claim in the Treasury report. Will the right hon. Gentleman now confirm, with a simple yes or no, that the OBR does not legitimise that claim?

**Pat McFadden:** Let me read what the OBR has said:

"The Treasury did not share information with the OBR about the large pressures on RDEL, about the unusual extent of commitments against the reserve... had this information been made available, a materially different judgement... would have been reached."

**Jeremy Hunt:** Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman ought to read the next paragraph, in which the OBR says that it is "not possible to judge" how much those pressures would have been offset by savings elsewhere, which demonstrates that they were within the range of the normal cost reductions that a Chief Secretary to the Treasury would make ahead of any Budget.

**Pat McFadden:** The right hon. Gentleman suggests that things got better after February. They did not; they got worse, and that is how we got to £22 billion. This is not just a verdict about what happened but an indictment of the Conservative party's final period in office. The truth is that, under his watch, the Treasury had stopped doing the basic job of controlling expenditure.

Announcements were made with no money set aside, the asylum and hotel bill was funded by emptying the country's reserves within the first few months of the financial year, hospital building programmes were announced without the necessary funds set aside to pay for them, a pay award sat on a Secretary of State's desk while they looked the other way, and compensation schemes were announced without the full funds being set aside to pay for them. That was an irresponsible dereliction of duty that has led to us picking up the pieces and to the right hon. Gentleman attacking the independent watchdog that was set up by his own party. Even his predecessor, the former Member for Spelthorne, admitted this morning that Labour is clearing up the Tory mess. If Conservative Members are more out of touch with reality than the former Member for Spelthorne, let me tell them that that is not a good place to be.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the IFS, which said this morning that the Chancellor

"is not wrong to stress that she got a hospital pass on the public finances."

**Alicia Kearns:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

**Pat McFadden:** I have given way once.

**Alicia Kearns:** I thank him for giving way—oh.

**Pat McFadden:** No, I am not giving way.

The Conservatives talk about their golden legacy, and we heard the former Chancellor read out some of his greatest hits. Who are they kidding? The last Parliament was the worst on record for living standards, with British families worse off than their French and German counterparts. His Government had the second lowest growth in the G7 since the pandemic and the highest inflation in the G7 since the pandemic. They left a

[Pat McFadden]

prison system overflowing and just days away from collapse, and rather than take responsibility for it, they cut and ran and called an early election.

I have to give the previous Government credit: some things did grow on their watch, such as hospital waiting lists, housing waiting lists, shoplifting, insecure work and the decline of our high streets. That is their record, and it falls to us to fix it and start to rebuild Britain, so there is no point in coming to this Chamber and pretending that people are making it all up.

The former Chancellor talks about business. His party stuffed business—his colleague, the former Prime Minister, said “eff business”, and then the Conservatives carried out the policy. Under them, we had the lowest business investment in the G7. Why? Because of constant chaos in their Governments, meaning that business did not know who would be leading them from one year to the next; because they caved in to their Back Benchers and blocked anything substantial from being built; and because businesses could not hire the workers they needed with so many people on the sick.

This could have been a Budget where we just muddled through—patched up some mistakes made by the Conservative party and hoped something would turn up—but that is not good enough. We have had that time and again. In fact, we have had 14 years of it—long enough to show that that approach is not going to work. The country voted for change, and this was a Budget to deliver change. It is not a time for more of the same; it is a time to choose. We did not duck the challenge or look the other way; we confronted the challenge, because that is what the country needs. This is the moment when the country turns a corner and sets out a proper plan for the years to come.

We did make tax changes in this Budget, which is never an easy thing to do. That was because the first thing we had to do was fix the foundations and put the public finances on a sound footing. With this Budget, we say how we will pay for what we will do. The first fiscal rule announced by the Chancellor is to fund day-to-day spending from the revenue that we raise, a rule that the OBR judges will be met two years early.

The IMF, to which the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash referred, has today welcomed

“the Budget’s focus on boosting growth through a needed increase in public investment while addressing urgent pressures on public services”,

so let me turn to those public services. Secondly, there will be more NHS appointments to get waiting lists and times down; more technology to improve productivity; more prevention to stop people falling ill in the first place; new surgical hubs and diagnostic centres; a hospital-building programme brought from fiction to reality, this time founded on more than hot air; new schools to help children learn; more teachers to bring out the best in every child; and more investment in further education to give people the skills they need. It is investment and reform together—not just more money into the same system, but changing the system for a new age, with productivity targets alongside the extra money.

The right hon. Gentleman also talked about welfare spending, but the Conservatives had plenty of time to sort out welfare spending. Their legacy is almost 3 million

people out of work because of long-term sickness. The truth is that they did not have a plan, but they do have a record, and again, it falls to us to sort that record out. We will take tough action on welfare fraud, and we will not give up on those who can work and make a contribution, because we understand that when the sick can get treated and when every child of every background has the best chance to learn, that is not just good for them and their families but for the economy as a whole.

Thirdly, this Budget put in place help with the cost of living for millions: a rising minimum wage with extra help for young workers, fuel duty frozen, carers allowed to earn more, the triple lock protected, the household support fund extended to help the poorest, and lower deductions from universal credit. Those are the choices that we made—real help for millions of people.

Finally, we reject the path of decline for investment that the Conservatives were planning. They wanted to cut public investment by a third. That was the right hon. Gentleman’s plan—to once again cut back on the house building, schools, hospitals and transport projects that the country needs. That is a path of decline that has been chosen too often in the past. The Tories do not yet have a leader, and the only policy to come out of their leadership contest so far is to cut maternity pay, but on the question of investment, they do have a position. Budgets are about choices, and yesterday they chose: the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak) railed against our new investment rule, and more Conservative Members have spoken out since. What does that mean their position is? New money for housing—opposed. New money for schools—opposed. New money for potholes—opposed. New money for research—opposed. Investment in the future itself—opposed by the Conservative party. I understand the perils of opposition. We have had long enough experience of it, but if the Conservatives really want to run around the country opposing every new investment over the coming four or five years, be our guests.

Yes, this Budget was a big choice, and in opposing the investments within it, the Conservatives have made a big choice too. We will remind them of it, project after project, year after year. They wanted to lock us into the world that voters rejected just four short months ago.

**Jake Richards** (Rother Valley) (Lab): My right hon. Friend has mentioned the policies, or lack thereof, that have come out of the Tory leadership contest. Unfortunately, I spent an evening watching the GB News debate between the Tory leadership contenders, and the one policy that one of the contenders said she would put in place on day one as Prime Minister was a tax cut for private schools. That is the priority of the modern Conservative party: opposing the investment in this Budget while offering tax cuts for the very richest.

**Pat McFadden:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, although I have to say that his television viewing choices are a little bit different from mine. With regard to education, we have always said that we support aspiration for all children in every type of school.

Our growth plans are about far more than this Budget. They are about planning reform to get Britain building, a challenge that was ducked by the Conservative party year after year. They are about more clean energy for

energy security. They are about private investment, with £63 billion of investment announced at our investment summit just a few weeks ago—investors are finally appreciating the stability that has come to the country after the chaos wrought by the Conservative party—and they are about reform of business rates to support our neglected high streets.

This is a big moment for the country. In July, the public did not vote to carry on as we are—they did not vote to continue with the plans of the Conservative party. They voted for change, and this is a Budget for change: not just change in policy, but facing up to the reality of what the Conservative party left behind. It is a Budget to stabilise the public finances, to help people with the cost of living, to begin to turn our public services around, and to start to rebuild Britain. It is a choice between investment and decline—a turning of the page after 14 years. It is a Budget that launches a new chapter for Britain, and we will be proud to vote for it in the Lobby next week.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

12.19 pm

**Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD):** It is a pleasure to speak in this debate in response to the first ever Budget delivered by a female Chancellor. This Government have inherited a mess, and we know that the cause of that mess is the legacy of reckless economic mismanagement left behind by the previous Government.

The Liberal Democrats are glad that the Chancellor has listened to our calls for investment and support for the NHS to start repairing all the damage done to local health services by the Conservatives. We will continue to stand up for our constituents, and press the Government to act with urgency and to provide the support to public services that is so desperately needed. The NHS has been stretched to its limits after years of Conservative neglect, and the Liberal Democrats have been tirelessly campaigning for an emergency health and social care budget to get it back on its feet. We therefore welcome yesterday's announcements. However, we need to see outcomes, including people being able to see a GP within 7 days, cancer treatment targets being met and people having a dentist appointment when they need one. We will hold the Government to account for delivering on these issues.

Millions of people have a long-term health condition that makes them too ill to work and millions more are stuck on NHS waiting lists. Many others cannot leave hospital because there is no care provision. The Liberal Democrats have always understood that we cannot have a thriving economy and strong public finances until we fix the crisis in health and social care, so we welcome some of the steps that the Government announced in this direction yesterday. The Liberal Democrats have campaigned on improving support for carers. While I am glad that the Government's review will look again at getting rid of the cliff edge for carer's allowance and the earnings limit, I hope that the Chancellor and her colleagues will consider a broader review to give family carers the support they deserve. We will hold them to account for ensuring that this new funding is delivered for patients and carers, including through extra GP and hospital appointments.

I also welcome the promise made by the Chancellor yesterday of full compensation for the victims of both the contaminated blood scandal and the Horizon scandal, and I hope that that can be delivered quickly to bring the victims closer to the justice they deserve. The previous Conservative Government yet again showed themselves to be totally shameless with the revelation that, while they promised to compensate the victims of the hideous infected blood scandal, they entirely neglected to set aside the funds to actually pay for them. It is essential that there is transparency in Government spending, and we are glad that the Government are strengthening the powers of independent bodies, such as the OBR, to ensure that taxpayers receive value for money.

We were glad that, during the Chancellor's Budget, she committed to investing to modernise the systems of His Majesty's Revenue and Customs using the very best technology, and we are glad that she has committed to recruiting additional HMRC compliance and debt staff. Investing in HMRC reduces the risk to businesses and individuals in navigating the bureaucratic and often complex processes associated with this service. I have heard from businesses in my constituency of the risks they face by not being able to directly speak to someone at HMRC. Strengthening these services with greater resources should benefit not only businesses, but all those required to complete self-assessment. Greater resources will protect citizens from unfair charges, including the loan charge, and allow people to access clear advice and support, making our tax system more efficient.

While I am pleased to support many of the announcements made by the Chancellor yesterday, I am concerned by her decision to raise employer's national insurance contributions. I fear that this will be deeply damaging to many already struggling small businesses and care providers, so we urge the Government to at least consider exempting social care from the employer's national insurance tax rise. The Chancellor has provided extra funding for the NHS and other public sector organisations to cover the cost of the tax rise. However, the vast majority of care providers are in the private sector, so will not benefit from this help.

Small businesses are the beating heart of our local economies. For years under the last Conservative Administration, these businesses have struggled, having to carry the burden of rising energy prices, interest rates and the red tape of the Conservative's Brexit deal. I urge the Government to go further than the announcements made yesterday on business rates by fundamentally overhauling the broken business rates system, which is destroying our high streets and town centres.

The Liberal Democrats believe that there are much fairer ways of raising revenue. Our manifesto set out our calls for a fairer tax system, including raising money by reversing the Conservatives' tax cuts for the big banks, or by asking the social media giants to pay a bit more. We do not believe that it is right or fair for the Government to instead increase the burden on small and medium-sized businesses, which are the engines of our economy and which are already struggling under the unfair tax system set out by the last Conservative Government.

We welcome yesterday's news of increased funding for schools. Supporting children and young people must be central to any Government policy. After schools were left to crumble by the last Government, we are

[Sarah Olney]

glad to see an increased investment in education. However, the Liberal Democrats oppose ending the VAT exemption for independent schools. We do not support taxing education, and we believe parents should have a choice about how they educate their children.

We were disappointed that at no point in the Chancellor's Budget was there a mention of Europe. The Government cannot indefinitely ignore the damage that the Conservative's shambolic Brexit deal continues to have on our economy.

**Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): Do you not think the fact that you are supporting all the spending commitments but none of the tax rises is the reason that the Lib Dems will never be in government—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Order. Sit down, please. The hon. Gentleman said “you” twice.

**Chris Vince** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I am not going to allow the hon. Gentleman to continue.

**Sarah Olney:** I am glad the hon. Gentleman has raised that point. I refer him to our general election manifesto in which, as I have already said, we set out a range of tax-raising measures, including reversing the Conservatives' tax cuts on big banks and taxing the social media giants. There are plenty of ways that the Government could have raised taxes more fairly than by placing additional burden on small businesses, which will be the engine of economic growth.

Brexit is another reason why our economy is not growing in the way it should. I urge the Government to acknowledge the seriousness of yesterday's report from the OBR outlining the continual damage that Brexit red tape causes UK businesses, and the OBR finding that weak growth of trading, exacerbated by Brexit, will reduce the overall trade intensity of the UK economy by 15% in the long term. We understand that rebuilding our relationship with Europe is a gradual process. However, we are disappointed that the Government have ruled out joining the single market in the future, even when relationships improve. We urge them to consider the breadth of benefits that a strengthened trading relationship with Europe would bring. The Liberal Democrats want to forge a new partnership with our European neighbours—built on co-operation, not confrontation—and to move to a new comprehensive agreement.

**Wendy Chamberlain** (North East Fife) (LD): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although the new Government say they want to reset their relationship with Europe, if the No. 1 thing on the European Union's mind is a youth mobility scheme that the Government are ruling out, they are not going to get very far?

**Sarah Olney:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point, and she is absolutely right. The first thing we should be doing is negotiating a youth mobility scheme. We owe it to our young people, who are struggling more than most in the current economic environment.

The mismanagement of our economy by the outgoing Conservative Government has left deep challenges, and we understand that undoing that damage will not be easy. Nevertheless, it is not right for the consequences of these decisions and for this burden to be carried by some of the most vulnerable in our society. In July, I urged the Chancellor to remove the two-child limit on social security payments in her first Budget, and we are disappointed that this did not happen. No child should grow up without adequate food, a warm home or security for their future. Currently, 1.6 million children are affected by the two-child benefit cap. Parents subject to these limitations have less available income for childcare costs, and therefore experience barriers to employment. The Liberal Democrats believe that removing this cap is the most cost-effective way of immediately lifting children out of poverty and getting more parents back into the workforce.

I and my Liberal Democrat colleagues have also listened to our constituents and heard from countless pensioners who are worried about how they will afford their energy bills this winter. Since the cut to the winter fuel payments was announced, I have been inundated with expressions of local people's disappointment at this decision. We will continue to urge the Government to give their full support to measures to boost the uptake of pension credit, and to ensure that all those eligible for pension credit claim both the benefit itself and the winter fuel payments.

For years, the previous Government failed to keep our communities safe from crime. It is vital that the new Government urgently restore the proper community policing that local people deserve. I ask the Government to clarify how and when the Chancellor will fund the thousands of new neighbourhood officers that her Government have promised. The Metropolitan Police Service has drawn on its financial reserves, slashed spending and sold off assets. During the election, our constituencies were promised more community police officers, but the Met has already made cuts and savings of over £1 billion, and next year it is facing a funding gap of over £450 million.

The Liberal Democrats are pleased to see the Chancellor's goody bag of infrastructure projects, yet I personally was disappointed that this did not extend to funding for Hammersmith bridge. Some 22,000 vehicles a day used to cross the bridge, and those cars are now causing gridlocked traffic throughout my constituency in Mortlake, East Sheen and Barnes. It will cost £250 million to fix Hammersmith bridge, a sum no local authority can afford to pay, so I hope the Government will consider what more they can do to assist with the bridge's reopening.

We all agree that we need economic growth and a stable economy after the chaos caused by the last Government. We know that this dire economic situation requires tough decisions. I welcome many of the steps that the Chancellor announced yesterday, but the Government must ensure that this does not come at the expense of the most vulnerable. I ask the Government to set out a timeline for the delivery of their proposals for investment, and I urge them to act with the urgency required to ensure that people can access the services they need when they need them. The cost of living crisis will not be solved by hitting families, pensioners, family farms and struggling small businesses, and our economy will not grow strongly again unless we repair our broken relationship with Europe.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I call Tom Collins to make his maiden speech.

12.29 pm

**Tom Collins (Worcester) (Lab):** As a boy, I remember walking to the shops with my mum and passing our nearest pub. Its name, the Lord Protector, confused me at the time, and I later learned that I share a home town with one Oliver Cromwell, so perhaps I should feel at home in this place. Having said that, I confess that the nearest pub to my first family home was The Cavalier. That is because I represent, and am proud to call my home, the faithful city of Worcester. Famous among historians as the site of both the first and final armed conflicts of the English civil war, Worcester is seen by many as the birthplace of modern parliamentary democracy, and that is fitting for our city.

Nestled on the great River Severn and in the shelter of the ancient Malvern hills, Worcester is one of England's best kept secrets. Rooted in the beauty of nature, and richly decorated by a long and varied history, Worcester is a city deeply informed by the past, and with a record of deeply informing the future. Throughout its history, it has continuously expressed creativity, enterprise and innovation, and through the stirring music of Elgar, the creation of the world's first combined hydroelectric power station, and even the establishment of the British Medical Association, the people of Worcester have been shaping the future of the world for millennia. We are home to *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, the oldest newspaper still in print, and of course we manufacture Lea & Perrins's famous Worcestershire sauce.

Having given a flavour of our city, I pay tribute to my immediate predecessor in this place, Robin Walker. Wherever I go, be it in this place or in my constituency, people consistently speak well of Robin, who won the affection of many with whom he worked. He worked with passion and dedication to improve education, and for that I offer my sincere thanks, and that of many others.

Worcester is home to many small and independent businesses that contribute hugely to our distinctive culture—during the election, I visited Spin the Black Circle and Script Haven, to give just two examples—as well as to some larger companies that, in the same spirit, are expressing our nation's creativity and shaping its future. I have been privileged to work with teams of talented people at Worcester Bosch, inventing the technologies of the future to grow and decarbonise our economy. If any Member would appreciate an in-depth discussion on heat pumps or hydrogen, I am always happy to indulge, being an enthusiastic engineer by background.

It is my belief that releasing innovation by investing in the talent, passion and skills of our emerging leaders, creators and problem solvers is key—key to our mission for growth, which is the guiding light of this Budget, and key to decarbonising our economy through industrial renewal, rebuilding our NHS, and putting people at the heart of all we do. Today, we are doing the vital work of fixing the foundations, because this kind of history-writing ambition is exactly what this place is for.

Worcester, and its incredible community of dedicated and talented people, is ready to deliver an exciting vision for the future, with our schools, colleges, and the Hive—one of the largest children's libraries in the

UK—ready to grow the next generation. The Budget's commitment to taking the first steps towards the renewal of our schools, and especially its provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities, will be very welcome in Worcestershire.

With the University of Worcester continuing our heritage through teacher training, Worcester Business School and Three Counties Medical School, where prospective Prime Ministers can reliably capture a good selfie, as well as a wealth of innovative businesses and creatives in the digital space, including the Kiln, now hosting BetaDen, our community has the vision for people and nature to flourish. It is led by local people such as Worcester Environmental Group, our cathedral's eco-group, and projects such as Bramblewood. It is a hub of culture, with arts at the Swan theatre, the Scala project and the Arches, and has a growing track record in disability sports, historic world-class cricket at New Road, our fantastic city football clubs, and hopefully soon the return of professional rugby with the Warriors. We are also very good in a tug of war!

Informed by the past and informing the future, Worcester has taught me that the key is to put people first, dream big, and unleash the creativity of diverse teams to shape the future. I came to politics with a passion to tackle climate change, see an end to modern slavery, and put leadership and vision back at the heart of politics. Let us remember that throughout the long history of this place, we, like Worcester, have never lingered on the past. As the Budget empowers us to do, let us continue always to fix our gaze with ambition, clarity, and focus on the creation of a bright and prosperous future.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Well done. Your family will be very proud indeed.

12.35 pm

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (North Cotswolds) (Con):** May I start by paying a huge tribute to the hon. Member for Worcester (Tom Collins) for his maiden speech? It was clear, and he paid a sincere tribute to his predecessor, for whom we all have a great deal of affection. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have a great future in this place, and I look forward to hearing more speeches from him.

I agree with the final remark made by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster: this Budget marks a new chapter in the economic performance of this country, it is true, but I suspect that his predictions and mine, which I will make clear in my speech, are rather different. Starting on the plus side, there are measures in the Budget that we should welcome. My constituents who live in rural areas will be particularly pleased that fuel duty is to be frozen for another year, because often they have very little choice in how to get to work; they must do so by car. As I said in an intervention yesterday, I welcome certain Government contingencies, such as on the infected blood and Horizon scandals, that have now been funded. The onus is very much on the new Government to ensure that the people affected are paid as quickly as possible, even if only with an interim payment, so that they can start, at long last, to rebuild their life. Spending on special educational needs in Gloucestershire is a particular problem, so increased funding will be welcomed by parents whose children need help in that area.

[*Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown*]

The Public Accounts Committee held several sessions in the last Parliament on rebuilding schools and hospitals, particularly those affected by asbestos and reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, commonly known as RAAC. We also looked at the huge project of restoration and renewal in this House. If the Government gets those investment projects under way, I will welcome it, but the PAC will scrutinise them to see how we can get value for money.

Contrary to what was said in leaks to the press before the Budget, the pensions industry appears to have been largely untouched in the Budget—perhaps Ministers will confirm that when they wind up the debate—and the trick now is to encourage large pension funds to invest in UK infrastructure. We did not hear anything about that in the Budget yesterday, but I know that the Government are thinking about it.

As predicted, we have a higher fiscal burden in this country under this Labour Government than ever in our history. The Office for Budget Responsibility could not find the fabled £22 billion black hole; instead, it found £9.5 billion associated with deteriorating circumstances, and that will happen to any Government in any fiscal year; £9.5 billion is equivalent to some of the public sector pay increases that we have seen, particular to highly paid train drivers.

The Chancellor has increased taxes and borrowing by a staggering £40 billion each—the largest increase in any Budget for 30 years. The Conservatives left office with low inflation, high employment, particularly for younger people, and the fastest growing economy in the G7. In stark contrast, in this Budget the Chancellor has put up national insurance, and we have inheritance tax up, capital gains tax up, mortgages up, stamp duty up, employment costs up, and business confidence down. The OBR has downgraded our GDP growth, based on the Budget, in every year of the next five-year forecast. That will affect everybody in this country; they will continue to see their living standards fall as a result.

There are lots of topics that I would like to cover, but I have chosen to cover those that will affect my constituents most adversely. First is national debt. UK national debt is £2.5 trillion, which is not far off 100% of GDP, and it is growing at a staggering rate of almost £16 million an hour, or £400 million a day. The interest for servicing the debt has now reached more than £100 billion, which is equivalent to the budget of the fifth largest Department, and it is completely dead money. As a result of the Budget, the debt will rise even further, by £50 billion, involving even higher servicing costs, which will result in higher taxes to pay for it in future years.

On a really important point, the OBR has forecast that national debt will triple over the next 50 years. That is completely unsustainable and should be a real wake-up call to the fact that we have to correct that dire structural problem. But the Budget has made the problem far worse. We cannot just change the rules to make the results sound better. Interest rates, including mortgages, will be higher for longer, and our children and grandchildren will now be saddled with the debt, which they will have to repay, for longer.

**Alex Ballinger** (Halesowen) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his recent appointment as Chair of the Public Accounts Committee. Would he like to apologise

for the £22 billion black hole that the previous Government left behind, and the contribution that made to the awful debt situation that the Government inherited?

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments about my election, and the PAC looks forward to scrutinising all Government expenditure carefully. He has fallen into the same trap as everybody else. Unfortunately, the OBR said yesterday that it could not find the £22 billion black hole. I do not have the exact quote, but the Government were advised, “When in a black hole, stop digging.” I suggest gently to Labour Members that they stop digging, because it could not be found.

The Chancellor announced that she expects national insurance contributions to rise by a staggering £25 billion, although she promised in the election that they would not. During the election, she said that the measures would not be a tax on working people; clearly she believes that entrepreneurs, who spend their time, energy and talent forming new business, are different. They will be heavily taxed, and changing the employment rules will make it more difficult to employ extra people. A 15% national insurance tax and a savage cut to the threshold, down from £9,100 to £5,000, will harm any business in my constituency employing more than four people. It could be the difference between a business growing and providing more jobs and a business not surviving.

We must all remember that the private sector, and individuals who work hard and put their livelihoods on the line, take financial risks to boost productivity and provide the growth the country needs, and they must be nurtured if they are to succeed. Small businesses account for more than 90% of all businesses.

**Graeme Downie** (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** The hon. Gentleman can have a try, too.

**Graeme Downie:** I ran a small business for at least 10 years. Does the hon. Gentleman welcome the increase in the Budget to the allowance on national insurance from £5,000 to £10,500, which will protect small businesses and help them grow?

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I have run a business for a much longer time than that. There are many measures in the Budget that will be very deleterious, especially for the smallest businesses, and we will have to wait and see how they turn out.

The Budget will have serious implications for farmers and rural communities in my constituency. I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, as a farmer. I am incredibly disappointed that from 2026, agricultural property relief and business property relief will apply only to the first £1 million of assets. That will worry many in my farming community and those in many other constituencies. It will result in fewer farms to rent.

Equally damaging will be the cap on the amount that can be transferred to spouses for inheritance tax purposes. The purpose of that tax relief was to ensure that working farms that provide our food will not have to be split up after the death of a family member. Very few farms are

valued under £1 million—basically only those of less than 100 acres are—and the rest will face a 20% tax. That will lead to the loss of jobs and livelihoods in the North Cotswolds and elsewhere. It will change the fabric of our countryside permanently. The structure and productivity of agriculture will change as more and more farms are split up and sold off as a result of this measure.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): I accept that the hon. Gentleman has great experience in farming, but did he read the analysis by Professor Andy Summers of the London School of Economics, which shows that the £1 million relief is on top of the £1 million couples allowance? The benchmark is really £200 million farms, and the average estate value is lower, so only about 200 estates will be affected a year. In this case, only a small number of UK farmers will be affected, and it is not the armageddon for farms that the Conservatives are claiming.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I suggest gently to the hon. Gentleman that, whatever the number, if the change causes damage to the farming sector and the productivity of food production, it is not helpful, and nor does it raise much money. What we surely want is measures in the Budget and elsewhere to boost the productivity of our agricultural sector so that we can produce more of the food we eat ourselves, rather than importing it from the rest of the world. I encourage the Chancellor to release any impact assessment she has done on this measure. I hope that she will reconsider this proposal, although I doubt she will.

I now turn to a topic that I have mentioned many times, and one that I will continue to raise with the Treasury. The Chancellor has talked about the difficult decisions that she has had to make on tax and spending to promote growth. May I suggest one specific policy area, tax-free shopping, which has the potential to increase growth considerably? Since we left the EU, British people have been able to shop tax-free in European states. However, we have not given the same advantage to wealthy visitors visiting the UK to spend their money here and benefit our economy. That disincentive to visit the UK will be worse if visa costs are increased. I have talked to some of the bigger businesses involved in this area, and they are seeing that instead of visiting the UK people are going to Paris, Madrid or Milan to do their duty-free shopping. We are losing out as a result.

That whole new market, unique to the UK, is worth an estimated £10 billion annually in foreign spending and would generate more than £3 billion for the Exchequer, based on an Oxford economist's report that said that for every £1 spent by visitors, 37p was generated for the Exchequer. The only thing stopping Ministers in the last Government looking again at this issue was the Treasury's 2020 forecasts, which unjustifiably—in my opinion—predicted little or no impact on EU visitor numbers or spending levels. That led to the wrong conclusion that there would be costs to the Exchequer, even without all the other added benefits I have mentioned for hospitality, airports and luxury goods manufacturers, which would help the economy. All the data on actual spending supplied by real businesses proves the opposite.

My only ask of the Chancellor today is that she takes the cost-free decision to review the 2020 impact forecasts in the light of overwhelming real data and this time,

unlike the last, ask the OBR to scrutinise the Treasury's forecast impact of extending the scheme to EU visitors. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with Ministers, and I could bring experts with me to help the discussion.

As the new Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, I remind Treasury Ministers of the report produced in the last Parliament called "Lessons learned: a planning and spending framework that enables long-term value for money", about how the Treasury should focus on getting the best value for every £1 of taxpayers' money spent. The PAC will scrutinise the whole of the Government's expenditure and help them to get better value for money.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** We have another maiden speech, from Margaret Mullane.

12.49 pm

**Margaret Mullane** (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to this debate with my maiden speech. It is the honour of my life to be standing here, in this historic place, at the heart of democracy, representing the communities of Dagenham and Rainham, the place where I was born and raised.

I was well and truly made in Dagenham, and I am also the first woman to represent the seat since the boundaries were redrawn in 2010, when the old seat of Dagenham inherited the communities of Rainham, South Hornchurch, Elm Park and now Beam Park. I am proud to join the long list of political women from Dagenham, such as the Ford machinists whose battle paved the way for the Equal Pay Act in the '70s, and now our very own Hollie Ridley, Labour's new general secretary.

I must take this opportunity to pay tribute to the inexhaustible work of my predecessor, Jon Cruddas, who always put the needs of local people first and was, I know, a very well-respected Member of this House for his very thoughtful contributions. His presence will be missed by honourable colleagues in Westminster and by the people of Dagenham and Rainham, not least for his community-led approach to parliamentary politics. He always brought people with him, displaying integrity and compassion, and I have committed to continuing in that vein.

When people think of Dagenham and Rainham, they think of industry and the era of great British manufacturing—the Ford factory, Sanofi-Aventis and May & Baker, which created one of the first antibiotics, saving many thousands of lives during world war two, including that of Sir Winston Churchill when he suffered with pneumonia. People also think of council housing. The Becontree estate, one of the most ambitious social housing projects in the world, built during the interwar period, marked its 100th anniversary in 2021 and is still a source of great pride. People also think of working-class solidarity: the communities that were forged on the factory floor, in the clubs and at the docks; and the indomitable spirit of the women machinists whose famous fight paved the way for the Equal Pay Act 1970 and for a strong trade union voice in our area.

Dagenham and Rainham has a rich past, and it is now my job to ensure that it has a bright future, full of opportunity and promise, built on the back of a new

[Margaret Mullane]

deal for working people. It has not always been politics for me; I have worked in insurance and in a call centre, and was a barmaid at the Dagenham Trades Hall.

I know how precarious work can be in areas such as Dagenham and Rainham, and it was the miners' strike that drew me into politics. Seeing secure jobs stolen away, the injustice of Orgreave and the heart being ripped out of working-class communities by decisions made in Westminster, I knew then that I wanted to be a voice for working-class people. That is why I welcome the Government's commitment to making the Hillsborough law a reality, creating a level playing field for people in places such as Dagenham and Rainham when tragedies sadly happen—like in 2015, when four young men were murdered by a serial killer. The Independent Office for Police Conduct found that mistakes were made during the investigation, and nearly a decade later I continue to work with the family of Jack Taylor, seeking the justice they deserve.

It is not only justice that working-class communities such as Dagenham and Rainham seek; they want more police on our streets to tackle the scourge of knife crime, particularly around transport hubs such as Dagenham Heathway, Elm Park and Rainham. We want thriving town centres, an NHS fit for the future—one where you can get a GP appointment—jobs you can raise a family on, council housing, infrastructure, good public services we can all rely on and representatives who serve with integrity.

The devastating fire at the Spectrum building in my constituency in the early hours of Monday 26 August will not have escaped the attention of the House. That has yet again brought to the fore the safety of residents in high-rise blocks across the country. Thankfully, a combination of brave residents and the rapid response from the London Fire Brigade meant that there was no loss of life on this occasion. I want to take a moment to thank our emergency services for their amazing work and our community in Dagenham for their overwhelming response to this tragedy. Local businesses and residents rallied around to help families who had lost literally everything. That is who we are in Dagenham and Rainham, and I could not be prouder as their representative in this House.

There is a long way to go before we have a level playing field, but in the meantime I will dedicate every moment I spend in this House to raising living standards and attracting opportunities for my constituents. The work has already begun. In a matter of months London's biggest film studio will be complete, bringing skilled work in the creative industries to a new generation of young people, making hope possible. That has only been made possible under the local stewardship of Labour, guided by Jon Cruddas, who brokered the agreement when Sanofi-Aventis vacated the site, and Barking and Dagenham council, which secured the deal with Hackman Capital Partners to develop it.

As with all things, there is good news and bad news, and there are still a lot of battles that need to be fought. There is a patch of empty land at Marsh Way where c2c trains should be taking customers from their new neighbourhood on the Beam Park estate to Fenchurch Street in 20 minutes, as promised by developers. I am determined to make sure that promise is made good.

Since discovering that this crucial infrastructure has been derailed, it is Labour representatives who have been fighting for a green light to get it delivered.

I have always been a champion of council housing at traditional social rents, and I will continue to do that in Parliament. That is why I welcome the Government's commitment to build a new generation of social and affordable homes. I also welcome the commitment to put in the essential services that communities desperately need. I will always beat the drum of infrastructure. As we build—there is a lot of development planned for Dagenham and Rainham—we must ensure not only that the homes are affordable, but that there are schools, GPs and dentists, transport options, leisure facilities, green spaces and the amenities needed to thrive.

There are many new challenges in Dagenham and Rainham, but there are also historical challenges that need resolution. The ongoing fires at the illegal landfill on Launders Lane in Rainham are not only a scandal but a public health risk, and I will be fighting tooth and nail to extinguish them once and for all. The health of my constituents is paramount. That is why I am in regular contact with the chief executive of the Barking, Havering and Redbridge university hospitals NHS trust, offering my support to get our local NHS back on its feet. Our local NHS has ambitious plans to expand the emergency department at Queen's hospital, and I will be doing everything in my power to make that a reality.

At the election, I promised that I would help local communities to shape the future of Dagenham and Rainham. From the Daggers boxing club to local faith groups, businesses, working men's clubs, and amazing local charities such as Dagenham United and the Ship in Rainham, everyone plays a part in building a future for Dagenham and Rainham. That includes Barking and Dagenham and Havering councils, which is why I will be a constant voice asking for a revised funding formula for local authorities, so that they have the resources they need to transform lives.

I will finish as I started. It is the honour of my life to stand here representing my constituency and to be given the opportunity to serve. I am fiercely proud of Dagenham and Rainham and, building on the legacy of those who stood here before me, I will always be on hand to fight for the communities who call my constituency home. Thank you.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I do not doubt that the hon. Lady will be a strong advocate for her constituency.

12.57 pm

**Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Margaret Mullane), who made an excellent speech. She spoke with knowledge and passion about her constituency and about the challenges that face the residents of Dagenham and Rainham. Hers is a constituency I know well, since I drive back to my own on the A13 every week. Sometimes, when it is closed, as happened last week, I find myself exploring even more of Dagenham and Rainham. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Worcester (Tom Collins), who also made a very good contribution. We look forward to hearing from both of them in the future.

I want to start by putting on record the thanks that I think are due to my right hon. Friend the Member for Godalming and Ash (Jeremy Hunt), the shadow Chancellor, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak), the former Prime Minister. One of the extraordinary things I have found in the Budget speech that we are debating is the complete failure to mention the two extraordinary challenges that the Government had to face: covid and the economic consequences of Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Those two events combined potentially threatened the survival of every business in this country and could have led to a catastrophic increase in the cost of living for ordinary people. It was only through the intervention of the then Government in providing support that we managed to keep the economy going and that those businesses and the jobs associated with them survived. I find the Chancellor's failure even to mention that challenge when talking about the economic legacy extraordinary. It has left us with a legacy, but despite the level of borrowing that was necessary, the Government were bringing it down and had restored the economy. I think that when the history books are written, a lot of credit will be given to my right hon. Friends the shadow Chancellor and the former Prime Minister.

**Mrs Sarah Russell (Congleton) (Lab):** Does the right hon. Member accept that the Conservative Government's decisions to reduce gas storage and to fail to invest in the NHS over long periods made dealing with those crises considerably worse?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Order. Before the right hon. Member responds, interventions are a healthy part of debate, but the hon. Lady should draw the attention of the Member by speaking loudly in asking for an intervention.

**Sir John Whittingdale:** Every country in the world faced enormous challenges. The record of the Conservative Government in tackling those challenges bears comparison with any other country. That cannot be diminished. I will say a little bit more about the NHS in particular as I move forward with my remarks.

I saw that Alastair Campbell tweeted in defence of this particular Budget. He said:

"It was a very Labour Budget".

I would certainly agree with that. It put up spending massively, borrowing massively and tax massively—to that extent, it was a very Labour Budget. In the first 30 minutes of the Chancellor's speech yesterday she did not actually make any announcements; she simply tried to justify some of the measures she was going to introduce by talking about the fictitious black hole. The shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Godalming and Ash, has already adequately exposed why that is a fiction, and the Office for Budget Responsibility was unable to find any evidence for the figures that she quoted.

Let us be clear: tax and spend is a matter of choice. It was the choice of this Government to break all the promises that they made at the last election. It was their choice to break their manifesto commitments not to increase national insurance contributions. They said that they would not increase tax on working people, but in many areas the measures that they have introduced will have a significant impact on working people.

The denial that there was a tax bombshell to come is extraordinary, given that they subsequently announced a £40 billion one, which will result in the tax burden in this country rising steadily to what will be the highest ever on record. Yet this is a Government who took office saying that their priority would be to fuel growth. I can say to the Minister that he cannot fuel growth by punishing the businesses that will be responsible for creating the jobs and wealth of the future. The Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast following the Budget shows that growth is forecast to fall steadily.

I want to speak about one or two of the tax choices that have been made—they, too, are a matter of choice. It was up to the Chancellor to decide how to raise the extra revenue. Even before the Budget, we already heard of one extremely damaging, painful decision—the withdrawal of the winter fuel allowance—to save money by taking it away from pensioners across the country. I have received many emails expressing great disappointment that the Chancellor pressed ahead with that measure and did nothing yesterday to reduce its impact.

It is primarily businesses that will pay the price in this Budget. The increase in employers' national insurance contributions is estimated to cost them £25 billion, which represents £615 more for every single employee of a business over the threshold. What is the result? If the cost of employing people increases, that can have only two consequences: lower wages and fewer jobs. Each of those will hit working people. On top of that, businesses will face an increase in the national minimum wage. That will hit the businesses that are already finding it hardest to survive. It will impact on the care sector and the hospitality sector—already under enormous pressure. The decision to increase the national minimum wage for young adults by 16% will make it even harder for those people to find jobs.

Just 10 days ago the Government heralded the investment summit, which was supposed to persuade international investors that this was a country they should want to invest in. Yet a week later, we have higher capital gains tax and higher stamp duty, and a war declared on non-doms. Instead of investment coming into this country, already we are seeing the flight of people living here—the entrepreneurs on whom our future success depends are leaving in droves.

**Graeme Downie:** The right hon. Member mentioned people fleeing the country. Could he point to at least three examples of anyone at the investment summit now saying that they will withdraw that money?

**Sir John Whittingdale:** The investment summit announced a lot of investment for which the Conservative Government were actually responsible. Let us wait and see. The Budget was yesterday. Businesses will have to look very carefully at their plans, but I do not expect them to do so in a mere few hours. I am happy to have this debate with the hon. Gentleman again in a few weeks' time once we have seen the impact of the measures that have been announced.

There are two specific measures that I want to touch on because they have a particular impact on my constituents. One of them, which has been mentioned a number of times in this debate, is the removal of agricultural property relief. The Country Land and Business Association estimates that that will affect 70,000 businesses. Family

[*Sir John Whittingdale*]

farms in particular will feel the impact worse. It is hardly surprising that the president of the National Farmers' Union has said:

"This Budget not only threatens family farms but will also make producing food more expensive... The shameless breaking of those promises on Agricultural Property Relief will snatch away much of the next generation's ability to carry on producing British food, plan for the future and shepherd the environment."

This is a measure that the Labour party said it would not introduce, but it has broken that promise and is now proposing to introduce it, with enormous damage not just to farmers but to food security and our environment.

The second measure that I would like to touch on—[*Interruption.*] Madam Deputy Speaker, I see you have acquired Speaker's cough. I will heed your warning, but I want to mention VAT on private schools. In my constituency I have three small independent schools: Heathcote school in Danbury, Elm Green in Little Baddow and Maldon Court school in Maldon. The parents who send their children there are not rich; they make huge sacrifices. In Essex we are very fortunate to have really good grammar schools. Those parents make that sacrifice to help their children hopefully get into the grammars, but they will not be able to continue if there is 20% increase in fees as a result of the imposition of VAT. They will withdraw their children and those schools will be threatened with closure. The consequence is that the children will need to be placed in state schools, which are already under huge pressure. My constituency is growing rapidly, and there is enormous pressure on schools. This will simply make it worse. This policy is simply vindictive and will do enormous damage.

Very quickly, I note that the Minister for Secondary Care, the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) has come back into the Chamber, and she would be disappointed if I did not say that I welcome the hospital building programme in the Budget and the announcement of new money. However, once again I reiterate that a hospital in my constituency is threatened with closure. We have been promised a new one for 30 years or more, under both my Government and the Government before that. She was good enough to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) and me the other day, so that we could make the case. If she does hold this money, I hope that she might be able to direct some of it to my constituency.

This Budget is one of the worst I have heard in all my time in this place. It will do enormous damage. I am grateful for this opportunity to put that on the record.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I call Jon Trickett.

1.9 pm

**Jon Trickett** (Normanton and Hemsworth) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will try to be reasonably quick.

I pay tribute to the maiden speeches we have heard today, which were exceptional. In particular, I associate myself with the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Margaret Mullane) when she said that she stands for working class life and communities, and will do everything she can for them. That is how I have seen my 28 years in this place, too.

I think I am probably the only person on the Labour Benches today who was here in 1997, so I want to say something to the Government and to all our Back Benchers. I was there when Labour came into office—I was elected in 1996, so I was here in '97—and the same lack of humility shown then by the Conservative party, which had been thrashed by the electorate, is being shown today. There is the same short-term memory of the failures their Government had committed under John Major and the other Prime Minister before that, and the same lack of remorse. There is a lack of remorse for what we have now: food bank Britain, with millions of people in poverty. Not a word from those on the Conservative Benches. There are millions of people on NHS waiting lists. No remorse from the party opposite for that. There is no remorse for the fact that our economy has not been properly invested in throughout their whole period in office. This country was the lowest investor in the whole of the G7. There is no remorse for all the other failures either, and no sense of humility when the public told them that they had made a series of mistakes.

**Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jon Trickett:** No, I am going to try to be quick. I am not going to take any interventions.

All those matters, and others too, require us to make a change in the direction of our economy. That is what this Budget has begun to do; we are turning the page.

One final reflection on '97. When Labour introduced the minimum wage, one of the great reforms of the century, the Tories kept us in the Lobby night after night after night. We were proud to do it. The arguments they made then have a parallel with the arguments they are making about our Budget today—that there will be job losses, an impact on profitability, small firms will be in trouble and so on. Let me say this. Eventually, they accepted the minimum wage because it was the right thing to do. There were no job losses and there was no impact on profitability. So, I say to those on the Government Front Bench: continue in the direction you are travelling, but move faster and be even more radical. I recommend that they have a look at Spain, where a socialist Government are in place. They have—I think I am right in saying—the highest rate of growth in the G7. They introduced a 0.5% wealth tax on estates worth more than €3 million a year and they are getting high growth. That shows that a determined Government restructuring the economy, as we need to do, can deliver change and not damage a country's economic success.

I represent 23 villages, all former mining communities that were treated brutally by the Tory party 40 years ago. It is a distant memory for many, but I remember every single moment of the strike. They destroyed the mining industry and have done nothing to replace it in the last 40 years, so we have widespread poverty, as there is in all post-industrial communities throughout our country. They perpetrated a hoax on those communities by saying that they would level up. The levelling-up fund was not directed to where poverty was. In any event, it was a competition in deprivation between one area and another. My communities got nothing, yet we are struggling desperately to achieve growth. Levelling up was a great slogan, but it was used as a trick to persuade people to vote Conservative in 2019. What happened? People have learnt their lesson.

Let me come on to one point that I am worried about and then on to a general point. On transport, the differences in the distribution of funding for transport are extraordinary. The previous Government—that lot—spent £418 per head on transport in Yorkshire. In London, it was £1,200. That is three times as much per head per year spent on transport in London than in Yorkshire, and that leaves us with problems. I represent 23 villages—rural communities in many ways, deprived communities, post-mining communities. To get from one community to another, bearing in mind over 20,000 people in our area do not have a car and the trains do not work very well—the train service has left us without adequate public transport by train—the only option is the bus. Buses often do not start until 8 o'clock, but people begin work at 7, or leave home at 7. I have met women walking from one village to another in the dark on unlit streets because the bus service has not yet started. That is a problem the Conservatives created.

I regret this Government's decision to raise bus fares from £2 to £3. I do not suppose there is anybody in this whole Parliament who does not have access to a car, but there are many people across the country who do not have a car because wages are so low. People are walking in the dark at 7 o'clock in the morning to get to work from one village to another. And for those of us who do have a bus service, it is going up by 50%. It will be roughly £6 a day to get to and from work. That is £30 a week and £1,500 a year in bus fares to get to work and back. Clearly, that gives us a problem. In my constituency, there are villages that are only seven miles apart, yet the bus takes one hour and 19 minutes to get from the one you live in to the one where you work. That is completely unsatisfactory. If we are going to raise bus fares—that is the decision that has been made, which I regret—we need to reform the way buses operate so that they are accessible to communities. The Government have made some announcements in relation to that already, which is welcome.

My final point is on the lack of investment the Conservative party presided over for years. I heard the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Jeremy Hunt) saying today, "Okay, there might have been a black hole in the public finances, but we were going to cover it with cuts." That is effectively what he said. The cuts were always taking place to investment and they were going to cut more investment. If we measure my constituency by GDP per head—a controversial measure, but the one we are familiar with—that lack of investment means the average worker produces £29,000 per year of GDP. Wages are pegged to productivity, as we all know, so we have low wages—less than £30,000 a year. But listen to this. In Camden—we know it is a different economy in Camden—GDP per head is £174,000. The regional differences between output, capacity and productivity are all the result of that failure to invest.

The Budget sets out to invest, and to invest big and go for growth, but I will be pressing, for all the held-back, post-industrial communities up and down our country—not only the coalfields but in the midlands and elsewhere—for the investment we achieve and the growth we deliver to be more equitable than it has been under the Conservatives.

With those few thoughts, and an encouragement to be more radical and even more bold for the future—let us bear in mind '97—I wish the Budget well.

1.18 pm

**Wendy Chamberlain** (North East Fife) (LD): One thing that we always feel after a Budget is a sense of relief, because we at least know that we are going to get some answers. It feels that when we are talking, campaigning and raising issues, we are always told to wait for the Budget. I was additionally relieved yesterday because my son managed to pass his driving test theory. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Thank you.

I do not think the Government need any help in talking about the economic legacy left by the previous Government, but we do have to acknowledge that the funding structures put in place by the previous Government have created a legacy, as well as expectations. I want to talk about those that most directly impact North East Fife, starting with infrastructure funding.

I was pleased to hear the city deal announcement in relation to Argyll and Bute, given that I have an Argyllshire father, but I want to highlight the opportunities within existing city deals to add value and to make up some of the increased costs we have seen in recent years. The town of Newburgh in North East Fife has been cut off from the railway for almost 70 years. It has a line running through it that transports 38 trains a day and for the last 13 years there has been a campaign to rebuild a train station and reconnect it to the line. That makes sense from a number of perspectives: a train station takes cars off the road; it allows investment into the town; it can bring tourists to places such as the Lindores Abbey distillery; and it shortens journey times for those travelling beyond for NHS or other treatments. However, the only mention of railway infrastructure is in relation to the city region sustainable transport settlements, which are for England only. I acknowledge that transport is devolved, but there are ways in which the UK Government could look to work with the Scottish Government in order to help those communities where additional funding could make a difference.

The other element of transport infrastructure is Access for All, which is a UK scheme although the Scottish Government play a part in determining which stations receive support. I want to make an additional call for funding for Leuchars station, which serves St Andrews—although it is one of the best-known parts of my constituency, it does not have a station. It sometimes feels that we have fallen into the cracks between Westminster and Holyrood on that. On disability and on Access for All, we need to do more at all levels to ensure that we deliver the funding.

Returning to the impact of the different funds and schemes that were put in place post following our departure from the EU, and the need to replace EU structural funding, I want to touch on the community ownership fund and the shared prosperity fund. I and other Fife MPs—I see two of them in their places—recently met Fife council to talk about the future of the shared prosperity fund, which is due to end in March 2025. I am pleased by the commitment to continue it for another year, although we need to move away from year-to-year funding. I am sure we all meet third-sector organisations and others who talk about the uncertainty that short-term funding brings to the services that they provide. We also have to acknowledge that the Budget—the relevant passage is very short—will mean that Fife council, for example, will see a cut of about a third in shared prosperity funding, which has delivered programmes

[Wendy Chamberlain]

such as Kingdom Works, an employability service that has supported over 8,000 people. The Government said in the Budget that they want to reform funding, and I urge them to do so quickly so that we get certainty.

The Liberal Democrats have talked a lot about health and social care. Others have spoken about the fact that we need to focus on social care, because without fixing it, we will not fix the NHS. Again, the NHS is devolved in Scotland. I welcome the significant increase in funding for Scotland; it is now over to the SNP-led Scottish Government to deliver on that. I am pleased, too, that we will see support for public sector organisations in relation to the national insurance increase. However, there is no doubt that the NHS in Scotland is in a dire state. In Fife, there is no NHS dentist currently taking patients, and in my constituency we are seeing further cuts and closures in dental services.

The other thing that I want to say about what I think the Scottish Government should be doing relates to the business rates changes that the UK Government have brought forward. Let me quote one of my constituents, who was reported in today's *Courier* newspaper saying about rates relief:

"We don't have the cliff edge in Scotland. We've been paying full rates ever since last summer."

I accept that that potentially is not covered by the block grant, but given that the whole UK is a tourism destination, the Scottish Government need to look at how they best support hospitality and tourism, because there is a real difference between what is happening in other parts of the UK and what is happening in Scotland.

I should declare an interest at this point: I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Scotch whisky and worked for Diageo for four years before my election. At the start of the debate, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster talked about choices. For me, the other aspect of choices is managing expectations. That is where the real issues that I have with the Budget come to the fore.

Mark Kent, the chief executive of the Scotch Whisky Association, said in *The Scotsman* today that the decision to increase rates on Scotch whisky

"not only flies in the face of the commitment to back the industry as a core element of the government's 'Brand Scotland' concept, it also serves no economic purpose."

The Conservatives' 10.1% increase in alcohol duty was deeply damaging to the whisky industry. In the 12 months since it came into force, revenues from the tax have actually fallen by £298 million, so it is clearly not delivering increased revenue to the Treasury. What we saw from the Government yesterday will continue to hurt the industry, which is so important for Scotland. The Chancellor offered support to breweries through the cut in duty on draught products, but that will do nothing to support responsible drinking. Taxing based on strength of alcohol is not the right way to go about it; it is about alcohol being alcohol and how it is consumed. I might not represent the most whisky distilleries in Scotland by number, but I probably do by volume, with the Diageo distillery and bottling plant in Leven.

Returning to the point about promises and expectations, we come to farming and the issue of the inheritance tax changes. The National Farmers Union Scotland said on its blog today that it is pleased to see the roll-over of the

agricultural funding, although that has gone into the Scottish Government's block grant, so, again, it is over to the Scottish Government to ensure that they deliver for farmers. We need farmers for our food production and security, for our climate and nature recovery, which is more vital than ever, and for rural growth and support.

**Dr Roz Savage** (South Cotswolds) (LD): The Budget is subtitled "Fixing the foundations" but I was saddened that it contained no mention of the most important foundation of everything in Britain: our natural world. Does she agree that more resources need to be dedicated to the restoration of nature and to supporting our farmers, both of which are crucial to food security?

**Wendy Chamberlain:** I absolutely agree. Whenever I have that discussion with farmers, they want to support climate and nature—they want to do the right thing—but they need support to do so.

As I say, the overall funding envelope for farmers is for the Scottish Government to deliver, and I am confident that my Scottish Liberal Democrat colleagues in Holyrood will be making the case for them to do so. In his intervention on the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, the hon. Member for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel) talked about how the number of farms affected will be small, but the issue is that the Government promised last year not to do anything in relation to agricultural property relief, yet that is what is happening. I am already being contacted by local farmers who fear that this will be the death of their and other families' farms. It is important that we remember that it is not just about those farmers; it is also about the infrastructure and the wider communities that they support, such as vets and other facilities.

We should not forget tenant farmers, either, because they are some of our most vulnerable. I know that because I worked with some of them prior to the election in relation to the roll-out of universal credit. That system is not fit for purpose for farmers. The Work and Pensions Secretary is no longer in her place, but I will be coming back to her on that issue. We need to ensure that we provide that support.

Until very recently, I wore multiple hats, because I had far fewer colleagues. Now that I have more of them, I have given up my Department for Work and Pensions hat, but I welcome the changes to carer's allowance. I would like some clarity about the carer support payment in Scotland, which is a devolved benefit that is currently being rolled out. I have not seen it in the notes that I have looked at so far, but perhaps it will become clear in the coming days whether that is included in the block grant that is coming to Scotland, or whether there will be additional consequentials.

To conclude, there are things in this Budget that I absolutely welcome, but, as always, there are unintended consequences, on which I hope the Government will listen to us.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I call Gregor Poynton to make his maiden speech.

1.29 pm

**Gregor Poynton** (Livingston) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in today's debate. First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Worcester (Tom Collins), and for

Dagenham and Rainham (Margaret Mullan), who have proudly shown the best of their constituencies in their maiden speeches today.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Hannah Bardell. Hannah has diligently supported our constituents over the past nine years, whether by addressing the Broxburn floods, assisting homeowners affected by RAAC, advocating for those affected by the infected blood scandal, or championing LGBTQ+ rights. On election night, she was incredibly gracious—a spirit that has continued, as Hannah and her team have gone above and beyond in passing on cases and helping my team to get settled. She said to me on the night, “It’s all about the constituents,” and she has been true to her word. Hannah said in her speech on polling night that she intends to be back in some form. Of that I have no doubt. I just hope it is not too soon.

My constituency is called Livingston, which is understandable, as that is the biggest town in the constituency and the county, but the constituency is so much more than that; it includes towns and villages such as Breich, Dechmont, Ecclesmachan, Uphall, Longridge, Broxburn, Bents, Stoneyburn, Addiewell, Kirknewton, Wilkieston, East Calder, Mid Calder, West Calder and Fauldhouse, each rich with its own history and distinct community spirit. The area’s economy and population was initially boosted by mining, of coal in the west, and oil shale in the east. The landscape still bears witness to this history, with the bings that remain. That is why it was important to me that the Chancellor announced in yesterday’s Budget that we are delivering on our manifesto commitment to return the investment reserve to miners. We are handing back £1.2 billion to former miners and their families. In fact, 144 former miners in the Livingston constituency will receive an average increase of £29 per week in their pension. For those who would like a further insight into Scottish oil and the shale oil industry, there is the Almond Valley visitor centre, which brings to life the first truly commercial oil works in the world, and celebrates the West Lothian chemist James “Paraffin” Young’s work and discoveries.

However, the biggest growth in the area was in the 1960s, with the creation of the new town of Livingston. Many from Glasgow and the west of Scotland ventured east because of the promise of improved housing and job opportunities. That entrepreneurial spirit is still alive in Livingston, which is the home of high-end manufacturers like Wyman-Gordon, biotech companies like Valneva, Glenmorangie’s bottling plant, Paterson’s shortbread factory, Mitsubishi Electric, The Centre and the designer outlet village, Sky, and numerous small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the lifeblood of our local economy. Now that I have highlighted Paterson’s shortbread and Glenmorangie, I am expecting a visit from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland—all in the name of promoting Brand Scotland, of course.

As I prepared to give this speech, I sought inspiration from the maiden speeches of two previous MPs for Livingston: Robin Cook and Tam Dalyell, who knew a thing or two about speaking in this place. Even in their maiden speeches, they set themselves apart with their wit, intellect and fire for social justice. Tam Dalyell used his experience as a schoolteacher to outline practical reforms that could be made to the education system, and Robin Cook, a former chair of housing on Edinburgh City council, made a plea for more and better housing.

I took from them that you should talk about what you know, and if I can maintain that for my whole parliamentary career, I think I will be doing rather well. Tam Dalyell and Robin Cook are two giants of Scottish Labour politics, who, in their different ways, made a mark in this place. We new Scottish Labour MPs must now make ours.

There is a Scottish Labour thread of history in this place, from Hardie, Maxton, Lee and Dewar to Cook, Brown and Darling. Living up to that is an impossible task, but try we must, because in that trying and effort is the opportunity to make a change. The idea of being a Scottish MP in the Parliament of the United Kingdom is important to me. I am Scottish, and I am British. I do not see these identities as contradictory, but they are different. Given that all four nations are part of the United Kingdom, and have been, in some cases, for hundreds of years, it would seem logical that the UK identity would subsume all, but that is not so.

The idea of Scotland is powerful. It has stood the test of time, and it means different things to different people in the Borders, the highlands, the island communities, the east, the west, the central belt, urban areas and rural areas, but there is a common fabric of what it means to be Scottish, and it binds us together, whether we were born into being Scottish or chose to make our home in Scotland. This is part of who we are, and having Scotland as one of the four nations makes our country greater than the sum of its parts.

The theme of today’s debate is “fixing the foundations”, because over the last 14 years our country has not been on secure foundations. The chaos of the last 14 years across the UK—and particularly the last 10 years in Scotland, where there has been a focus on the constitution, not the day job—has made our country feel less secure and life feel too precarious for far too many. Families are one mistake, a piece of bad luck or a decision that is no fault of their own away from disaster. That is no way to live. That is why this Budget—which ensures a pay rise for over 200,000 of the lowest-paid Scots, letting more families keep more of their hard-earned cash—is important for families right across the Livingston constituency.

I wanted to come to this place to make sure that everyone, no matter their background, can thrive. That is what drives me and my politics. Having grown up in a working-class family in a working-class town in central Scotland in the ’80s and ’90s, I have seen what happens when people have opportunities and security, and what happens when they do not. My father worked in a plastics plant in Grangemouth for over 35 years, providing our family with stability and dignity through unionised work. Without it, I would not be here today.

There is hope for the future. Yesterday’s Budget marks the end of the era of austerity, and raises much-needed cash for our public services. This Labour Budget delivers the largest budget settlement for the Scottish Government in the history of devolution. It means there is an additional £1.5 billion for the Scottish Government to spend in this financial year, and an additional £3.4 billion next year. This is a significant increase in investment to ensure that we have the funding available for Scotland’s NHS, schools and public services. It is now for the SNP, which has lost its way in recent years, to get a grip and spend the money wisely.

I recently visited the Larder, a social enterprise providing solutions to poverty through learning opportunities and access to high-quality, affordable food. It supports

[Gregor Poynton]

young people for whom traditional academic settings have often not worked, helping them to build skills and confidence. The Larder has had huge success in turning lives around, so it can be done. We have the people and drive to build stronger communities. We have a Government who are on the side of working people, and we should not rest until everyone in this country has the opportunities that they need to build a more secure life for themselves and their families. That is what I resolve to spend my time in this place doing, on behalf of people in the Livingston constituency.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I call my constituency neighbour, Mims Davies.

1.36 pm

**Mims Davies** (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): I congratulate all hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches. May I wish the hon. Member for Livingston (Gregor Poynton) well in his time in this place?

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) that the failure of the Budget, and its long preamble, mentioning covid and the war on our continent, was very stark. However, I would like to start on a positive note. I am the 380th woman elected to Parliament, and it was truly a historic moment to see the first female Chancellor at the Dispatch Box. She said that it would give hope to other women who were watching, and I absolutely agree. I just hope that our businesses, and sectors such as hospitality, feel that hope.

It was very pleasing to hear the announcement of the compensation schemes for infected blood victims—my constituent Robert, in East Grinstead, has been campaigning very hard on that—and for victims of the Post Office scandal, which will be welcomed by many of my constituents. It is also pleasing that fuel duty has been frozen, and I thank all my hon. Friends and campaigners who made sure that there was support in this area of the family finances. I am pleased about that, and, indeed about the cladding interventions. There is a welcome boost for funding for special educational needs and disabilities, and something for the dreaded potholes, although we have yet to find out how far that funding will stretch.

However, 10 independent schools are in peril in my constituency, and their food providers, staff and many others are very worried about where they will go if they are displaced. There is no funding in this Budget to deal with such displacements. I would have welcomed more support for the Sussex wine sector; I am sure that you would agree with me on that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Order. That point was not about the consumption of wine; I have many vineyards in my constituency, as the hon. Member does.

**Mims Davies:** It is very important to support people working in the wine sector. Viticulture is alive and well in Sussex, Essex and across the country. If the train drivers' needs have truly been satisfied, the services from East Grinstead to the capital simply must improve. That is my plea to the Southern rail service.

Despite the leaks and the pre-Budget announcements, it came as something of a shock to hear the full announcements in the Budget yesterday. There can be no mistake: the cost to the country is very dear. According to the OBR, the direct and indirect costs amount to £52 billion. The new Labour Government cannot escape the fact that, in their first Budget in 14 years—as they keep reminding us—they are set to raise taxes by a staggering £40 billion. Taxes will be at their highest level since 1993, and that builds on the winter fuel payment debacle. Despite Labour Members' glee and their waving of Order Papers, when they go back to their constituencies or open their emails, they will see a very different story. Their constituents, like mine, will face the largest tax burden in our history, and working people will pay the price, as the Chancellor has now agreed.

Let me turn to younger voters and those keen to get on the housing ladder. Stamp duty is back for first-time buyers. One of my Conservative councillors in Copthorne and Worth highlighted this morning that the purchase of two rental properties has fallen through because the margins were already very tight. Yesterday's decisions mean that two couples will now not be homeowners.

In Handcross and Pease Pottage, one of my councillors, Mr Prescott, mentioned the Budget of broken promises. His organisation will face a cost of £70,000, it will lose two people, and the delivery of programmes will be stopped. That is the reality of these decisions. Small businesses—often those that are women-led, such as salons—will see the impact of the national insurance rise. I will be interested to see the effect across all sectors, particularly as the measures are a clear breach of the Labour manifesto. Despite Labour's retrospective revisionism, the effect will be felt right across the land. On every radio station that I listened to on my way in this morning, the dismay across sectors, affecting real people's lives, was everywhere.

The national insurance rise affects charities and organisations, such as our hospices and air ambulances. As the shadow Chancellor said in the media this morning and again here today, picking the pockets of business, charities and organisations is not cost-free. The Institute for Fiscal Studies confirmed that the rise will hit the lowest-paid workers through lower pay, and the OBR has said that it will hit employment. So much for not raising taxes on working people. Two manifesto commitments have been broken.

**Yuan Yang** (Earley and Woodley) (Lab): My constituents told me on the doorstep that their No. 1 priority was to improve the NHS. If the Conservative party were still in government, it would be overseeing steep cuts across the NHS and our public services. Would the hon. Lady be happy to be part of such a programme?

**Mims Davies:** Nobody here wants any negatives for their constituencies from the Budget, least of all for health services. However, I have family in Wales who have been living under a Labour Government, and they know the reality of what is coming down the line.

Let me build on the questions I have had from constituents this morning. Family businesses are directly affected. A local funeral directors group with national reach said that it believes that the Treasury has its figures wrong on the impact of the changes to agricultural property relief and business property relief. The cap and the 20% rate must surely be a simple mistake, the

group writes. To meet the inheritance tax bill and pay their liability, firms will have to extract capital, incurring a 38% dividend tax rate, which is above the proposed 20% rate of reduced IHT. Given that capital gains tax is at 24%, it makes no sense for family businesses to pass on their shares to family. They will simply have to sell them or their business. I have been implored to ask those on the Treasury Bench to ensure that the Government consult and listen to family businesses, at the very least.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster talked about Conservative Members opposing the Budget. We are opposing it. It is anti-choice, anti-growth, anti-business—particularly anti-family businesses—and anti-aspirational. It is focused on more borrowing. Disgracefully, as has been said, it pits the public sector against the private sector. Happy Hallowe'en, because everybody here knows that this is the ghost of a Labour Government of the past. They are back and haunting every single constituency.

I represent a rural constituency, and it is clear that local farmers will be hit by the changes to inheritance tax—we just need to read the messages from the NFU today. I am afraid that the subterfuge and the hoodwinking of the farming community will be felt not just by Opposition Members, but across everybody's communities.

I recently read out in Westminster Hall the words of a local farmer, whose concerns were purely about business confidence at that point. The same farmer wrote to me again this week—I remind the House that farmers are working people, and they work 365 days and 52 weeks a year—to say:

“My family's farm and estate are currently economically viable but there is no chance that they would ever produce sufficient cash flow to make it possible for us to cover any significant amounts of inheritance tax. If we are struck by excessive taxation we will no longer be able to produce 7,000,000 litres of milk per annum or timber for the nation. The heritage of 200 years could be gone.”

Farmers across my constituency are stunned. This is a hammer blow for family businesses, as the shadow Chancellor said, and we will oppose the Budget. It does not fix the foundations; it is a set of dangerous ground works.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I call Maya Ellis to make her maiden speech.

1.46 pm

**Maya Ellis (Ribble Valley) (Lab):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. My journey here comes via almost 10 years in local government, as an officer working on economic development and regeneration. I grew up among passionate socialists, but I also saw the investment that small businesses all around me put into their local areas, so I am delighted to be making my maiden speech, as the first Labour MP for Ribble Valley, in this debate on a Budget that truly harnesses the best of both social policy and great British enterprise. We need both, and we need them to work together.

For a young woman, full of dreams and wanting to change the world, sometimes our day-to-day can feel a pretty restrictive place to be. Anyone who has felt held back in their ambition will know that it can take just one or two people to believe in you, to make all the difference to whether you carry on or give up. I cannot possibly name all the people who helped me get here,

but you know who you are, and it made all the difference that you never questioned for a second that I could do this.

It is so easy to quickly take for granted that we are speaking in a debate on a Budget presented by the first ever woman Chancellor of the Exchequer. She will know as well as I do that as fairytale as our journeys may seem at their high points right now, the prejudices and obstacles that we faced, and that women face every day, are still far too high. I have said it to many women, and I will say it to any listening now: you are as smart and as capable as you think you are; do not let anyone convince you otherwise. We need your fire.

I have been in Westminster a few months now, and one thing I hear people say frequently about my predecessor, the right hon. Nigel Evans, is how much he loves and cares for this place that we stand in today. Mr Evans worked incredibly hard and diligently as Deputy Speaker and on the restoration and renewal programme board. We are very lucky to have this well-managed centre of debate and challenge in the UK, and I am grateful to Mr Evans, and to all those who work here, for upholding our exceptional standards of democracy.

I promised Mr Evans on the night of the election that I would take care of the Ribble Valley constituency that I know we both love. I can already safely say that I will likewise show this incredible institution of Westminster and our strong democracy the respect and protection that I know we both value so highly.

I am one of those exceptionally lucky MPs who have lived in their constituency most of their life. It means that I know it like the back of my hand. For better or worse, it also means that I encounter situations like I did the other day, when one of my old Brownie leaders called me over while doing the school run to raise an issue about local social housing—I am on it, Jan, I promise.

My constituency of Ribble Valley is a patchwork of our country's history and its future. We remember the battle of Bamber Bridge, when locals stood up against white GIs to welcome black US soldiers into their pubs—a brilliant example of the inclusion and multiculturalism that makes this country great. In Samlesbury, we have produced planes to protect the country since world war two, and I am delighted that progress on establishing the National Cyber Force in my constituency is well under way. It will lead our country's research, develop our future security and build our skills in cyber.

People are often surprised by the size of the Ribble Valley constituency. Its boundaries have changed over the years, but it currently reaches from the Lancashire-Yorkshire border, with picture-perfect villages such as Tosside, Rimington, Waddington, West Bradford and Chipping, through to the lively suburbs of Preston, taking in Fulwood, Bamber Bridge and Walton-le-Dale, and almost reaching the Ribble estuary at the Irish sea.

I see the breadth of my constituency as its depth. We have wonderful places to live, though much could be done to keep them safer and kinder. We have great transport links, with the M6 running through, and it is only two hours to London on the train from Preston. We also have utterly stunning countryside, including a large part of the trough of Bowland, where the late Queen said that she would have loved to retire.

[Maya Ellis]

Strong communities are so important to me, and both the rural and urban areas of my constituency are made up of villages that come together to create celebrations such as the Lostock Hall carnival and the Broughton scarecrow festival just last week.

Right in the heart of my constituency is my home village of Ribchester, where my family have lived since 1961 and where I am now raising my family. I must pay a quick tribute to the people of that village. From the amateur dramatic society and the church to the Brownie unit and the parish council, the village showed me the best of what it means to be British. I look forward to this Government easing the burden on families, so that they can spend more time contributing to the amazing communities that we all need to thrive.

The only person I know who loved Ribble Valley more than I do was my dad. He travelled the world, living in big cities and in communes, dreaming of new ways to live our lives, but I recently found a letter that he wrote to himself at age 21, in which he spoke of the strange pull back to our beautiful little corner of the world, where he chose to raise his family and, without knowing it, raised the Labour MP he dreamed of it having.

It is my deepest sadness that my dad did not live to see me standing here, but I know that he relished every heated debate we had at the dinner table and, along with my mum—one of the most intelligent women I know—I think my dad had an eye to what he was preparing me for. He was the biggest feminist I have ever known, and, in me, I think he raised the second biggest.

A lot of my career has involved working on innovation policy, which has collided over time with my passion for social justice. I think we all need a vision to look towards, and I want us to be ambitious that our rapid advances in technology and automation should translate into greater rewards for workers. I would like to think that it is not too utopian to hope that we will move to a standard four-day working week in my lifetime.

So much of what our society needs does not necessarily cost money, but it does cost time—time to give our children focused play; time to truly rest our bodies so that they do not crumble far too early; and time to live slowly and to grow our own food, to reduce the huge demands on this Earth. Technology can give us time, if that is where we choose to channel the benefits.

Before I finish, I will touch on my utmost priority as a Member of Parliament: working families. We need to make life much more tenable, more affordable and, dare I say, more joyful for parents, who want to contribute to our country while also raising good humans. It is also critical to me that we make sure the children have the lives, support and love they deserve.

We have a vision for an innovative and high-growth economy, but we do not get innovation without diversity of thought. This Parliament is the most diverse in history, and I, as one of those new diverse Members, am able to be here with my mental health just about intact only because my husband took three months of paternity leave with both our children. This meant that, when an election was called two days after I was selected as the Labour candidate, I did not have to spend a single second handing childcare over to him; he already knew

how to change a nappy, what to pack in a bag and the books my children want to read at bedtime. I fully believe I would not be standing here now if he had not taken paternity leave. That opportunity should not be rare.

Forgive me for speaking in a hetero-normative context, but that is my personal experience. We know that few dads take up paternity or parental leave, which means that many women cannot dream of putting themselves forward for political office, as I did. Knowing that my husband can confidently care for my children gives me time to think, to organise and to dream. Too many women are still unable to do this because their mental load fills every bit of additional brain space they have.

We need the ideas and dreams of mothers and parents to propel our businesses, our public services and our society. I was delighted to join the campaigning organisations Pregnant Then Screwed and The Dad Shift earlier this month to try to shift the dial on parenting equality. I hope to see some truly ambitious step changes as our Government review paternity leave over this coming year, not only to create a new vision of fatherhood in this country, but to unlock the dreams and plans of mothers, which we have been so desperately lacking but which are so desperately important. I send a huge thank you to my incredible husband for holding the fort at home, and for being the foundation of my standing here today.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that it takes a lot of bravery to be a girl or a young woman today; it always has. It is relentless, scary and exhausting, especially for those with caring responsibilities or facing additional prejudices. There are a million reasons to give up, and there were a million times I almost did, but please do not give up. I can promise you this: brave girls grow up, and one day you might stand here and be the one in charge.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** That was very inspirational.

1.55 pm

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Maya Ellis) on her spirited maiden speech. Her speech, along with the other maiden speeches, underlines how new Members come here with good will in their hearts, full of good intentions and full of ideals. It is heartening to see that in new colleagues on both sides of the House.

I do not think the new Labour Government have any lack of good intentions, but this Budget is happening in something of a political bubble. Much of the Chancellor's discourse seems to reflect a continuation of the general election campaign, which we now know could have been fought more honestly, openly and transparently by the Labour party.

That said, I am sure the Chancellor believes she has produced the best Budget for this country. The biggest cheer from the Labour Benches yesterday seemed to be for the 1p cut in draught beer duty, but I have since spoken to people in the hospitality industry, and they have described this as a shattering Budget. The money that publicans and restaurateurs will now have to pay their staff, and pay for their staff, massively dwarfs any benefit they could possibly pass on to their customers from the 1p beer duty cut. In fact, most of the increased beer prices that we will see as a result of this Budget are

a direct consequence of the tax increases inflicted on businesses. I am afraid that those cheers demonstrate a complete lack of reality about the world we live in.

The character of this Budget reflects a reversion to the failed Labour policies of the 1960s and 1970s. It is naive to believe that taxing wealth creators, wealth creation and capital formation will not drive entrepreneurs and business leaders out of our country, which is happening. It is also deceiving, because the Budget reflects that Labour's plans were not fully costed, and it is destructive of wealth, wealth creators and pensions. The Budget massively reduces people's incentive to save into their pension pot, as they will now be taxed on what is left over at the end of their life to pass on to their children.

Of course, there is also a streak of vindictiveness towards wealth creators. I heard a Labour Member shout "Good!" when the shadow Chancellor said that we are climbing the league table of countries with higher tax rates across the economy, moving beyond Germany. The attitude that taxation is somehow an inherent good has limits, and we are going beyond those limits.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): On that point, will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** I certainly will if it was the hon. Gentleman that said that—

**Alex Sobel** *indicated assent.*

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** It was. I thank him for owning up.

**Alex Sobel:** What is wrong with the German economy? The German economy has consistently performed well over the past 30 years, in excess of our economy, and has a strong industrial strategy. This Government are going to produce an industrial strategy so that we can have just as strong an economy as Germany, and a similar tax base.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** When Margaret Thatcher was elected in 1979, we were the sick man of Europe. What she, Lord Howe and Lord Lawson did to the British economy in that period put us on a faster growth track than the German economy. Since that time, we have been falling behind again. This Budget will help us fall behind again.

Elements of this Budget are a defiance of reality, because behind the cheer for the 1p cut on draught beer is the real world outside. I have been watching the gilt rate—the 10-year bond rate—on my telephone. It closed yesterday at 4.362% after going up substantially in the last hours of trading, and now stands at over 4.5%. That means the Budget has spooked the markets into increasing the cost of borrowing, which the Government will have to pay. The idea that these measures are pain free, and that getting more tax revenue in and borrowing more is going to bail out the economy, is very flawed.

I do not suggest there is going to be a bond crisis tomorrow, but we are enmeshed in a debt trap in this country, as are so many other mature democracies, after the energy crisis and covid, so there is likely to be another liquidity crisis of some kind over the next few years. How well prepared will this Government be, if they have already put up taxes and borrowing to spend on more consumption, rather than for our long-term economic benefit?

This is not a Budget for growth. Apart from the initial impact of the extra spending in the forthcoming year, the throttling back of expenditure, then the decline in borrowing and the burden of the extra taxes, suppresses economic growth, which the Office for Budget Responsibility is perfectly clear about. It was an empty promise for the Prime Minister to say, "We are going to prioritise economic growth." This Budget simply does not prioritise economic growth. We have forgotten all the lessons of our economic history, learned from the disastrous policies of the 1960s and 1970s.

If socialism worked, everyone would do it. Socialism does not work. This is a more socialist Government than we have seen since the 1970s. They have forgotten what Tony Blair and Gordon Brown did. It was Gordon Brown who cut the capital gains tax rate. As Chancellor, Gordon Brown was the successor to Margaret Thatcher and continued with many of the same policies. Gordon Brown did not set up a ludicrous vanity project like Great British Energy. He did not believe that taking control of investment in a sector like energy would increase the wealth of the country. All the equivalent state-owned enterprises around Europe lose money—the Government will not make a return in that sector.

**Yuan Yang:** The hon. Gentleman mentions Gordon Brown. Yesterday's Budget starts to restore the level of Government spending as a share of the economy to levels that are similar to those under Gordon Brown and the last Labour Government. It starts to restore the foundations of our public services. Does the hon. Gentleman welcome that restoration and investment?

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** I wish we could all have everything that we wanted. Gordon Brown inherited a golden economic legacy from the Conservatives in 1997—*[Interruption.]* Yes, he did. Debt was falling and growth was outstripping our competitors. By the time of the financial crash in 2008, he had already increased borrowing and spending. The consequence of the financial crash is that he achieved what every Labour Government always achieve: they leave office with higher debt, higher unemployment and higher inflation. That is what Labour Governments always do, and that is what this Labour Government are set to do again.

**Andy MacNae** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Lab) *rose—*

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** I am not going to give way any more. We need only look around the world to see that the idea that an ever-larger state makes the people richer is confounded by economic experience, otherwise the richest countries in the world would be those with the biggest state. It is businesses and free enterprise that generate the wealth that pays for the public services we need.

We can all recall Milton Friedman's four ways to spend money. There is people's own money that they spend on themselves: they think about it, spend it very carefully and make sure they get the maximum value for money. There is money that people spend on other people, such as when they buy a present: they may want to keep the cost down and may not be sensitive about whether the person really wants a particular gift or not. There is somebody else's money that people spend on themselves: when people use expense accounts, they go on the most expensive aeroplane or get the biggest car

[Sir Bernard Jenkin]

their company will pay for. Finally, there is somebody else's money that is spent on other people: that is what Governments do. It is a reality that Governments are the worst allocators of resource for ensuring future wealth creation. That is just a fact.

The record will always confirm that if we want to create more wealth, the smaller the state can be, the faster economic growth will be and the more we can afford to then spend on public services. This Government are profoundly un-strategic—just look at what the OBR says about investment:

“Tax rises in this Budget weigh on real incomes, so private consumption falls as a share of GDP”—

that means people are going to be getting poorer. It continues:

“Corporate profits are expected to continue falling as a share of GDP in the near term”.

It adds that

“business investment falls as a share of GDP as profit margins are squeezed, and the net impact of Budget policies lowers business investment.”

Is that good for the British economy? I submit not.

What about debt? If someone has too much debt, the one thing they should do is not borrow more money, if they want to get out of a debt trap—[*Interruption.*] Members on the Government Benches have surgeries attended by people who are in debt. The one thing hon. Members will tell them not to do is to stack up more debt, but that is what the Government have chosen to do. That is not a long-term policy.

Finally, what about GDP? I take no pride in saying that growth in GDP has been struggling for a decade or more—

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Tulip Siddiq):** For about 14 years.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** Yes, I do not think we did enough to dynamise the British economy. We did not do enough, but I was very grateful for the support of the Liberal Democrats for the first five years of the Conservative Government. That helped us to keep public expenditure under better control so we could begin that process.

GDP per head has really been flatlining. We are falling significantly further behind the United States, but what are the trends? On these trends, we will be overtaken by Poland by 2030 in terms of GDP per head. What are this Government doing to address the real long-term trends? Let us look to 2050. What is the shape of public expenditure going to look like in 2050? This Budget does not begin to address that. What will be our national debt on a long-term basis? What is happening to our demographic, including the ageing population and the ratio of people in work and out of work? What are this Government doing to address that trend and to address the immigration trend, because that is adding to the cost of our economy?

How will we be able to increase defence spending? The Chief of the General Staff has recently said that this country could well be directly involved in a war within the lifetime of this Parliament. We will have to spend more on defence, as well as controlling the rest of the public sector. It is many decades since health, education and welfare started swamping out every other kind of

expenditure in the Government. If we are to survive as a country, we will have to address these very damaging long-term trends.

**Alex Ballinger:** Will the hon. Member give way?

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I am just drawing to a close.

What is the true cost of decarbonisation? That is something that the Government are hopelessly naive about. It is as though investing in decarbonisation is somehow a get-out-of-jail-free card, and everybody's bills will start to come down, but anyone involved in the industry will say that that is not the case. The need to dynamise our zombie economy is still there and being made worse by the burdens that this Government have inflicted on us. How will we re-industrialise our economy when deglobalisation has taken away the opportunity to import all the cheap things that we used to make, but no longer do? Those are the real strategic challenges, and the Budget does not begin to address them.

2.10 pm

**Richard Baker (Glenrothes and Mid Fife) (Lab):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak about how this Budget is fixing the foundations of our economy, which could not be more important for my constituents. I listened with interest to the remarks of the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) about the last Labour Government. Let us remember that the last Labour Government lifted 900,000 children out of poverty. What costs to our economy are caused by poverty, rather than getting people into work and securing for them the quality of life and living standards that they deserve?

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Richard Baker:** Of course, because I have just mentioned the hon. Gentleman in my speech.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** One hon. Member complained about food banks. Actually, food banks started under Tony Blair. I think that we need to share these problems and concerns. We need to understand each other's different approaches to economic policy if we are eventually to have a solid approach to reviving the economy of this country, but I am afraid that this Budget does not do that. There will be more poor people as a result of this Budget.

**Richard Baker:** I thank the hon. Member for his intervention. In Scotland we say, “Facts are cheils that winna ding.” The fact of the matter is that 900,000 additional children were lifted out of poverty by the previous Labour Government, and the rise and use of food banks under this Administration has been exponential—to the extent that, now we as a Government are dealing with food banks running out of food because of the level of poverty that we have inherited. This Budget will fix the foundations of our economy. It will redistribute wealth, tackle poverty and invest in growth. That is why we can look forward to what will be achieved by this Government, thanks to the decisions taken by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Anybody looking at events in Scotland will see that my constituents have suffered from two Governments failing to deliver on investment and failing to deliver on

growth. Their mismanagement of the public finances stands in sharp contrast to the measures that have been bought forward by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who has taken some challenging decisions on taxation, to ensure that there is no return to austerity and that we can invest in growth.

The Budget gives us the chance to move on from the reckless incompetence of the Tories here in Westminster and of the SNP in Holyrood. It is a chance to move on from the catastrophic mini-Budget of Liz Truss—a mini-Budget that caused so much damage to my constituents. The hon. Member for East Grinstead and Uckfield (Mims Davies) conjured up images of Halloween in her speech, but the economic nightmare was caused by the Conservative party, and our constituents paid the price in their living standards.

Those of us in Scotland cannot underestimate the impact of the shambolic stewardship of Scotland's finances by the SNP. It is one thing for the SNP to crash the finances of its own party, but quite another to crash the finances of our country. The SNP Government have completely mishandled contracts for much-needed new ferries. Other public sector projects have been overspent by millions, while others have been delayed or cancelled. They have also failed to spend hundreds of millions of pounds which had been allocated to them in structural funds. Funding for our local authorities has been slashed. The housing budget has been cut, and the Institute of Fiscal Studies assessed that the Scottish health budget faced a real-terms cut under the SNP in this financial year.

While we know that this Budget is fixing the foundations, so that we can deal with the reckless approach of the previous Government here, the SNP cannot simply blame everyone else for its own mistakes, as, yet again, it has attempted to do over the past 24 hours.

**Mims Davies:** The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech, not least because he has mentioned both me and my constituency, so I am grateful to him for that. On that point about the SNP blaming everyone else, he has just blamed the SNP and then blamed us. While he is looking at all this guilt, he should consider the merry-go-round operating under Labour with its jobs for the boys. Perhaps he might like to address that issue.

**Richard Baker:** I think the guilt should be felt by those on the Conservative Benches. The fact is that we have inherited a £22 billion black hole in the country's finances, and that has been assessed independently by the OBR. That is how blame should be apportioned.

I was talking about matters in Scotland, which I am sure will be of interest to the hon. Lady and her constituents. The Scottish Fiscal Commission stated that much of the pressure in Scotland comes from the Scottish Government's own decisions on cuts in its last Budget. I very much welcome the additional £3.4 billion that will come to Scotland and our public services through this Budget. It is vital that the SNP learns from its mistakes, and undoes the damage that it has caused. I do not know where the SNP Members are today. Perhaps they are travelling back to Scotland in their own party campervan.

My constituents cannot put up any longer with lengthening waits for hospital treatment, with finding it so difficult to register for an NHS dentist, and with a

housing crisis where so many people do not have the homes they need or cannot get a foot on the housing ladder. In my constituency, there can also now be no excuse for further delays by the Scottish Government in constructing a new health centre for Lochgelly. The SNP has promised to deliver this for over a decade, but has failed to do so.

In contrast, this Budget sets out a different vision for our public services. This Government will invest in homes and in our schools. Having worked with the disability charity, Enable, prior to taking my seat in this place, I am delighted with the announcements on social care and special educational needs. It is astonishing to hear some Members talk about our plans for wages in the social care sector. They seem to imply that our hard-working social care staff, who play such a huge role in our communities, should not get fair pay for that vital role that they carry out for us and for our loved ones.

The pension triple lock is protected. Representing a constituency where there are so many former miners—849 members of the mineworkers' pension scheme are living in Glenrothes and Mid Fife—I am delighted that this Government are ensuring that more than £1 billion owed to them will be returned, which will be an average of £29 a week more for each member, as my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Gregor Poynton) highlighted in his excellent maiden speech—one of so many excellent maiden speeches from Labour Members.

As many of my constituents benefit from this Government's ending an injustice of the past, more can look to investment in the future. The Budget is redistributive, but it is a Budget for growth, too, boosting public investment by £100 billion over the next five years. A total of £125 million is immediately being invested in GB Energy, headquartered in Aberdeen. It was extraordinary, Madam Deputy Speaker, that when it came to the vote this week, SNP Members failed to back the establishment of GB Energy. Far from standing up for Scotland, the ones who were actually here were sitting on their hands.

Renewables is a key and growing part not only of the Scottish economy, but of our local economy in Glenrothes and Mid Fife. Along with GB Energy focused on establishing Scotland and the UK as a green energy powerhouse, the National Wealth Fund opens up the potential for us to invest in our renewables infrastructure. As we seek to secure a long-term future for the Methil fabrication yard in my constituency, investment in the facilities of that yard would ensure that the 200-strong skilled workforce can play a vital role in taking forward our ambitions for our renewables sector.

The election of Anas Sarwar as Scotland's First Minister will be required for my constituency to reap all the rewards that the Budget has set the foundations for, but with £3.4 billion extra for Scotland in it, as the Scottish Trades Union Congress has said:

"The task now falls to the Scottish Government to take the decisions needed to invest, through progressive taxation, into our communities and public services. The Westminster blame game is finished."

This is a Budget for our public services, and a Budget to boost investment. This is a Budget for Scotland.

2.20 pm

**Dr Neil Hudson** (Epping Forest) (Con): May I join you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and colleagues across the House in congratulating the hon. Members for Ribble

[Dr Neil Hudson]

Valley (Maya Ellis), for Livingston (Gregor Poynton), for Dagenham and Rainham (Margaret Mullane) and for Worcester (Tom Collins) on their fantastic maiden speeches?

We have heard that the Budget was about fixing the foundations of our economy, as both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have claimed. If that is the case, many of my constituents in Epping Forest will be asking what exactly will be built on those foundations, and they may rightly be concerned that some of that building may well be on top of our precious greenbelt. At its heart, when fixing the foundations is promised but there is no coherent or evidence-based vision to underpin it, a misguided Budget like this one is what we end up with.

Before I go into further details, I must acknowledge some of the announcements in the Budget that I welcome. The freeze on fuel duty, maintained for years by our Conservative Government, is very welcome for my constituents, who no doubt have faced real worries about paying extra at the pump. I very much welcome the increase in SEND funding, which is so important to support our young people with special educational needs. A penny off a pint is welcome, but it is small beer for landlords, who will struggle to pass it on when they are hit by the national insurance rises for employers and the reductions in business rates relief. Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete has unfortunately blighted a number of schools across my constituency, so the Labour Government honouring the previous Conservative Government's commitment to funding rebuilding is most welcome, and I hope that we see action soon.

**Chris Vince:** I welcome his welcoming—I am sorry to repeat the word—of investment in schools that have RAAC. Does he agree that the time for the Government to spend money on repairing those schools was when Essex county council recognised the issue of RAAC in our schools in 2012? Had the Conservative Government done so, we would not be in the situation that we are in now.

**Dr Hudson:** The situation with RAAC has built up over many years, under Governments of all colours. It is important that we stand together to sort out the problem as soon as possible so that the educational experience of our young people, and the staff who teach them, is improved. I welcome the fact that we will make progress on that, and I hope that we see action soon in schools such as Buckhurst Hill community primary and Roding Valley high, which I visited just a couple of weeks ago. I discussed these very issues with staff and students.

Unfortunately, however, there are a number of areas in the Budget where putative short-term gain has been prioritised for little to nothing in the long term. With the NHS facing pressures, it is one thing to provide day-to-day funding, but it would be very short-sighted to suspend or withdraw funding for key infrastructure projects that would tackle the long-term issues facing the NHS. The rebuilds of Whipps Cross hospital in Leytonstone and the Princess Alexandra hospital in Harlow, promised by the previous Conservative Government and now put on hold by Labour, are so important for my constituents' healthcare needs—not just today or tomorrow but in the long term. While I am pleased that

the Government have listened to me by honouring the Conservative commitment on the new community diagnostic centre coming to St Margaret's hospital in Epping, I urge the Government to fulfil those much-needed hospital rebuilds to address the healthcare needs of my constituents and of neighbouring constituents, including the constituents of the Health Secretary.

**Chris Vince:** I thank the hon. Member for giving way on two occasions. I would not normally intervene on a speech twice, but he referred to a hospital in my constituency: the Princess Alexandra. Although he and I may have political differences, I welcome the opportunity to talk about the Princess Alexandra hospital as often as possible. Does he recognise that part of the delay has been caused by the funding not being there for the new Princess Alexandra hospital, and does he recognise the work that I have done in lobbying the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, who has committed to a new hospital but recognises the challenges, because the funding was just not provided for by the previous Government?

**Dr Hudson:** I thank the hon. Member, who is my neighbour, for his intervention. We have to get on with rebuilding the Princess Alexandra and Whipps Cross, and we need to do it quickly.

I also urge the Government to listen to my constituents' concerns about the introduction of VAT on independent school fees. This tax on education impacts not only 2,000 pupils in my constituency at independent schools but our excellent local state schools. Some families will unfortunately have to move their children midway through the school year, or in the next year, to some of these fantastic schools, some of which are already oversubscribed, impacting class sizes. Independent schools provide a social good in my constituency and right across the country, providing access to high-quality facilities, and providing access bursaries. For many parents, independent schools are a choice borne out of hard work and sacrifice. For some, they are the best way their children with special educational needs can be supported, amid the difficulties and delays found in the process of receiving and delivering an education, health and care plan. Once again, the supposed short-term gain comes at the long-term expense of our children's future, and the Government must look again at reversing that punitive measure.

Unfortunately, harming aspiration flows not just through that education tax but in the measures that affect the everyday lives of the working people the Labour Government claim to speak for—if they have finally worked out who “working people” are. If someone strives to own their own business, they will be forced to pay increased employer national insurance contributions for having that aspiration. Business owners will have their business rates relief cut. People who rely on the bus to get to work or appointments will be penalised by the bus fare cap increase from £2 to £3. We Conservatives introduced the £2 bus fare cap, which helps people in urban and rural communities alike, and we promised to deliver it for the whole of this Parliament. The Labour Government have callously ripped up that lifeline bus ticket.

**Andy MacNae:** Will the hon. Member give way?

**Dr Hudson:** No, I am going to carry on. For pensioners aspiring to live in dignity in their retirement, this Labour Government have taken away their winter fuel payment. That is just immoral.

Let me say a couple of words about national security. It is deeply disappointing that the Government are not heeding calls to commit to spending 2.5% of GDP on defence now, when we really need to show our allies, and indeed our adversaries, where we stand. Nationally, it seems that another area of the Government's lack of vision is food security and biosecurity. Food security is national security, and biosecurity is national security. Over the last five years, agriculture and biosecurity have faced a seismic shift as we have navigated our departure from the EU. This was an opportunity that our previous Government seized, with environmental land management schemes to ensure that farmers are rewarded for feeding us, while protecting our precious environment, and the border target operating model to keep our food industry safe from the biosecurity risks that pose a threat to both animal and human health.

The last thing that the sector needed was to learn that it will not get the stability and support of investment that is so desperately needed. To state in the Budget document that farm schemes and flood defence funding will be reviewed is no way to treat our farmers and rural communities. We have heard a lot today about agricultural property relief, the changes to which could devastate our farming sector, risking the decimation of the sector that we rely on to feed us and support our environment. The impact of the policy on family farms, the tenanted sector and our food security will be untold. Families have had their succession planning turned on its head, and that inheritance tax pressure will have profound impacts on people's mental health. Farming communities face huge challenges from shock events such as floods and animal disease outbreaks, and chronic pressures of finance and rural isolation. These are people who we know are at higher risk of mental health issues, and tragically suicide as well. I say that as a veterinary surgeon—a profession with similar risk factors. Gallingly, this policy decision has broken the promises that Labour made to our farming communities.

The opportunity has likewise been lost in the Budget to invest in the frontline of our defence against biosecurity risks—the Animal and Plant Health Agency, the A-team of our national biosecurity. Its headquarters in Weybridge, Surrey needs an urgent and full redevelopment, as outlined by the National Audit Office report a couple of years ago. With biosecurity threats such as African swine fever afflicting livestock in Europe, avian influenza not gone away, and bluetongue virus bubbling away in this country, a full funding of the headquarters in Weybridge is now more urgent than ever. We cannot afford the devastation that biosecurity threats such as foot and mouth disease or African swine fever could wreak on our economy, our farmers, our food industry and rural mental health if we are not firing on all cylinders against these threats.

This Budget's claim to fix the foundations falls short in meeting the everyday needs of the people of Epping Forest and of people throughout the United Kingdom. This short-termist Budget with a lack of evidence-based decision making will harm our country in the long term. An urgent rethink and reversal is needed from those on the Treasury Bench. I and my Conservative colleagues will stand up for our constituents, who will suffer from this anti-aspirational and promise-breaking Labour Budget.

2.31 pm

**Frank McNally** (Coatbridge and Bellshill) (Lab): I start by commending Labour Members for such wonderful maiden speeches this afternoon.

I am proud to support this historic Budget. Our new Labour Government are working tirelessly to deliver the change that my constituents in Coatbridge and Bellshill need, and this Budget represents an important change—an important step towards fixing the foundations and repairing the damage caused by 14 years of economic mismanagement and fiscal vandalism by the previous Government.

The scale of that challenge is immense—public services have been pushed to breaking point, wages have been stagnant for far too long, child poverty is on the rise and too many people in my constituency are forced to work multiple jobs just to make ends meet.

In Scotland we have had the double whammy of two bad Governments. Just like the Tories, the SNP has decimated our public services, pushed our NHS to the brink and forced Scots to pay more to get less, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife (Richard Baker) highlighted in his excellent speech. The Budget offers significant support to my constituents and provides record funding for Scotland. On top of the £47 billion block grant, the level of investment in public spending outlined by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will generate an extra £3.4 billion in Barnett consequential, resulting in the strongest settlement yet for Scotland in the devolution era. Sadly, the SNP Government have not yet worked out whether to love or loathe this Budget, and as my hon. Friends pointed out earlier, SNP Members are not here to tell us. As the Scottish Trades Union Congress highlighted yesterday, however, the blame game is now over—the SNP Government have the money and they must act to address the challenges impacting Scots.

The Budget has also addressed a number of fundamental injustices, from the infected blood scandal to Horizon and—critical for me—the mineworkers pension scheme. Representing mining communities and as a member of the coalfields parliamentary group, I wholly welcome the ending of this injustice and the delivery of Labour's manifesto commitment of more than £1 billion to ex-miners. For the retired miners in the scheme in my community, that will mean an increase of £29 a week in their pension. Ending that scandalous injustice has not been a short or easy undertaking, and I commend my predecessors and all hon. and right hon. Members who have fought on this for many years before my time in this place.

I also commend the Government for their commitment to ensuring that £20 million will come to Coatbridge in my constituency through the towns fund. The previous Government announced that plan, but their fiscal irresponsibility put it in doubt. I am grateful to Ministers for taking the time to meet me to discuss these matters and delighted that the £20 million for Coatbridge is now costed and will be delivered by this Labour Government. That will allow our town board to help develop and deliver a long-term local plan, support business and secure investment.

I am also delighted that the Budget delivers a pay rise for 200,000 Scots. Increasing the national minimum wage by 6.7% and, critically, starting the journey to end age discrimination banding for 18 to 20 year-olds by

[Frank McNally]

increasing their wages by 16.3%, are key steps, as is the 18% increase for under-18s and apprentices. Young people are not immune to the challenges linked to the cost of living crisis and often struggle just to make ends meet. It is unfair that, for so many of them, their work—their labour—is valued less than that of their peers, simply because of their age. It has to end, and this Labour Budget has set us on a course to eradicating it.

This is the first Budget of this new Labour Government, and it lays the foundations to deliver the change our constituents voted for. Serving in Government is a privilege: it is an incredible honour that no party should take for granted. It is clear from the Conservatives' actions that their party failed to live up to that solemn duty; they drove our country, our constituents, down a dirt path of decline until they ran out of road. They tried to mask their failings with fantasy economics and imaginary money pots, and it now falls to this Government to clean up their mess.

It is not the only mess that Labour will have to clean up. The SNP Government are equally hapless, and we are counting down the days to 2026 to deliver the change we need in Scotland too.

After 14 years of failure, our Labour Government have set a new course—to restore public finances, transform public services, tackle poverty and raise living standards. This is an honest Budget, which does not cynically shrink from the challenges, but seeks to tackle them head on—a Budget that will deliver the change that Scotland needs, that Coatbridge and Bellshill needs, and it should be welcomed across the House.

2.37 pm

**Bobby Dean** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The first Budget of a new Government is always significant, but one can rarely have been set in such tricky circumstances. This one comes following a series of major shocks—some of them external and unpredictable, as Opposition Members have said, such as the covid pandemic and the energy crisis, but some of them down to policy decisions, such as the Brexit deal and the mini-Budget. It also sits in the long shadow of the financial crisis and over a decade's worth of cuts to public services. Growth has been stubbornly sluggish, the cost of living has eroded people's wages, and as tax as a proportion of our national income has ticked up, the capability of many to contribute more has diminished. The result of all of this is that our public services are under strain, our public finances are under strain and the British public are under strain. It is in that context that I try offer a constructive opposition to the Budget today—pointing out what I agree with, what I do not and where I think it can be better.

Healthcare is the biggest issue for my constituents, so I will start there. At first glance it looks like we have a big injection of cash into the NHS. That is a relief. I have previously warned about the counterproductive nature of further austerity, and I am cautiously optimistic that we might escape it in this area. But the rate at which the cash is being injected, alongside the speed at which it drops off, presents questions about how well it can be spent and what the hangover from this sugar rush might be. That requires further scrutiny.

On capital expenditure more broadly, I am glad that we are waking up to the real calculation that needs to be made by seeking to borrow to invest in vital infrastructure.

I made my maiden speech on Second Reading of the Budget Responsibility Bill, and I took that opportunity to encourage a change to the fiscal rules. That is exactly the kind of geekery that you will get from me, Madam Deputy Speaker, now that I sit on the Treasury Committee. Next week, I will go into more detail on “persnuffles”—PSNFL, or public sector net financial liabilities—and so on, but I will spare the House of that today. Overall, I am pleased to see a move in that direction.

I say “overall” because in my maiden speech, I used the example of rebuilding my local hospital as the perfect no-brainer project that could be unlocked by greater willingness to borrow to invest—St Helier hospital is older than the NHS itself, and some parts of the estate are literally crumbling and desperately need investment in major works and a new building—so I was disappointed that we did not even receive greater assurances about the progression of that project. I hope that the Health Secretary will soon return to the Chamber with further announcements.

The other big gap in the Chancellor's Budget was on social care. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey) said yesterday, it is still undeniably

“the elephant in the...waiting room.”

Without addressing social care, any investment in the NHS will be fundamentally flawed. Billions of pounds will pour in, but it will be undermined by the failure to get people who would be better treated at home out of hospitals. Of course, that has a knock-on impact on local authorities. I fear that the £600 million put forward yesterday to support councils on social care will be spread too thinly, especially when factoring in the impact of the national minimum wage and employer NICs, so I ask the Government to consider extending the public sector exemption to the care sector. The Budget means that councils that are already on the brink are going to have to make some pretty unpalatable cutbacks just to survive. It means that the mismatch between what taxpayers pay and the local services they receive will get worse. I hope that we get much greater clarity next year on local government funding.

My final point on the NHS relates to its potential to get our economy going again. Far too many people are economically inactive because of ill health. That places a huge strain on our welfare budget, and if we are honest, we do not really have enough data on what is driving it. I am worried that the Labour Government think that it is because we have suddenly become a nation of shirkers. There was tough talk yesterday of carrying over the Tory plan to get more punitive on work capability assessments. Chasing down benefit cheats might go down well with some newspapers, but that kind of demonisation of the sick is both shameful and ineffective.

Let me point to just one example. My dad, a proud scaffolder for most of his life, has worked his socks off from Monday to Saturday every week, but he is now in his late 50s, and that kind of work is not easy. He started having trouble walking and has had to stop work, and it took months to get a diagnosis. When he finally found out that he had a hip problem, the NHS basically told him to come back in a year, because it could not treat him until then. He asked what he was supposed to do about work, and was told that he would have to sign off sick. Do Members think that my dad

enjoys doing that? He hates it; he is a proud working man being denied the opportunity to work. If the NHS could fix him today, he would be back in work tomorrow. Here is my big bet: there are far more people like my dad than there are the benefit cheats that Labour focused on yesterday. So let us have some compassion and focus on what will really get people back into work.

Before I bring my remarks to a close, I will touch on two big elements that I plan to take up further on the Treasury Committee. The first is tax. I want the country to start a more honest conversation about tax. I know what some Labour Members will be thinking, but the Liberal Democrats set out in our manifesto £27 billion-worth of tax and spend proposals, because we knew that public services desperately needed the cash injection. The Labour manifesto proposed only £5 billion in tax rises, but yesterday we were presented with an increase of £40 billion. I am willing to accept that a black hole was left behind, but those numbers do not add up. The Conservatives proposed tax cuts in their manifesto, and at the previous Budget, but it turns out that they were not based on realistic figures either. Tax is always something to be “hit by” in politics—always deemed a punishment instead of a contribution. It leaves in tatters the debate about what a fair distribution of tax is, and trust in politics plummets as a result. We all need to do much better.

My other point is about growth. We have had months of hearing this Budget being pitched as one of growth, yet the OBR thinks that its effect will be broadly flat—at least over the forecast period. The conversation around how to achieve growth must get much more serious. Growth in GDP—a very specific measure—should not be the sole way in which we evaluate the country’s success, and someone who believes that it should must at least recognise that growth has not only a rate, but a direction, and it up to us, in this place, to set that direction.

Finally, I was advised recently that the key way to critique the Budget is to look out for the big numbers in the Red Book that the Chancellor did not mention. Well, I will save that, but I will highlight a small number that the Chancellor did not mention: £40 million to trial a kinship care allowance. I moved into the care of my grandparents as a teenager, and they would have been immensely grateful for that support, so I welcome the trial and hope that it is a roaring success.

2.45 pm

**Mrs Sarah Russell** (Congleton) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Bobby Dean) for his comments about kinship allowance, which I will address in due course, because it is helpful when we have constructive opposition. However, he talks about the difficulty of obtaining NHS treatment, and I remind him of the five years that the Liberal Democrats spent working alongside the Conservatives to bring about cuts to our NHS, the police and many other vital services. I will leave it at that.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on the Budget, which is clearly the start of a new chapter towards making Britain better off. I can see clearly how it links into our Labour target of securing the highest sustained growth in the G7, as well as into our other missions of having an NHS fit for the future and breaking down barriers to opportunity. It is clear

that there is a strategy for achieving aspiration and providing people with support. Those two things can truly combine to make our country greater.

One measure that will affect my Congleton constituency is the work that will now continue at pace for hospitals affected by the RAAC—reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete—crisis, including Leighton hospital in Crewe, which serves many of my constituents. The hospital still has paper notes; it does not have an electronic records system. The major reason for that is that it has spent over £100 million in the past few years just on propping up its walls. That kind of failure spend to sustain the hospital’s most basic physical infrastructure means that the investment to make the NHS fit for the future cannot be made. I look forward to being part of a Government who enable us do the sort of forward-thinking work in which we stop making short-term decisions that simply prevent people from having access to the care that they need—we must work in a rational manner. People in the NHS, including doctors and nurses in my constituency, will be grateful that we are moving in that direction.

The NHS has been broken, but the Budget will begin to fix it. Our social care system has also faced significant challenges in recent years. Again, this Budget begins to fix that. Alongside the £600 million in grant support for local authorities, I am so pleased to hear about the £86 million increase in the disability facilities grant, which will enable us to support 7,800 more home adaptations. As I think we all know, people want to stay in their homes for as long as possible, and it is our duty as a Government to facilitate that.

Similarly, I am pleased to see the 4.1% uplift in the state pension through the triple lock, which will enable more than £475 per year to be given to many pensioners across the country. We are also going to see the biggest ever cash increase in the earnings threshold for carer’s allowance, meaning that many more thousands of carers in my constituency can increase their income—which is so important for people’s dignity—and many more people will be able to access carer’s allowance for the first time. I also want to say an enormous thank you to the kinship carers in my constituency: those grandparents, older siblings, aunts and uncles, extended family members and family friends who are looking after children. They will welcome the announcement of £44 million to support kinship and foster carers, including through the new kinship allowance trial.

Speaking of children, I turn now to schools. Schools across the country are crumbling. RAAC schools specifically have hit the headlines, but there are many other fundamental structural problems in many of our schools—schools that were decimated overnight by the previous Government’s scrapping of the Building Schools for the Future programme. This Budget will begin to fix those problems, with £1.4 billion allocated to delivering classrooms that children can learn and thrive in, and a £2.3 billion increase in the core schools budget to support the recruitment of 6,500 new teachers. It will also enable us to properly fund pay rises for the public sector, which are so important for retaining the experienced teachers on whom we rely. I am delighted that £1 billion of that £2.3 billion increase will go towards fixing our special educational needs system and systems for disabled children within education. It is so important that we get that right: parents in my constituency and their children are desperately reliant on us for it.

[Mrs Sarah Russell]

Our childcare system has also been struggling, which has had huge implications for parents' ability to go to work. This Budget will begin to fix that by allocating £1.8 billion to continue the expansion of Government-funded childcare, which will help people to stay in, and return to, work. More than a quarter of children in my constituency of Congleton live in relative poverty after housing costs. The roll-out of free breakfast clubs in primary schools is a very welcome measure to help struggling families. Moreover, the increases in the national minimum wage will have an enormous impact on families and on child poverty. Some 70% of children in this country who are growing up in poverty live in a family with at least one working parent. It is low wages that are causing those problems, and I am very pleased that we are addressing them.

Our roads have also been broken by 14 years of austerity, and again, this Budget will begin to fix them. The investment of £500 million to fix an additional 1 million potholes per year is a good start. Drivers in my constituency will welcome that investment, as well as the continued fuel duty freeze.

Of course, businesses will welcome many of the steps in the Budget as well. While we are increasing the national living wage to support workers, we are also supporting small businesses through an increase in the employment allowance, fairer business rates, start-up loans, growth hubs and the new national wealth fund. Small businesses in my constituency will also welcome the funding the Chancellor has committed to tackling shoplifting, which affects all of our shopping bills and is worth billions of pounds to the economy every year. Shopkeepers in my constituency recently told me and the Cheshire police and crime commissioner, Dan Price, that they have given up on trying to report shoplifting in many instances because it is simply not a good use of their time. I am so pleased that we will begin to address this issue.

We are beginning to get the fundamentals right. Under the last Government, there were so many counter-productive cuts that undermined our national productivity. This Budget does not stand alone as a one-off event. Rather, it is part of a coherent set of plans to ensure that our public services are reformed and that we are able to develop cross-departmental working in government and deliver what working people need to have a good quality of life, an NHS that is there when they need it and work that pays. I look forward to working with businesspeople and families in my constituency to ensure that we get the delivery of those plans right over time, but right now, this Budget looks like a solution that will begin to fix the NHS and social care; rebuild hospitals and schools; fix the SEND system; and rebuild confidence in our public services, in the economy and in our future as a country.

2.53 pm

**Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs Russell). It was enlightening for me to listen to her because she listed a huge array of things on which the Government are now going to be spending a lot more money. They are all very good causes of absolute benefit to the people of our country. The one problem I have listening to her, and to all the Labour Members, is that we do not

have any money left: we have spent it all. We had to spend half a trillion pounds on the pandemic, but I notice that no one has mentioned that. We are, in effect, running on tick. We are living beyond our means, we are spending money we do not have, and all we are doing, laudable though it may be to spend the money we are discussing today, is handing huge debts to future generations.

I have to remind Labour Members that every Labour Government we have ever had in my lifetime has left this country with higher debt, more unemployment and an economy in a worse state. I would also remind them that it was in 1979, after years of failed socialist government, that we finished up having to rebuild the economy under a Prime Minister who had the determination to do what was right for our country, and those economic reforms led to years of prosperity.

**Andy MacNae:** It sounds as though the hon. Member is giving up on Britain. He seems to be saying that there is no point in trying to find a better future for ourselves because there is no money left, and the previous Labour Government left no money. Would he recognise that the level of debt left in this country at the end of the recent Conservative Administration is twice what was left by the Labour Government in 2010?

**Andrew Rosindell:** The hon. Member forgets about the pandemic and its associated costs. The reality is that we have to create the wealth before we spend it. For many years I have heard Labour Members talk about how to spend money. I very rarely hear how we actually create the wealth we need to spend on our public services, and that is where it all goes wrong.

**Andy MacNae:** Will the hon. Member give way?

**Andrew Rosindell:** No, I will not give way.

The Chancellor yesterday painted a dire picture of our country's future. Under Labour, it is not the economy that is booming but the size of the state, with an ever-increasing burden of taxation on working people. Under this Government, it is not the businessmen in my constituency of Romford who are being supported with the future success of their enterprise but the climate alarmist, with a public energy company that will not even produce any energy. How sensible is that? It is not the young family in areas such as Collier Row or the pensioner in Rush Green—both in my constituency—who are being supported by, for example, a decrease in stamp duty or help with energy payments, but, of course, the union bosses who are able to deliver over-inflated pay rises to the public sector, and the private sector is once again paying for that.

Despite the Government's talk of growth, this Budget is preparing us for the return of the dark days of the 1970s, with hard-working people paying the price. Indeed, the Government are so lacking in aspiration for this country that they want the Office for Budget Responsibility not only to mark their work but, it seems to me, to do their homework completely. They are even gifting the OBR more powers, as was outlined in the King's Speech.

In my view, Britain's potential is far greater than a high-tax, low-growth and dysfunctional big state. Far from my "giving up on Britain", as the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Andy MacNae) said—quite

the opposite—I love this country, I believe in this country, and I hate to see what socialism has done to this country over the years. Labour Governments always end up in a worse situation than when they started, and Conservative Governments always have to come in and pick up the pieces, and restore the economy back to prosperity and vibrancy again. In five years' time, I am sure we will have to do the same.

It is now clear that, under this Labour Government, the British people face a tyranny of taxation. Not content with the record-breaking tax burden that already exists, Labour is adding to the load on the shoulders of hard-working people. Under Labour, it will be harder than ever to buy a property. The journey to work of my constituents in Romford who are lucky enough to own their own home is going to be even more expensive than it is already under the control of the Mayor of London, Mr Khan, with the rise in bus fares. Once they get to work, my constituents will have far less in their pay packet, because the increase in national insurance paid by employers will, of course, clearly be passed on to employees. It is nothing but a stealth tax by this supposedly transparent Labour Government, and it is job destroying. Businesses in my constituency have already been telling me that they will not be employing people because of this reckless increase in national insurance. My constituents, all our constituents, might even lose their jobs. *[Interruption.]* They will lose their jobs, as businesses struggle with the national insurance increase. The costs of that will be phenomenal, and the growth-crushing increase in capital gains tax will also have a big impact.

As if that was not enough, when someone sadly passes away, the Labour Government want to make it even harder for them to pass on what they have earned throughout their life to their loved ones, by expanding inheritance tax to pensions and so on. That is incredibly cruel. People pay tax throughout their life, and will pay more tax when they die. Is that really the kind of thing a Labour Government should be doing? It will harm a lot of families who would inherit but will not be able to because of the cash grab from this Budget.

I do not believe that the Government are pro-worker at all. They cannot even define what a worker is. Labour used to be the party of the state from cradle to grave. Now it seems to be the party of taxing my Essex constituents from cradle to grave and beyond. This has been a very Essex-weighted debate, with contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Epping Forest (Dr Hudson) and for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale), the hon. Member for Harlow (Chris Vince) and others. People in my county of Essex are very disillusioned by all this, because they are aspirational and hard-working. They are market traders and small business people. They will be devastated by all this. I warn Labour Members that they will find that out when they next knock on doors in their constituency.

As Margaret Thatcher warned us—*[Laughter.]* Well, she did rescue our country's economy; let's be honest about it. *[Interruption.]* She really did, and we are still benefiting today from the reforms that she introduced. As Margaret Thatcher said, any Government who impose high taxation are taking power away from the people and giving themselves power over the people. Of course taxation at some level is always necessary. It has to be in

place to support our nation's armed forces, to support families and protect pensioners, and for investment in necessary infrastructure and public services for the future. But what are the Labour Government doing with all the hard-earned money that the working people of this country have created? I think they will be spending billions of pounds on things that will go to waste.

**Chris Vince:** Does the hon. Gentleman not think that there was quite a lot of waste under the previous Government? There were dodgy personal protective equipment contracts that did not result in money being spent on PPE. Is that the sort of waste our Government should claw back?

**Andrew Rosindell:** I have to say that I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The last Government wasted a huge amount of money—*[Interruption.]* No, they did. No wonder we lost the election. But this is not a political point; this is about how we run the country effectively and efficiently. My hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex made a range of serious points about how we are going to survive as a country. We cannot keep spending money like this. It does not work, and future generations will suffer because of it. The last Government failed, but this Government are going way further. This is all simply unaffordable, and I worry about the future of our country if we cannot see where this will eventually lead.

The Labour Government are spending billions of pounds on a renewable energy company that will not produce any energy—another vanity project. They are spending billions of pounds on public sector wage hikes, and are pouring even more taxpayers' money into public services, with virtually no concrete productivity targets.

**Johanna Baxter** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that those pay rises will go to hard-working people who are themselves taxpayers?

**Andrew Rosindell:** Look, we have to live within our means. Of course I do not object to money being spent wisely and sensibly—it is the role of any Government to ensure that the money we spend goes where it is really needed in our country. The problem I have is that all this is unaffordable. We are about 100% of our GDP in debt. That is the highest that debt has been in our entire history. We cannot go on doing this. Eventually it will all come crashing down, and every hon. Member who let it happen without speaking out, as I am doing today, will have to take responsibility when future generations have to pick up the pieces. We cannot afford the debt we are getting into.

If hard-working people are being taxed, they rightly expect the money to be put to good use, to boost infrastructure. We should focus on local services and economic growth, not ideological consumption. Again, the people of Romford and throughout the borough of Havering and the county of Essex will be rightly outraged that there is so much unfairness, especially in local government funding. The funding formula has not been addressed in the Budget, from what I can see. That is a serious issue in the London borough of Havering, where my constituency is based. Despite this being the greatest example of tax and spend that I can remember since I have been a Member of Parliament, nothing has been done to address that very serious problem.

[Andrew Rosindell]

The funding formula is unfair, outdated and discriminatory. It fails to address local demographic shifts. Local people, businesses and public services are the bedrock of our economy. They face acute financial pressures in my constituency. They deserve an ambitious programme of reform, so that the money we pay in can be spent on our local services, instead of us closing down libraries and facilities, which my council is sadly now doing—necessarily, because of a lack of funding. It is a question of priorities. My local council should not close libraries, but at the end of the day, we are not being funded fairly, and the Government need to address that. If local services are not provided, people will be angry and disillusioned, and local communities will be harmed.

I speak not only for Essex and the surrounding London boroughs, but for all hard-working people the length and breadth of this country when I say that the United Kingdom has no place being a high tax, low growth and low aspiration nation. If the Chancellor wants growth, I encourage her to look to nations whose economies are expanding much faster than ours is due to under the sluggish and rather depressing growth forecasts she outlined yesterday. The formula for some of those countries is the same, whether they are in north America, Asia or Europe: low taxes that give people back the money that is rightly theirs, policies that incentivise enterprise and growth in the economy, and a lean state with minimal regulation. Investment in infrastructure is critical, and truly local public services are vital to people. They also create a basis for private investment.

In Britain, cutting red tape and reaping the benefits of Brexit—we really should do that—will attract booming business and stimulate success. The mantra that the state should manage decline needs to be rejected. The British people deserve better than this. I encourage the Government to follow not the example of failed Labour Governments littered throughout history, but the nation-saving policies embarked on in 1979 by a Prime Minister who had a vision of a greater Britain and more prosperous United Kingdom.

We must pursue an agenda of low taxes, economic growth and an efficient state that improves the public services that look after the elderly and those truly in need. The people of this country do not want, and simply cannot afford, a return to red-blooded socialism that discriminates against hard-working people, decimates our economy, destroys jobs, curtails growth and restricts freedom. The British people need a small state that works, not a bloated state that holds our country back.

3.9 pm

**Mary Glendon** (Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), even though I fundamentally disagree with everything that he said. I know that he will take that in the right spirit. I congratulate all colleagues who made their maiden speeches. The speeches were fantastic and moving, and I wish them all a really wonderful time in this Parliament and, I hope, Parliaments to come.

Progressive Governments are judged on whether they deliver higher standards, and I welcome the direction of travel that our first woman Chancellor took yesterday.

It is good to hear that for the first time, the cost of living will be taken into account when calculating the national minimum wage. I also welcome the step towards a single adult wage rate, with 18 to 20-year-olds receiving a 16.3% increase. I hope that those kinds of revisions will continue. Those are valuable examples of the change that a Labour Government will make to low-income households.

A key feature of this Budget is that it can safeguard existing jobs in the north-east and help to create new well-paid jobs for the people I represent. One of the biggest sectors in our north-east industrial base is the offshore energy sector—that is, oil and gas companies that work in the North sea, and the associated supply chain. We are proud to have those jobs in my constituency, and we must anchor them here in the UK and avoid their being attracted overseas. Last year, in Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend, the offshore sector added £2 million in gross value added and supported thousands of jobs. That is just a snapshot from the region, where the sector contributed £416 million and more than 4,500 good jobs overall. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor recognises the reality: that oil and gas will be essential to our economy and for energy security for decades to come, especially given that if we misstep, we will simply have to rely on imports, which are more expensive, have a higher carbon footprint and do not deliver any tax yield.

This Government have committed to ensuring that the North sea is managed in a way that does not jeopardise jobs and continues to attract necessary investment, with the delivery of net zero and energy transition being an exciting prospect. A successful home-grown energy transition has the potential to deliver the economic growth that the country needs. I know that the oil and gas sector and its representative body, Offshore Energies UK, found yesterday's Budget encouraging. They are grateful for the positive engagement from the Secretary of State, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Exchequer Secretary over the summer. They recognise that the energy profit levy served a purpose, but the commitment to looking at unwinding it, and to finding a new permanent regime, can give companies and investors the confidence that they need to invest in our UK.

I look forward to helping Ministers succeed, but I will of course also hold them to account. I will also hold the industry to account on its commitment to support workers, deliver a fair transition and provide retraining and working standards for all. The trade unions are keen and willing to play their part. Offshore Energies UK estimates that with the right investment environment, UK offshore energy companies could invest £200 billion in home-grown energy this decade alone, supporting the UK to reach 50 GW of wind and 10 GW of hydrogen, reducing reliance on oil and gas, and allowing us to scale up to at least four carbon capture and storage clusters by 2030—an exciting prospect indeed.

Moving away from the economy and on to local government, I welcome the 6% real-terms increase in spending on SEND and alternative provision. The SEND system is broken. In my constituency, children have been held back from flourishing and reaching their true potential. The £865 million to help plug deficits is a movement in the right direction. I urge the Chancellor to build on that moving into the spending review in the spring.

Today, Longbenton councillor Karen Clark has been selected as Labour's candidate for the North Tyneside 2025 mayoral election. Karen welcomes the Chancellor's historic Budget and looks forward to promoting its promised investment for local government during her forthcoming campaign.

On social security, the reduction in the deductions cap will help to minimise the financial impact of debt repayments, with those benefiting keeping an extra £420 a year. It is a smart, fiscally neutral way to help reduce negative household budgets and raise living standards. However, the commitment to deliver the Conservative plans to reform the work capability assessment and to deliver the inherited savings has worried many with limited capability for work and work-related activity. I hope the House will be given time to examine and debate that when the proposals are outlined in greater detail.

As the chair of the responsible vaping all-party parliamentary group, I have concerns about the announced tax on vaping liquid from 2026. There are still 6 million smokers who have yet to make the switch to vaping, and a tax on vaping will only serve to discourage those smokers to quit. The vaping tax proposed by the Chancellor is unsustainably high, at 22p per ml of vape liquid. It will make the UK's tax one of the highest in Europe. The tax will also hurt working people throughout the north-east who rely on vaping to keep them off cigarettes. Currently, many stores sell vaping liquid for refillable devices for 99p. Under the Chancellor's proposals, that will increase by 267% to £3.64. Access to vaping liquids is not driving youth vaping—the Government are already looking to address that through the Tobacco and Vapes Bill. I fear that the tax on vapes will hurt people who have made the decision to switch from smoking to the less harmful alternative—a decision that has already saved the NHS tens of thousands of pounds per person.

Yesterday's Budget has renewed the hope of ordinary people that the future can be different—a Labour Budget for lower-income households, working people and children. Our public services can be rebuilt, living standards can begin to turn around, and our politics can deliver progress again.

3.17 pm

**Dr Scott Arthur** (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): It has been a real privilege to share the debate with so many maiden speeches this afternoon—something I did not expect. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribbles Valley (Maya Ellis) is not in her place just now, but I am sure her father would have been proud of her, as will her husband. I have a fantastic charity in my constituency called Dads Rock, which supports dads and gives them confidence. It sounds like her husband is a dad who rocks.

It has been remarkable that Margaret Thatcher has been invoked quite a few times. It is quite unusual for her name to be mentioned so many times in my presence. I grew up in Fife during the 1980s, and I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife (Richard Baker) would agree that the impact that she had there is still felt today. People still feel the impact of the rapid deindustrialisation of proud communities. I am sure that my hon. Friend has casework still about the impact of that.

It was emotional yesterday to hear the Chancellor deliver her fantastic speech. I am still a little hoarse today from all the emotion. This is the Budget our

country needs, and the IMF agrees, which is incredible. It was great news for Labour MPs to wake up to this morning—I expect colleagues from other parties were less happy. The chances of my being elected were always slim, but I promised those I met on the campaign trail that Labour would get our country back on track. Yesterday's Budget is proof that we are serious about that. We have spent the weeks since the election clearing up the mess which was left by others, but the Budget sets down the foundation for what we want to do next. It is transformative Budget. I cannot believe we are achieving so much in our first Budget, but it is only the start of a real change for our country.

The Budget will work for both the working people who call Edinburgh South West home, but also the young and retired people who deserve well-funded public services. The measures that we set out yesterday are a re-set, establishing the tone for the remainder of this Parliament and for the coming decade, not just five years. Gone are the irresponsible commitments, without plans to follow through, that we have been dealing with since the election. It feels like the grown-ups are now running the country.

We have a Budget that provides the stability to encourage growth and investment in our nation's infrastructure and our public services. After reading through the details of the Budget, it was clear that when my colleague Anas Sarwar said,

“Read my lips: no austerity under Labour”

he meant it. The Chancellor has delivered. The Budget will deliver for the people of Scotland, with a record-breaking £47.7 billion for the Scottish Government's budget in 2025-26. That has the potential to be entirely life changing not just for my constituents, but for people right across Scotland. The Chancellor yesterday proved that when Labour wins, Scotland wins, with the measures announced resulting in more investment per head of population in Scotland than in the rest of the UK.

The Scotland Office is now equipped with a budget for trade missions around the world, selling brand Scotland and bringing in new investment and custom to countless Scottish businesses. Some 200,000 of the lowest-paid Scots will also feel the benefit in their payslips. We will close the age banding on the living wage, which has always been unacceptable. The Budget has protected working Scots and has laid the foundations for a new era of investment and growth in Scotland, raising money from those with the broadest shoulders.

With all that in mind, I find it rather embarrassing that SNP Members talk with a straight face about this being an austerity Budget. It is almost as if they wrote their speech before they heard the Budget. It is quite curious. I can only guess—as others have commented, none of them are here today—that they are busy rewriting their lines and thinking about how they are going to respond. But I think a lot of people in Scotland will find it unacceptable that no SNP Members are here today to engage in this debate.

Is it not time, when the UK Labour Government have given the Scottish Government their largest ever funding settlement, that the SNP begins to take responsibility for its own mismanagement of Scotland's finances? In government, the SNP has wasted millions on pet projects rather than the services on which so many Scots rely. We have had ferries with painted

[Dr Scott Arthur]

windows. As I speak, a hospital in Edinburgh is being closed as an emergency action because of a lack of maintenance. This is not a small hospital. The Princess Alexandra Eye Pavilion caters for 1,400 out-patients per week and it has been closed almost overnight. It is a planned process, but one that has been forced. It is absolutely incredible and shameful.

In parallel with that, local authorities have been starved of cash and our towns and cities have found their public services decimated. On Tuesday, I met third sector groups in my constituency who were preparing to make staff redundant due to the pressures of SNP cuts to social care. At 10 past 12 yesterday, just as the Chancellor was getting ready to speak, I received a WhatsApp message from a GP serving one of the most deprived parts of my constituency. She described the cuts to social care services in Edinburgh as catastrophic and devastating. At quarter past 11 last night, I received an email from a GP making exactly the same points. The SNP will blame Westminster or howl austerity, but in reality that is mince—that is a Scottish phrase, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Scottish Government's own decisions are to blame for "much of the pressure" facing Scotland's finances. That is not just my view, but the considered view of the official economic forecaster in Scotland.

The Budget presents the Scottish Government with a choice. They can use the record funding to own the problems that they created and get our public services back on track, including the social care services I talked about. The only alternative to that is handing over power to Anas Sarwar in Scotland, because more guddle cannot be an option but I fear that that is what we are going to get. If the SNP is not up for that challenge, Scottish Labour is ready to step in. My constituents know more than most the impact of the SNP's cuts and mismanagement, because Edinburgh—Scotland's capital—has the worst-funded local authority in Scotland. With this additional funding, it is high time that the Scottish Government do the right thing and stop starving our council of the resources it needs. Councillor Cammy Day, Edinburgh's council leader, made that demand yesterday. Let us hope that the funding will be a lifeline to social care providers.

In 2026, Scottish voters will have the opportunity to elect a Scottish Labour Government that will work hand in hand with this UK Labour Government to continue to deliver for the people of Scotland. However, until then, we Scottish Labour MPs, and our colleagues at Holyrood and in council chambers, will hold the Scottish Government to account for how they choose to spend the additional funding. After all, I think we can all agree that the Scottish Government have not just needed more cash; they have needed to get better at spending it.

We saw yesterday what a Labour Chancellor can do to turn around the lives of working people, even in the face of a shocking legacy handed to us by the Conservatives. This Government have given the Scottish Government all the financial tools they need to succeed. Just imagine how truly transformative it would be if we had a Scottish Labour Finance Secretary working in partnership with a Labour Chancellor here in London. That is our goal.

3.26 pm

**Alex Ballinger** (Halesowen) (Lab): It has been a pleasure to listen to so many excellent maiden speeches this afternoon, and to hear so many colleagues saying such positive words about a Budget that I am excited to support.

Every single Member on these Labour Benches represents a mandate: a mandate we were given by the British people when they voted for change on 4 July. They did not just vote for Labour Members to sit on these Benches and continue the last Government's failed policies of austerity and decline; on 4 July, people voted for real change. I am delighted to say that this Budget has set us on a path that will change our country for the better. It begins the process of fixing the foundations of our broken economy, it sets in motion the investment needed to deliver change, and it remains steadfast that no working person will see higher taxes in their payslips.

The country knows that the Conservative party failed us with a cost of living crisis, a shoddy Brexit deal and a dreadful mini-Budget that fractured our economy, and working families in towns like Halesowen felt its failures hardest. People across my constituency have shared countless stories of their struggles to cope, with their bills going up, their wages stagnating and no help from the Government. The last Parliament was the first in modern history to leave living standards lower at its end than they were at its start.

People have been exasperated with our public services. They have watched relatives wait months and years for NHS treatment, seen their local services close, and seen the public infrastructure crumble around them. They were tired—tired of living under a Government that did not deliver on their commitments, tired of seeing our public services get worse year after year, and tired of waiting for a Government that would bring about genuine, lasting change.

Yesterday, I was proud to listen to the Chancellor as she set out the plan to change our country. I was delighted to hear her focus on fixing the foundations of our economy, on real investment in our public services and, rightly, on putting the burden on those with the broadest shoulders. With each announcement, I began piecing together what the Budget will mean for our community in Halesowen. It delivers a real difference for those most in need of help: a 6.7% increase in the national living wage, putting £1,400 more in the pockets of retail workers, pub staff and many others; an increase of the carer's allowance earnings limit to £196 a week—carers' charities in my constituency, such as We Love Carers, have said that that will make a vital difference to carers by allowing people on really low incomes to earn that little bit extra to support their families—and a £25 billion investment in our NHS, meeting our promise to bring waiting times down to no longer than 18 weeks, just as they were under the last Labour Government.

However, what I am most pleased by is the funding for our town centres and local communities. It pains me to say it, but our high streets have struggled in recent years—I have seen many independent shops close, and our community centres are really struggling—so I am delighted that the Government are providing £1 billion to support our high streets and communities, and the infrastructure that will support people across Halesowen. That includes £20 million to regenerate Halesowen town centre, and an additional £20 million to redevelop Haden Hill leisure centre in Cradley Heath. Both are really

important projects that were promised under the last Government, but no funding was provided, so I am delighted to see that this Government have made that available. People deserve better, and Halesowen deserves better. It is time for revitalisation, and these commitments will do just that.

This Budget sets a precedent, and this Government are laser-focused on delivering for our communities. It is a Budget for growth, a Budget for investment, a Budget for fair taxation, a Budget for workers and a Budget for stability. It is a Labour Budget, and I am proud to support it. It is a Budget that will change our country, and I am hopeful for the years ahead.

3.30 pm

**Graeme Downie** (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): I congratulate all those on this side of the House who have made their maiden speeches this afternoon. It has been absolutely fantastic to hear all those stories.

It has been a long 14 years since we had a Government and a Budget that will deliver for Scotland, the UK and working people. We have had 14 years of austerity, 14 years of chaos, seven Chancellors and 19 fiscal events, but not one of them delivered a thing. Opposition MP after Opposition MP—wherever they have gone—welcomed investment and said, “I want a new hospital; I want this and that,” but not one of them had an idea about how to pay for it. Yesterday, I was proud to sit and listen to a Chancellor who was being honest with the British people about the mess that was left, what we will spend, the improvements that we will make, and how we are going to pay for them.

That is what changed yesterday as we heard the first female Chancellor deliver the first Labour Budget in 14 years, and what a Budget it was. It boosted public investment by over £100 billion and maintained the fuel duty freeze and 5% cut, which are vital for families and small businesses in Dunfermline and Dollar, and across Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Alongside that, the Budget supported the take-up of electric vehicles and abolished non-dom tax loopholes, raising £12.7 billion. It increased, extended and reformed the energy profits levy, as we promised to do, and kick-started GB Energy, which is headquartered in Aberdeen, to deliver the clean energy and green jobs that we will need in the future. Despite GB Energy being described by Conservative Members as a vanity project, it will deliver the infrastructure that this country needs, which they failed to deliver in 14 years.

We have increased the employment allowance for small businesses to £10,500. As someone who used to run a small business, I know how well that will be received. We have preserved the state triple lock on pensions, which will see over 12 million pensioners gain up to £475 next year. We have provided an uplift of £2.9 million for the defence budget, while maintaining £3 billion in annual support for Ukraine for as long as it takes.

As has been mentioned by my hon. Friends, this UK Labour Government will deliver a total of £47.7 billion in Scotland—the largest settlement in the history of devolution. That includes an additional £1.5 billion for the Scottish Government this financial year, and an additional £3.4 billion next year.

**Andrew Rosindell:** It is a bonanza of expenditure; a lot of money is being spent. The hon. Gentleman said earlier that he would explain how it will be paid for. Just

for clarification, will he please explain where all this money is coming from and how we are going to pay off the debt in the long term?

**Graeme Downie:** I believe the Chancellor outlined all of that absolutely perfectly yesterday. I would never seek to improve on the performance of our fantastic Chancellor, from whom we heard just yesterday.

Whereas the rest of the UK has only had to endure 14 years of the Conservatives’ incompetence, we in Scotland have suffered even more. We have had 17 years of the SNP blaming the Tories for its own economic incompetence and decisions. We have had years of two failed Governments who have been content to play political games, rather than come to the help of the people of Scotland.

**Frank McNally:** My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Following yesterday’s Budget, there will be a significant increase in investment in further education, which is critical to delivering the skills revolution that we need. In Scotland, further education has been decimated by the SNP Government. Does he agree that they need to recognise the important steps taken by the Chancellor and follow suit?

**Graeme Downie:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. As I and other Members from Fife know, we are celebrating the 125-year anniversary of Fife College. I will attend a college dinner this week and I will make exactly that point to those attending. Further education is critical in providing the skills that Scotland needs, as I said yesterday during Scotland questions in relation to the defence sector. We need to ensure that the investment being provided by this Government is best used in Scotland to develop the skills that we need.

We have had years of two failed Governments but that time is coming to an end. It will truly end only in May 2026 when the people of Scotland have the opportunity to elect a Scottish Labour Government. But before the SNP exits stage right—although SNP Members seem to have exited the Chamber during this debate—I urge it to use the record funding wisely and start delivering for the people of Scotland.

The SNP Government must abandon their austerity programme of cuts to public services and a focus on their pet projects as they have gone along. They might be on their way out the door, but the least they owe the people of Scotland is not to leave the same kind of mess as their partners in constitutional distraction, the Tories, have left for the rest of the UK. That includes projects such as the Kincardine health centre in my constituency. Like the health centre mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes and Mid Fife (Richard Baker), that has been delayed by more than a decade after being promised by the SNP.

Alongside the good news, we heard the Chancellor outline the mess and legacy left after 14 years of Conservative Government, who made announcements with no funds allocated. Among the empty promises from the Conservative Members was the £500 million of cultural funding promised to the city of Dunfermline in my constituency. While it is absolutely clear that the blame for that lies with the previous Government, it is none the less disappointing for the city of Dunfermline that the Government have been forced to consult on

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and review the funding. Dunfermline is an old city and the historic capital of Scotland, but it was officially awarded city status only in 2022. It is a growing city, which has the potential to be the driving force for the economy of Scotland. To achieve that, however, we need the right investment and support.

As the consultation on cultural funding is under way, prior to the Budget, I also wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer asking for assistance and support to find a small amount of investment for the port of Rosyth in my constituency to enable a new, regular passenger and freight service between Scotland and the continent. With major local employers such as Mowi and Amazon UK in the area, a ferry service to Europe would further strengthen their position as major contributors to the Fife economy and provide the option of more environmentally friendly logistics by removing truck journeys from the road.

Both the previous UK Conservative Government and the current SNP Scottish Government have talked about supporting that project, but neither have been willing to make the necessary investment. Having being failed by the previous Government promising money that they did not have, will Ministers meet me and others behind these plans to find ways of perhaps funding that commitment?

Yesterday, we truly turned the page on 14 years of Tory austerity and have given the UK and Scotland the chance to grow and succeed again. I will be the proudest Member of Parliament to support this Budget, which fixes the foundations of our country and sets us on a path to prosperity and growth in the future.

3.38 pm

**Jim Dickson** (Dartford) (Lab): It is a privilege to rise as Dartford's first Labour MP for 14 years to welcome the first Labour Budget for 15 years. But before I do so, I pay tribute to those who have made their maiden speeches this afternoon; they have been inspiring and personal, and Members have talked about their journeys and lovingly about their constituencies. I thank Members for those, and congratulations on them.

Dartmouth, like much of the country, is at a crossroads after more than a decade of Conservative failure, with our economy stagnating and our public services broken and unable to be the safety net that my constituents need. Labour Members were elected on a promise of change, and yesterday's Budget delivers that with a hugely welcome focus on investment to get our economy moving, setting the foundations for growth and beginning to fix our schools, our hospitals and our broken roads.

It is astonishing to hear Conservative Member after Conservative Member say how they wish to see public services improved in their constituency, without willing any means to pay for it. The hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), for example, seems to want European levels of public service on American levels of taxation. That is not possible, but this Government are achieving European-level public services supported by European-level taxation, borne by those with the broadest shoulders.

The Chancellor is absolutely right that we must grow our economy. Nowhere is this truer than in the Thames estuary, which has the potential to be one of the UK's

engines of growth, with 1.3 million new jobs, 1 million new homes and £190 billion-worth of additional value added by 2050.

In this Parliament, I hope to work with MPs on both sides of the House and from across the estuary region, as well as with Ministers, to make real progress. Work is already under way on establishing an all-party parliamentary group on the Thames estuary, which will work with Ministers on the fair growth agenda set out by the Government-sponsored Thames Estuary growth board.

For the small number of people who have followed my short parliamentary career to date, it will come as no surprise to learn that I believe that a key shovel-ready piece of infrastructure, the lower Thames crossing, will be crucial to our investment in the estuary. Currently, we have only one road crossing of the Thames east of London, at Dartford—a single point of failure that can not only block crucial freight movement across the country but make the lives of Dartford residents a misery due to the gridlock. This project could start very quickly, with the planning process already undertaken and a delivery team already in place. In short order, it would create jobs across the local area and help us to unlock the largest bottleneck in the UK. I look forward to working with the Chancellor and her colleagues across Government to secure the necessary finance to get this project started.

Dartford is lucky to have a district general hospital at Darent Valley, where the staff work with dedication every day to support our local population. However, after 14 years of Conservative government, waiting lists are far too high and the accident and emergency unit lacks the capacity to see people quickly. The latest figures indicate that more than 26,000 residents are awaiting treatment, with more than a third waiting longer than 18 weeks. The Chancellor's announcement of £25 billion over two years for the NHS, to cut waiting times through extra elective appointments and additional capacity, should help to bring down these waiting lists.

The recent Darzi report on the NHS highlighted the need to be far more creative in how we keep people healthy over the long term by building prevention into the system. I hope that Ministers will recognise the opportunities for people to get involved in community activities that help them to lead more active, healthy lives, as emphasised in this Budget. There is more work to do on tackling health inequalities, as these opportunities are not evenly spread across the country.

On the subject of prevention, I particularly welcome the proposal to review the sugar tax, and to consider its extension to milk-based drinks. I would like to see this consideration extended to other products, including foods that are high in salt, fat and sugar. An obese nation cannot be a healthy nation.

I finish by touching on an area of personal importance to me. Six years ago, my mother was diagnosed with dementia after her memory began to fail. I am proud that, thanks to the NHS, she has received high-quality care and continues to lead a high quality of life. As a former local government cabinet member for health, working across NHS and council boundaries, I know that is very often not the case. We can make life better for those who, like my mother, are diagnosed with dementia by ensuring early and accurate diagnosis, so the condition can be better managed, with the right treatments, and those who have been diagnosed and

their families can prepare for the care they need. I hope Ministers will use the extra investment to look at how we can make that happen within the NHS.

Dartford residents will welcome two other sets of critical measures in the Chancellor's speech. Like colleagues from across the House, I know from my many conversations with parents of children with special educational needs how inadequate and broken the provision is, across the UK and in Kent. On top of the significant increases for schools and further education, the new £1 billion announced yesterday will add resources to the review of SEND announced by the Secretary of State for Education.

I also welcome the steps the Chancellor has taken to tackle crime and to make people feel safer on our streets. Across the country, our sense of security has been eroded, with levels of antisocial behaviour and shoplifting that are far too high. This Budget will put us on the road to delivering our manifesto pledge to boost visible neighbourhood policing, with 13,000 more neighbourhood officers and police community support officers.

As other hon. Members have said, for too long we have tolerated high levels of shoplifting in our town centres. Thanks to the effective immunity for low-value shoplifting introduced by the previous Government, retailers and staff live in fear of the individuals and organised gangs that target them. The additional funding to tackle that and provide more training to our police officers and retailers will help stop shoplifting in its tracks.

It is clear that the problems we have inherited from the previous Government are substantial, but the Budget has laid the foundations for us to begin to tackle them. Steps to boost public investment, cut NHS waiting lists and fix our schools will be warmly welcomed by Dartford residents, and show that the new Labour Government are on the path to delivering the change our country voted for.

3.46 pm

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): It has been a pleasure to listen to so many excellent maiden speeches this afternoon from new colleagues on the Government Benches. I am looking forward to hearing the remainder of the maiden speeches to be made by our fabulous new intake to this Parliament.

This Budget was about fixing the foundations, and we should take a moment to think about that word "foundations". It was not about fixing the country or the economy, but fixing the foundations, so what underpins our country is broken. In Leeds, prior to 2010, there was one food bank and no food pantries in a city of 800,000 people. In my constituency, which is one of eight constituencies in the city, our food banks and food pantries are now in double figures. That represents an economic failure that we will fix. I hope that by the end of this Parliament, we will be closing food banks and food pantries because people will no longer need them, and we will not be having to open new ones.

There is nothing more foundational to this country than the national health service. I thank the Chancellor—my neighbour—for her continued focus on the NHS, a service that means so much to everyone in this country. The £1 billion capital investment to address the backlog of repairs and upgrades to outdated NHS infrastructure is a crucial step forward. I also want to acknowledge the £1.5 billion in capital funding that will be focused on

increasing capacity in our health service, through new hospitals, surgical hubs, diagnostic tests and diagnostic centres.

I am particularly grateful to hear confirmation that the Health Secretary will be providing further details of the new hospital programme in the new year. With that in mind, I would like to make a strong case for the prioritisation of the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust's hospitals of the future project. Leeds is home to one of the largest and busiest acute trusts in the country, treating more than 1.6 million patients each year. The trust includes one of the largest centres for children and young people in the country, which cares for over 250,000 children annually and supports the birth of more than 8,000 babies.

Despite the progress made by the trust, it faces significant operational challenges because of outdated infrastructure. Some parts of the Leeds General Infirmary in my constituency date back to the Victorian era. Maintenance of such an old estate is an enormous financial strain, with backlog maintenance costs now exceeding £630 million. The previous Government's delays in the new hospital programme have already added an extra £300 million in costs to the trust. These challenges are not just financial; they directly impact our ability to deliver care to the people of Leeds. I have been to the Portland building and seen that three floors are shut. I know that the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has also visited the site. What is going on is not acceptable.

The hospitals of the future project will create the Leeds innovation village, delivering £13 billion in economic benefit and creating more than 4,000 jobs—delivering part of the vision that Lord Darzi had. For every £1 invested, there will be a return of £12 in public benefit—both to the NHS and the taxpayer. That is real efficiency and real productivity in public services.

Leeds is ready to deliver. The trust has already secured outline business case approval and planning consent, and has completed significant enabling works. The new hospital will be a net zero carbon building, designed to meet the highest standards of sustainability and digital innovation. This will not only improve the quality of care, but set a national benchmark for environmentally friendly and efficient healthcare infrastructure. I urge my constituency neighbour, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the Health and Social Care Secretary to ensure that the Leeds hospitals of the future project is given the priority that it deserves in the upcoming review of the new hospital programme. Leeds is ready to go. We have the approval, the plans and the commitment. We just need the green light to get on with it.

My constituency is a significant cultural centre. Earlier this year, under the previous Government, Michael Gove committed £5 million to the National Poetry Centre, but, unfortunately, it was £5 million that he did not have. The centre will be sited by the University of Leeds in my constituency. Yesterday, we received the news that the £5 million of funding was under review, subject to consultation. I hope the Chancellor, or a Treasury Minister—I see that there are a couple on the Front Bench—will meet me and the poet laureate, who has made this centre his passion project, to ensure that this centre adds to our national cultural life.

The British Library in the North is situated in my neighbouring constituency of Leeds South, just a few hundred yards from my own constituency, and it received

[Alex Sobel]

very similar news. I hope that we can meet the relevant Ministers in both the Treasury and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that these projects do not flounder under the false promises of the previous Government.

Like many other colleagues, I am also pleased about the funding commitment for special educational needs. I meet so many parents who cannot even find a place in an appropriate school for their SEN children. Some have to travel many miles to be able to get the education that they deserve. The £1 billion funding promise yesterday, which is 6% above inflation, will hopefully provide a new school, or schools, in Leeds for SEN children, with new teachers and I will no longer have to knock on doors and meet parents saying, “My child is not going to school, because there is not an appropriate place in our city”.

Finally, let me turn to devolution. I am sure that you will agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, that devolution has been a success in West Yorkshire. We have seen our bus fares capped at £2, and I know that the mayor is committed to keeping that going. We have also had a huge increase in lifelong learning and the skills agenda. None the less, Leeds is still the largest city in Europe without mass transit. It was great to hear the Chancellor recommit to that mass transit yesterday, and that West Yorkshire will receive part of the integrated settlement to deliver that.

We have only had a mayor in West Yorkshire since 2021, but I understand from a letter that she has received that West Yorkshire will be included in the integrated settlement in 2026, two years ahead of schedule if we look at previous integrated settlements that have been announced and the length of time that those authorities have had a mayor. That shows the exemplary leadership that we have in West Yorkshire at parliamentary level, at local council level and, most of all, at mayoral level with Tracy Brabin. West Yorkshire is ready to deliver in transport, in health, in education and in all areas. I know that my colleagues on the Treasury Bench will be supporting us, and I shall be supporting this Budget.

3.54 pm

**Andy MacNae** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Lab): I congratulate all my colleagues who have made brilliant maiden speeches today. As always, I am taken aback by the range of experience and expertise in this House.

I had planned to be radical and speak very briefly about a few matters that are particular to the north-west, but before I do so, I have to pick up on some issues raised by Conservative Members. First, the right hon. Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) made a seemingly unequivocal statement that businesses facing increases in payroll have only two choices open to them: to reduce their workforce or increase prices. That is patently untrue. Businesses increase payroll all the time for perfectly good business reasons. We cannot be so simplistic in our analysis. Far more important for business is having the right infrastructure, and a skilled workforce who are able to get good healthcare and support—all things that the Budget will provide.

Another Conservative Member, who would not take an intervention, drew the tired analogy between household budgets and national budgets. They are not the same.

It is that sort of rubbish that got us in this mess in the first place. Finally, there were several references to short-term growth forecasts. Conservative Members are either unaware of or wilfully ignoring the fact that there is a lag between good infrastructure investment and meaningful, sustained growth. The decisions that we are taking now are long-term decisions—the sort of decisions that previous Governments ducked. These decisions will deliver sustained growth in four, five, six or seven years, which will make a real, sustained difference to the country—not short-term, sugar-rush growth for political gain.

Let me focus now on the north-west. Like much of the country outside the home counties, the north-west was badly let down by the cuts and false promises of the previous Government, so I am particularly pleased that the Budget will reverse that trend and start the process of rebuilding our infrastructure and public services. I am particularly pleased to see the very significant commitment to northern rail infrastructure. With the commitment to fund a trans-Pennine route upgrade, our cities and towns across the north will be better connected, with more frequent and faster trains.

I also welcome the recognition of the importance of local connectivity, with the commitment of £650 million specifically to fund local transport links outside the key city regions. In that context, I look forward to continuing to make the case for a commuter rail link from Rossendale to Manchester. I am also delighted to see our Government's commitment to properly funded local growth deals and town funds, with both Darwen and Rawtenstall set to benefit from £20 million over 10 years. I will be excited to work with local leaders to develop innovative implementation plans. I look forward to the development of ambitious regional growth and investment plans that will unlock the true potential of our area.

Another hugely important aspect of the Budget is the move towards integrated settlements for mayoral combined authorities. That will truly move decision making away from the centre, end the command-and-control mindset, and put power in the hands of local leaders and communities, who know our area so much better than officials in Whitehall. That approach has the potential to bring transformational change to our region and deliver both greater value for money and better outcomes for our residents. While Lancashire is not currently in a position to receive that sort of settlement, the Budget should be a signal to council leaders and other key stakeholders in the county of the huge opportunity for Lancashire if we can all work together to get a devolution structure in place. I look forward to continuing to work with the Government and local leaders to grasp that opportunity and put Lancashire back in the fast lane.

Finally, with the average income in Rossendale and Darwen much lower than the standard throughout the UK, and even in the rest of the north-west, I wholeheartedly welcome the rise in the national living wage that the Chancellor introduced. It will mean a £1,400 pay rise for many of my constituents—a rise that can make a truly significant difference to people's day-to-day lives. Taken together, I am delighted to see how the measures in the Budget start the process of real and sustained change for the north-west, but I am very much aware that it is simply the start of the process. I look forward to future Budgets.

3.58 pm

**Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): It is Halloween this evening, so I thought that I would come as the scariest thing that I could think of—I am wearing a blue tie. More seriously, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I also thank the Chancellor and the Treasury team, including the Exchequer Secretary, who is here today, for the incredible amount of hard work they put into the Budget.

As a former councillor who served on a council that was Labour-controlled for nine of the 14 years of Conservative Government-imposed austerity, I know of the huge challenges involved in putting forward a progress budget, a forward-thinking budget and a budget that gives hope, at the same time as dealing with a gaping black hole in finances.

However, as I often paid tribute to Harlow council's finance lead, former councillor Mike Danvers, for balancing the books as well as protecting services and staff during those difficult times—something that the Conservative administration that followed were unable to do—I congratulate the Chancellor and her team on performing a miracle, frankly, with the Budget they have presented to the House.

The Labour Government were elected on a manifesto that put economic growth and stability at its heart, recognising that anything else would continue the reckless legacy of the previous Government, and this Budget does just that. We were elected as a Government to make tough decisions and we have shown already that we will not shy away from those tough decisions. We were also elected on a manifesto that focused on fixing the foundations of our NHS, and I am pleased that we have a Budget that will allow my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to do just that.

This Government are providing an additional £22.6 billion of resources to the NHS, delivering 40,000 elective appointments a week to make progress towards a commitment that patients should expect to wait no longer than 18 weeks from referral to consultant-led treatment a reality. The capital investment in public services includes £1.5 billion to deliver capacity for more than 30,000 NHS procedures, over 1.25 million more diagnostic tests and new beds across the NHS. And there is £1 billion to reduce the backlog of crucial NHS maintenance, repairs and upgrades. The Government are investing £1.4 billion to help rebuild our schools; £1.2 billion pounds to deliver extra prison spaces; half a billion pounds to invest in local roads and deal with the dreaded potholes, which we will all be aware of; and £1 billion in new funding for extending the household support fund.

However, Members will be unsurprised to know that, as the new chair of the all-party parliamentary group for young carers, although the carer's allowance is not paid to young carers, I really welcome the fact that the carer's allowance weekly earnings limit is being raised to improve financial security for carers and support them into work, or to allow them to work more hours if they choose: 16 hours a week, or £196 a week—a rise of £45. It was with real delight that I was messaged by a friend who suffers from cerebral palsy, to talk about the massive difference that will make to his family. He is going to buy me a pint, apparently, but he also pointed out that the pint will cost less.

**Alex Ballinger:** My hon. Friend has given a long list of the achievements of this Budget, but he has neglected to mention that the Labour party has taken one penny off a pint of beer.

**Chris Vince:** I have cut down on my drinking now, so it does not help me as much as it would have done in the past, but I am delighted that we have done that, and delighted with the many achievements that we announced yesterday.

However, this is just the start. We know that rebuilding our economy, our public services and our country will take time, but I know—this Budget confirms it—that under this Labour Government we have the leadership and the will to make life better for everyone in our society, not just the privileged few.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** I call the shadow Minister.

4.2 pm

**Gareth Davies** (Grantham and Bourne) (Con): If you will indulge me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall start by paying tribute to and thanking my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor for his service on our Front Bench. I had the pleasure of serving him in government, as Parliamentary Private Secretary and then as Exchequer Secretary; we worked very closely together. If I may say so, there are very few people who match his ability, but also his decency. I thank him for that.

This debate has had a number of excellent contributions. I will come to the maiden speeches in a moment. My hon. Friend the Member for North Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, made important points about the pension fund industry and the importance of getting it to invest in infrastructure—something that we worked on very hard in government. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) rightly highlighted the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, which has undoubtedly had a massive impact on our economy, but we were showing the signs of recovery, as he pointed out. My hon. Friend the Member for East Grinstead and Uckfield (Mims Davies) rightly focused on the new tax on education, and especially the impact on displaced children, which I appreciated.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) gave a great speech, first highlighting the importance of pubs and the hospitality industry, but then the importance to our economy of enterprise more broadly. As a vet, my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Dr Hudson) made excellent points—as usual—about the importance of farming, and mentioned in particular the devastating impact of the Budget on family farms. My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) made excellent remarks, not least about Margaret Thatcher and, in particular, the importance of private sector investment to our economy.

Those speeches were part of a debate that has included some excellent maiden speeches. The hon. Member for Worcester (Tom Collins) will, as an engineer, bring great talent and experience to the House. He was right to highlight the importance of innovation in our economy. I personally appreciated his comments about his predecessor, who worked very hard for the people of Worcester, as I am sure will he. The hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Margaret Mullane) made an excellent speech

[Gareth Davies]

about her home. She comes to this place not just as a local MP but as a strong advocate for workers throughout her constituency, and I wish her well. The hon. Member for Livingston (Gregor Poynton) represents the home of one of my favourite drinks. Scottish whisky is one of our great exports, and I wish him well in championing that sector as well as his constituents. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Maya Ellis) painted a wonderful picture of her constituency. Her dad clearly made a good decision in raising his family there, and if I may say so, he would be extremely proud of what she has achieved, but I feel that she is only getting started.

Let me turn to today's subject. The Government are calling it "Fixing the foundations," but frankly I think the OBR would call it "Breaking the foundations," because in just one hour Labour broke our economic fundamentals. Labour has broken trust with the British people, and the spirit of aspiration and opportunity, which it will never understand or accept is the true foundation of growth in our economy. Our country woke up this morning to a new but darker dawn, with fear and a feeling of betrayal. People woke up to a number of headlines that I am not sure the Chancellor was expecting or hoping for, including "Halloween horror show," "£40bn tax bombshell for Britain's strivers," "Things can only debt better"—which I particularly liked—and even *The Guardian* laments the "Return of tax and spend" under Labour. It is indeed a Budget that has broken our economic fundamentals. Labour has performed its biggest U-turn yet and reversed our economic recovery.

Let us never forget that the Labour Government inherited the fastest growth in the G7, inflation at target, and a deficit that is half what we inherited from Labour. Their first act was to spook consumer and business confidence, which fell more sharply than at any time since the pandemic. Now we see those worst fears being realised. Across almost every conceivable metric, the latest figures on our economy make for grim reading, even for Halloween: the highest tax burden in history, debt up and rising as a share of GDP in every year of the forecast, and debt interest payments above £100 billion in every year of the forecast—the first time ever that that has happened.

The OBR says that inflation will be higher, interest rates will be higher for longer, mortgage rates will be revised up. Gilt rates are today soaring, real household incomes are declining, and employment will undoubtedly be down, as anybody who has run a business would tell us. And for what? Unbelievably, and perhaps most humiliatingly, growth—the No. 1 pledge and priority for this Chancellor—has been downgraded by the OBR as a result of the Budget. The Government used to talk about pulling the growth lever, but they have gone and pulled us into reverse. It is unbelievable.

The Labour Government have also broken trust with the British people. They promised that they would not raise national insurance, but the Budget increases it by £25 billion. They promised that their plans were fully funded, but the OBR calls the Budget the largest increase in borrowing as a result of policies in nearly three decades. They promised that they would not fiddle the fiscal rules, but they have done just that to fund their borrowing spree. They promised that they would crowd in private sector investment; the OBR now says that it is being crowded out by this Budget. They promised to

boost business investment; the OBR says that it will now fall. They promised to cut energy bills by £300; we questioned them countless times on that, and the OBR now says that we will experience "higher gas and electricity prices".

To justify all of this, the Government concocted a fictitious black hole, which the OBR yesterday refused to endorse. Let me quote this to Labour Members, because it is important that we clear this up once and for all: Richard Hughes of the OBR was directly asked this question live on television. He said:

"Nothing in our review was a legitimisation of that £22 billion." Nobody believes it; nobody is backing it up.

Finally, Labour has broken the spirit of aspiration that, as I said, is the true foundation of growth. We on the Conservative Benches recognise that it is the British people and British businesses who drive growth and prosperity in our country, not the Government, and certainly not this Labour Government. This Budget said to Britain, "If you want to invest—to expand, to take risks, to innovate—and to build a better life for yourself and your children, Labour will not back you; it will tax you." Far from fixing the foundations, this is a Budget of broken promises, a Budget of betrayal, and a Budget that will set us back, push us down and kill aspiration. It is a Budget that the public will never forget and will never forgive.

4.11 pm

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (James Murray):**

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Pat McFadden) for opening today's debate, and for so clearly reminding us of the state in which the Conservatives left our country.

As many Members have rightly made clear today, yesterday's Budget made choices about the future of our country. They were not just choices to get through the next few months until the next fiscal event, as we got used to under the last Government, but choices—sometimes difficult ones—about the long-term future of the UK economy and the public finances. The Chancellor's Budget honoured our manifesto commitments by restoring economic stability, fixing the public finances and boosting long-term, sustainable investment in our country. The first Budget of this new Government turned the page on the last 14 years of chaos and decline. This Budget is a generational event to fix the foundations, so that we can deliver the change that the people of this country voted for. It begins to address the urgent pressures that our NHS, our schools, our police and our borders are under.

However, this Budget is not just about the coming year, nor even the whole of this Parliament; it is about making the right long-term decisions to create opportunities for people throughout the country, put more money in people's pockets and begin a decade of national renewal.

**Mims Davies:** I thank the Minister for giving way; he is very generous. He has mentioned choices. Could he comment on the fact that the cost of borrowing is soaring after this tax-raising Labour Budget of broken promises? Labour Members have talked about a crashed economy, but now the Government are presiding over their own low-growth, slow-growth car crash, and they are living in denial themselves.

**James Murray:** Although we will not comment on market movements, the Chancellor outlined yesterday two new robust fiscal rules, which are the bedrock of stability on which this Budget is built. Those rules will put the public finances on a sustainable path and prioritise investment to support long-term growth. The current budget is in surplus by £9.9 billion in 2029-30, with net financial debt falling in 2029-30 and with headroom of £15.7 billion.

When we went into the election in July, the first steps that we promised to the British people opened with these three words: “Deliver economic stability”. As the Chancellor confirmed yesterday, our first fiscal rule is the stability rule. That means we will bring the current budget into balance so that day-to-day spending is met with tax receipts. No more borrowing for day-to-day spending, no more living beyond our means, and no more papering over the cracks. Our tough new stability rule means that the British people, businesses and the markets can all see the fiscal responsibility that will underpin every decision we take in government.

The Chancellor is clear that taking the tough decisions needed to deliver stability is not always easy. The previous Government ducked the difficult decisions. They made promise after promise to the British people that they knew they could never afford. Our stability rule offers a different approach. Meeting it means we needed to raise taxes, but we have been clear that we will protect working people. That is why the Budget does not increase income tax or national insurance contributions that working people see on their payslips. Instead, we are balancing the books in a fair way.

That does not always mean decisions are easy—far from it—but it is also right that, before considering any changes to taxes, we make sure everyone pays the tax they owe by closing the tax gap. That is why, as the Chancellor set out yesterday, we will deliver the most ambitious package to close the tax gap that this country has ever seen. Alongside a series of policy changes set out in the Budget documents, by 2029-30 HMRC will have recruited 5,000 additional compliance officers and funded 1,800 additional debt management staff. Together, that will mean £6.5 billion in additional tax revenue to pay for the country's priorities before we make a single change to a tax rate or threshold.

Beyond the crucial work to close the tax gap, the Budget confirms that we will implement our manifesto promises, including to abolish the non-dom tax loophole, which the OBR says will raise £12.7 billion over the forecast period. We will end the VAT exemption and business rates relief for private schools, which the OBR confirms will raise £1.8 billion a year by 2029-30. As of today, we have increased the stamp duty land tax surcharge on second homes to 5%, helping more than 130,000 people to buy their first home or move home over the next five years, while raising £310 million a year by 2029-30 to support public services.

I know hon. Members have raised questions about some of the other tax changes announced in the Budget, and I am glad to have the opportunity to respond. In particular, I would like to address the changes we have made to inheritance tax, specifically the reforms to agricultural property relief. I realise that people may be concerned about the impact on family farms, so I would like to make clear some of the facts about how the reforms to this relief will work. The main rate of agricultural

property relief on all assets was set at 50% until 1992, at which point it was raised to 100% just before the election that year.

Let me be clear: these reforms still provide a very significant level of relief to protect family farms. The Chancellor confirmed yesterday that the first £1 million of combined business and agricultural assets will continue to receive 100% relief in most circumstances. Assets above £1 million will attract a 50% relief, equal to the pre-1992 rate, which means that inheritance tax will be paid at a rate of 20% instead of 40%. Our reforms, in a tough fiscal context, still leave the relief as being far more generous than it has been in the past.

It is important to note that agricultural and business property reliefs are in addition to the nil rate bands and other exemptions, such as the transfers between spouses and civil partners, and the rules on gifts. Indeed, the National Farmers Union director of strategy has highlighted that these other features of the tax system are important. He said just today that APR

“is not the be all and end all for passing on farms on death.”

Indeed, these exemptions mean that if someone has no other assets and is passing it on to a direct descendant, a farm or farming business worth up to £2 million can be passed on without paying any inheritance tax at all. Furthermore, those liable for a charge can in most circumstances pay any liability over 10 annual instalments.

Let me also be clear about the data on agricultural property relief. The total value of a farm should not be confused with the value being passed on at death. Multiple family members can own part of a farm. For example, if an individual jointly owns a farm worth £3 million with their partner, only £1.5 million is in their estate at death. In 2021-22, the most recent year for which data is available, the median value of assets qualifying for APR was £486,000. Three quarters of estates claimed for assets below £1 million, and such estates will continue to pay no inheritance tax at all. Just 463 claims were for agricultural assets of over £1 million, or 27% of all claims. The largest assets, those worth over £2.5 million, related to just 7% of claims for APR. That data is published openly on gov.uk for everyone to see, and I encourage people to investigate it.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** It does seem rather odd to introduce a new tax and then to defend it on the basis that very few people will pay it. Why is the Minister so confident that it will yield anything recognisable in terms of a contribution to the public finances? The few landowners who will be caught by this measure will be making other arrangements to ensure that they avoid it, particularly the very large landowners.

**James Murray:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for acknowledging that the impact of these changes is limited and targeted. That is an important point. He leads me on to my concluding point, which is to point out that the decision we have taken to retain APR, but to limit its generosity for the top quarter or so of assets, is the right approach to fixing the public finances while also protecting family farms.

I have set out some of the detail of how we are restoring stability and responsibility to the public finances and meeting our first fiscal rule, the stability rule. As the Chancellor set out yesterday, that rule is accompanied by the investment rule, which makes sure that debt is

[James Murray]

falling as a share of the economy. Debt is measured as net financial debt—a statistic measured by the Office for National Statistics since 2016, and forecast since then by the OBR. It recognises that Government investment can deliver returns for the taxpayer by counting not just liabilities on our balance sheet, but our financial assets too. That new approach provides space to deliver the step change in investment that our country needs, within a strong fiscal framework that puts public finances on a sustainable path.

To drive investment further still, the corporate tax road map, which we published yesterday, commits us to providing the best environment for businesses through a predictable, stable, tax system. It caps the headline rate of corporation tax at 25%—the lowest in the G7. It maintains our world-leading capital allowances system, including permanent full expensing and a £1 million annual investment allowance. It maintains our generous R&D reliefs so that the most innovative companies can invest in the long-term future of our country.

Before I conclude my remarks, let me thank all hon. Members for their contributions today. It is a pleasure still to be hearing maiden speeches so far into this Parliament. I found the speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Tom Collins) truly uplifting as he spoke about what he drew from the past of his constituency, the promise of the future and, most importantly, the people who he represents and the inspiration they give him. I thank him for bringing some of that uplifting inspiration to the Chamber.

I thoroughly enjoyed the maiden speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Margaret Mullane), and everyone in this Chamber will immediately have felt the connection that she has to her constituency and the people she represents. Having formerly been the Deputy Mayor for Housing in London, I found her emphasis on the history and future of affordable housing particularly close to my heart.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Gregor Poynton) spoke passionately about his constituency, and perfectly articulated the strength of our Union in the UK, balanced with the strength of our national identities in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. I thought he encapsulated that perfectly in his speech, and I will be looking at *Hansard* to remember his phrasing.

The maiden speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Maya Ellis) touched us all as she spoke about her late father, who I am sure would be incredibly proud of what she has achieved. I thank her for sharing that close personal story with us today.

We also heard from the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Bobby Dean) whose maiden speech I believe I heard last time I was at the Dispatch Box. Was he trying to claim that the change in fiscal rules was his campaign win during his speech? I am pretty sure it was the Chancellor of the Exchequer who came up with the idea, but I thank him for his contribution none the less, and I look forward to seeing him on the Treasury Select Committee.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel) for acknowledging the importance of working with mayors across the country, including the excellent Mayor of West Yorkshire.

Let me briefly address two points made by Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for North Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) who spoke about a pensions review. It is an excellent idea to have a pension review, so I am glad that the Chancellor announced in August a landmark pension review, which is looking at how to boost investment and to increase pension pots. It will set out how billions of pounds of investment could be unlocked from defined contribution pension schemes and how pension pots in such schemes could be boosted by up to £11,000. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will look at that review, and I would welcome discussing it with him in due course.

The hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) spoke about the Scotch whisky industry. I understand that it may not have welcomed everything in the Budget, to put it mildly, but I want to be clear that we feel that the overall package on alcohol balances the commercial pressures on the alcohol industry with the need to raise revenue. Of course, 90% of whisky is exported so no duty is due on that. We have also looked to support the Scotch whisky industry by reducing fees for geographical verification—specific support that I hope will help the industry in the years ahead.

Today's debate has brought to the surface the stark difference between this side of the Chamber and the other. The Conservatives have made it clear, yet again, that they are unable to take responsibility for the state of the country as they left it. In contrast, Labour's first Budget makes it clear that, above all else, we are taking the difficult and responsible decisions to fix the mess they made. We know there are no shortcuts. We are realistic about that, but our Budget is the one our country needs. It is a Budget to restore economic stability while protecting working people, to fix the foundations and fix the NHS, to invest in the future and to rebuild Britain. I commend it to the House.

*Ordered*, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Taiwo Owatemi.)

*Debate to be resumed on Monday 4 November.*

## LGBT Veterans Independent Review

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

4.27 pm

**Oliver Ryan** (Burnley) (Lab/Co-op): I greatly appreciate this opportunity to engage in a significant debate about the implementation of the LGBT veterans independent review. The review not only acknowledges the historical injustices faced by our LGBT veterans, but also brings to light the ongoing barriers, insecurities and inequalities they experience, underscoring the urgent need for reform, support and compensation.

There has been plenty of interest in the debate and I am pleased to see the Lord Commissioner of His Majesty's Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), and my hon. Friends the Members for West Ham and Beckton (James Asser), for Slough (Mr Dhesi), for Macclesfield (Tim Roca), for Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven (Chris Ward) and for Wellingborough and Rushden (Gen Kitchen), and others in their places.

I start by congratulating the Minister for Veterans and People, my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Birmingham Selly Oak (Al Carns) on his appointment to ministerial office. We are indeed fortunate to have someone of his experience and dedication leading the way in advocating for all veterans and their families. His role is pivotal, and his leadership will undoubtedly influence the lives of countless veterans for the better. I thank him.

At this time of year, we come together to honour the profound sacrifices made in times of conflict and to remember those who gave their lives so we could live ours in peace. It is right to have this debate about those veterans that Governments have let down in the past, not because, as some would assert, talking about diversity, inclusivity and lived experience makes our armed forces weaker, but because it makes them stronger.

The gay ban, which was active from 1967 to 2000, was an abhorrent period of our history. For over three decades, discriminatory practices and policies excluded LGBT individuals. Those policies created a culture of fear and discrimination, in which people were compelled to hide and deny who they were or risk losing everything. The treatment in that way of people who were actively serving our country, often putting themselves in harm's way, is a shameful chapter in our history. It undermines the values that we hold so close of respect, honour, duty, freedom and inclusion. Especially as a gay man, to whom this period feels somewhat alien considering the freedoms we enjoy today, I find it sickening to reflect on that legacy. We must ensure that it never happens again.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate. As he has rightly mentioned, although the damage of the ban on LGBT personnel serving from 1967 to 2000 and their abhorrent treatment cannot be undone, the restorative measures contained in the independent review remain hugely important. Does he agree that it is incredibly important, to ensure justice, that steps are taken to create greater awareness of the measures, which should be implemented forthwith?

**Oliver Ryan:** My hon. Friend the Chair of the Select Committee—it is good to see him in his place—is completely right about the recommendations made as part of the review. I will come on to that point shortly.

I pay tribute to Fighting With Pride, an LGBT veterans charity, for the amazing work they do in advocating and supporting the health and wellbeing of LGBT veterans, service personnel and their families. I have met Craig Jones and Carl Austin-Behan, whose strength and work in this area have been invaluable to many. They make the important point, more eloquently than I, that this is about security. It is about the historic injustice of lives ruined by prison sentences, criminal records and being labelled as sex offenders, and the shame that brings. Indeed, Craig highlighted two particular cases to me. The first was of “Steven”, a man imprisoned for his sexuality during the 1980s while serving in Germany. The second is “David”, a Gulf war veteran imprisoned and registered as a sex offender in the mid '90s, just months before I was born. This stuff is not ancient history.

Lord Etherton's review makes stark the terrible experiences that so many LGBTQ veterans had to endure. His report bears out the painful reality of being forcibly removed from the armed forces, the harassment these people faced and the acute losses that such discrimination led to. As one veteran said, particularly poignantly,

“My ejection from the army made me homeless. My mother disowned me for ‘bringing shame to the family’ and I ended up living in a car with an unhealthy relationship with alcohol until I got myself back together. It took years.”

That summarises the deep emotional scars that have been left by a system that failed in its duty to protect those who served. My own constituent “Steven”—I would not be raising this issue without his lobbying throughout the campaign and since I became an MP—was not a gay man but was dismissed based on suspicion about his sexuality. He was left with a life in tatters, living in shame and anguish for years and his relationship with his family was broken because of the decision that was taken about him.

The review's findings are both alarming and revealing, highlighting that even after the repeal of the ban LGBT veterans continued to face both discrimination and stigma—and many still face significant barriers in accessing the full range of benefits and services they deserve, underscoring how unwelcoming the culture can be for LGBT service members. It is unacceptable. It is not what we want for Britain and it cannot be what the armed forces are about. I know that the Minister agrees.

**James Asser** (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): It is 30 years since I began to get involved in campaigning on LGBT issues, so this is not as ancient history for me as it is for my hon. Friend as he is younger than me—I got that in before he did. I was speaking to a veteran last night. My hon. Friend has mentioned how this is still affecting people, and the world has changed significantly from when I started campaigning, when people were still being criminalised and convicted. But this is still a live issue for many people and there is concern among campaigners that many veterans are now getting older and time is running out for them to be able to resolve this.

**Oliver Ryan:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention and am grateful for his experience. It comes as a bit of a reality check that, especially as gay men, we stand on

[*Oliver Ryan*]

the shoulders of giants in this space. The people who have come before us have lived much more difficult lives and faced much more discrimination than we do, so the duty is on us to raise these points.

The report pointed out several aspects of the situation, pointing out in particular the mental health difficulties faced by LGBT veterans against the special nature of the experiences and traumas they were exposed to. They reported higher rates of suicide, homelessness and mental health issues that included, but were not limited to, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. That is why a focus on targeted services is important to adjust to their needs.

Access to healthcare and support services was an additional concern raised by the review. Many LGBT veterans report difficulties in navigating the support system, and too often felt that their identities and experiences are not understood or respected, even in the present day. For these veterans, the lack of sensitivity and awareness in the system was a significant obstacle to receiving the care and support they deserve. It is essential that our systems cultivate an environment of understanding and respect going forward—one that acknowledges the distinct experience of LGBT veterans within the wider veteran support network.

The creation of dedicated support schemes tailored to the needs of LGBT veterans is another critical recommendation. These programmes should include peer-to-peer support, mental health resources and other services that acknowledge and validate the unique experiences of LGBT veterans. Peer support in particular can be an invaluable resource, offering veterans a safe space to share their experiences, build connections and receive encouragement from others who understand their journey. Increased outreach efforts are also essential to ensure that LGBT veterans are aware of the services available to them. For too long, many of those veterans have felt marginalised and disconnected from the resources intended to support them. We have to link those people up. Targeted communication strategies are needed to engage this community effectively, ensuring that they know their rights and the resources at their disposal. By proactively reaching out to LGBT veterans, we can foster a sense of belonging to ensure that they receive the support that they need.

Financial redress stands out as a key recommendation in Lord Etherton's review, underscoring the need to compensate those affected by these historic wrongs. Although the previous Government offered a formal apology and took meaningful steps to implement many of the review's recommendations, the allocated £50 million compensation scheme fund falls short, inadequately compensating the estimated 4,000 LGBT veterans and those affected by discriminatory practices. This amount is insufficient to address the depth of the harm inflicted or the number of people whose lives have been trashed in many cases. We must advocate for a more substantial commitment to financial redress—one that reflects the true scale of injustice endured by these individuals, and that seeks to make amends in a meaningful way. I know the Minister is genuinely alive to this; he is listening, and he and the Defence Secretary understand the plight of this community. I thank him for his continuing work in this area to support our veterans, especially as a man of service himself.

The independent LGBT veterans review provides a comprehensive road map to address the inequalities faced by LGBT veterans. By recognising the ongoing challenges, we can take decisive steps to implement the report's recommendations. We can work towards creating a military and veteran support system that truly honours the service of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This commitment to inclusivity and justice is not only a moral imperative, but a testament to the values we strive to uphold as a nation—values that I know the Minister and the Government agree with.

Let us take this opportunity to ensure that the sacrifices of all our veterans are acknowledged and respected. Let us all work together to build a future in which every service member is afforded the dignity and support they deserve, free from the shadow of discrimination. This is our chance to demonstrate our commitment to justice, to extend a hand to those we have wronged—including the review of financial redress—and to create a legacy of equality and respect within our armed forces today and for the future.

4.38 pm

**Mr Gideon Amos** (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Burnley (Oliver Ryan) on securing this debate—an excellent move. I also thank the Minister and you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak, following a somewhat short-notice request.

I am confident that the House will come together today to recognise the service of many of our armed forces who were shockingly discriminated against and dismissed for nothing more than being who they are. The Liberal Democrat party constitution includes the belief that everyone should be free from poverty, ignorance and conformity. It is in that spirit that we on the Liberal Democrat Benches add our support to the recommendations of the Etherton review. I also add our support and thanks to the work of the organisations already listed that campaign for the rights of these people.

Five minutes from my house is the RAF cadet base, which I see on the way to the Army Cadet Force where I am an adult instructor. I confess that in coming into the Chamber and thanking the Minister, I am not sure whether I should be saluting or bowing—I am only a sergeant! What I want to say is that my constituent Mark Shepherd used to be a member of the RAF cadets in Taunton in my constituency and later went on to pursue the career he wanted as a technician.

Mark went on to see active service on the frontline with Tornados in the second Kuwait war and in Kosovo. But he was then questioned about his sexuality and presented with the option of either leaving immediately—immediate dismissal, from which he would have lost £6,000, a considerable sum of money for a young man at that stage in life—or the premature retirement route, which he had to take. That meant he had to stay in the service much longer in very difficult circumstances with a cloud hanging over him, when really all that should have hung over him was our nation's gratitude for serving our country on the frontline and putting his life on the line.

I am delighted that this issue has come to the fore. I genuinely congratulate the hon. Member for Burnley on bringing it forward. I am absolutely delighted that in

a few weeks in Taunton I will be presenting Mark with his RAF certificate to recognise the injustice that was done to him. It is my absolute privilege to have the opportunity to do that, and to explain and pay tribute to his service in this debate.

4.41 pm

**Chris Ward** (Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Oliver Ryan) for securing this very welcome debate, and the Minister for Veterans and People, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Selly Oak (Al Carns) for the collegiate and sympathetic way he has engaged with me and other colleagues across the House over recent weeks.

I represent a constituency with a significant number of LGBT veterans, some of whom I have had the huge honour of meeting in recent weeks. I have also been fortunate enough to work with Fighting With Pride, the same organisation my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley referred to earlier, and I am pleased to say that they join us in the Public Gallery today.

Let me be clear about the injustice that has been suffered here. As the Etherton review sets out, for over four decades, considerable time, resource and effort was put into hunting down people who were suspected of being gay in the armed forces. That led, among other things, to arrest, interrogation, demeaning physical inspections and medical treatments, court martial, imprisonment and being dismissed in disgrace. As we have heard, this left many LGBT veterans, often at a young age, with criminal records, and no jobs, income or family support.

In the short time I have, I just want to highlight one case, a constituent of mine who I met last week. Steve joined the RAF in 1971 at the age of 16. He worked on Vulcan Bombers at RAF Waddington, served three tours of the Falklands, and was stationed in West Germany. He had an impeccable service record. In 1985, he was investigated by the RAF over a relationship with a male officer. He made the fatal mistake of telling the truth and was sentenced to six months in jail. He lost his rank, all his financial benefits, his family and the career he loved. When he was released he was 28 years old, homeless and had nowhere to turn. As I said, I met Steve. He is a man of huge honour and courage, but these are the words he said to me:

“I felt washed in shame. My career was shattered. I had a criminal record. I had no pension and had to live hand to mouth for the rest of life surviving on benefits.”

I raise Steve’s case not because it is unique. In fact, as we have heard today, it is not even an outlier. It is sadly typical of the story of too many LGBT veterans: loss of earnings, loss of dignity and loss of purpose not over the short term, but over a lifetime. That is why I gently ask the Minister, who has been incredibly sympathetic—and while I recognise the financial situation under which the Government operate—whether capping payments at an average of around £12,500 per person can really be appropriate for the level of injustice suffered by Steve and so many other LGBT veterans?

Finally, the Defence Secretary, for whom I have enormous respect, said when the Etherton report was published:

“This is unfinished business for Labour.”—[*Official Report*, 13 December 2023; Vol. 742, c. 899.]

I agree, and I know that the Veterans Minister will want to complete that work and finally deliver the justice for which LGBT veterans have been waiting far too long.

4.45 pm

**Tim Roca** (Macclesfield) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Oliver Ryan) for securing this debate. He is proving himself to be a powerful advocate for his constituency. May I also welcome my hon. and gallant Friend the Minister to his place, and thank him for all the work he does? He is a credit to the Government. Finally, I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your indulgence in allowing me to speak this afternoon.

The very fact that we have to hold this debate is a reminder that there was once a time when a person’s ability to serve was questioned because of the person they loved. Discrimination against any LGBT person is of course appalling, but it takes a special kind of cynicism and bigotry to punish, denigrate and demean volunteer servicemen and women—soldiers who served willingly, fought beside their peers willingly, and in some cases died or were injured in the line of duty—because of their sexuality. There was never any excuse for the laws being what they were. There was no justification on account of ability in combat, no rationale based on individual discipline, and no standards that those servicemen and women could not and did not reach. The laws existed simply because of a fear of difference, and an intolerance of LGBT people. It was inexcusable.

It is worth reflecting on the sad truth that there used to be consensus about those laws. Shamefully, in 1996—quite recently—a cross-party Select Committee rejected calls for the removal of the ban, but it is important to note that 30 years on, there is a new consensus. Before, brave individuals such as naval officer Duncan Lustig-Prean, RAF sergeant Graeme Grady, RAF nurse Jeanette Smith and Navy weapons engineer John Beckett had to stand alone, but now this place is united in condemnation of that policy and—alongside the phenomenal charities that have been referenced, such as Fighting With Pride—supports the thousands of LGBT soldiers, sailors and airmen in our armed forces.

I am pleased to say that a member of my new team here in Parliament is an Army reservist and has seen in his own military career an improvement in attitudes towards himself and other LGBT+ colleagues. It is a journey, but it is worth acknowledging that things are improving. Instead of being seen as a threat and a source of disruption, difference is seen as an advantage. Celebrating difference and diversity of thought, avoiding group-think and fostering a “thinking soldier” environment are parts of a wider conceptual component that gives our military an edge. It is not enough simply to say that we tolerate LGBT people in our military or our society. We value their unique contribution to our forces.

However, even though we are far beyond the ban of the ’90s, we need to support those whom we let down. I am worried, as other hon. Members are, that a cap was placed on the compensation scheme for the 4,000 veterans that lost their careers because of institutional bigotry by the British state. I agree with my hon. Friends: how can £12,400 be deemed sufficient compensation for someone’s own chaplain initiating an investigation and subsequent interrogation of them by the Special Investigation Branch?

[Tim Roca]

The British state treated many thousands of people with contempt in exchange for their willingness to serve. It exposed them to state-sanctioned, institutionalised homophobia and to discharge, leaving them isolated from their friends and family. I am glad that we are building a new consensus, but let us go a step further and make sure that those 4,000 brave, selfless servicemen and women get the compensation and redress that they deserve. And they are only the ones we know about. How many more managed by hiding their true selves? How many more denied their true self to themselves? We must do right by these people.

Finally, as we approach Remembrance Day, I hope that we can all add to our reflections a moment for LGBT veterans specifically. I will be thinking of Edward Brittain. Edward was born in Macclesfield, my constituency. At 21, as a temporary lieutenant in the Sherwood Foresters, Edward fought in the battle of the Somme. He was injured twice, shot in the arm and then in the right thigh on 1 June 1916. His gallantry won him the Military Cross, just as the Minister's did. Edward's citation was precise and understated:

"For conspicuous gallantry and leadership during an attack. He was severely wounded, but continued to lead his men with great bravery and coolness until a second wound disabled him."

On returning to the front, he was tipped off by his commanding officer that he would face a court martial when he came out of the line, as Army censors had read in his personal correspondence that he had had an intimate relationship with a man in his company.

On 15 June 1918, as Edward led his company on a counter-attack on the Asagio plateau to recapture a trench and stop an enemy advance, he was shot and killed by an enemy sniper. He was 22 years old. Whether he deliberately put himself in a position to be killed, as his sister and his CO believed, is unknowable, but what is knowable is that had Edward come out of the line alive between 15 June 1918 and 12 January 2000, he would have been court-martialled and shamed by the country he had shed blood for.

Edward had a Military Cross. He was shot twice at the Battle of the Somme, but returned to the front and led his men with bravery. However, none of that mattered—he would have been considered a disruption to the unit. Let me be the first person in this place to thank Captain Edward Brittain MC for his service. He deserved better from his country.

4.51 pm

**The Minister for Veterans and People (Al Carns):** I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Oliver Ryan) for initiating this debate. I thank the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington (Mr Amos) for lending his support, and for his fantastic support for cadets, which is absolutely super. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven (Chris Ward) for sharing a harrowing story that is all too familiar across the system. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Tim Roca) for his moving story, which really resonates, given what we are discussing today.

Earlier this month, I had the privilege of speaking at the LGBTQ+ defence awards, where I thanked former and serving personnel for their tenacity and courage. I mentioned that anyone can dodge bullets, bombs or

artillery fire, but to fight against the tide when everything is bearing down on you, and to continue the struggle and fight for justice, is commendable. A wise man once said to me that courage is a decision, not a reaction. Those fighting for pride, and others who have championed this cause for so long, are truly courageous. Indeed, they are the bravest of the brave.

The abhorrent way in which LGBT service personnel were treated between 1967 and 2000 by the Ministry of Defence was completely unacceptable. The Ministry was on the wrong side of history. Its historical policy of prohibiting homosexuality in the armed forces was simply wrong, which is why the LGBT veterans independent review, conducted by Lord Etherton, has united this Chamber since its report came out in July last year. This Government supported the review in opposition, and we are now supporting its delivery. I trust that colleagues appreciate the importance of this remaining a cross-party issue as we address the remaining recommendations.

I want to personally thank Lord Etherton for all the thoughtful work he has done to address the long-burning injustices, and I am pleased that 33 of his 49 recommendations have been implemented. I can confirm that we have already received 676 applications for non-financial restorative measures through the gov.uk website. In practice, this means that the chiefs of the Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force have sent apology letters directly to the individuals affected by these issues. Medals and berets that should never have been taken away have been reissued, and each of the services has hosted several presentation ceremonies to welcome LGBT veterans back into the service family, where they have always belonged.

Rightly, our focus is now on fully addressing the 16 outstanding recommendations, including the two that relate to financial redress for those dismissed and discharged as a result of the ban, so I very much welcome this opportunity to hear the views of hon. Members. It will help inform the Government's work to design an appropriate financial redress scheme that enables applications to be considered on a case-by-case basis and timely payments to be made. I can reassure veterans and the whole LGBT community that the needs of potential claimants are being carefully considered at each stage, including the need for a fast lane for applicants in certain circumstances, especially those with terminal illnesses.

I am, of course, aware of speculation, and I have heard some figures in relation to the fund. I trust colleagues will understand that we continue to finalise its modalities, and it is too soon for me to comment on exact figures. However, the Government are fully committed to meeting our inherited target of opening the application window by the end of 2024, and it remaining open for two years.

**Oliver Ryan:** I am not sure whether it is common procedure for someone intervene in their own debate, but I appreciate the Minister's time, and I thank him for his comments about the compensation scheme. I know that he is doing the work, and that he sincerely understands the scenario for these people. It would be remiss of me not to mention that although "Steven", my constituent, felt that yesterday's Budget was great in lots of ways, particularly the provisions around infected blood and the Post Office scandal, he wanted a compensation scheme to deal with this issue in the same way. I hope that the Minister will look at that, make sure that we do

not wait another year, for the next Budget, to talk about what we can do financially and sustainably, and recognise the context that “Steven” references.

**Al Carns:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. To link that to what my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven said, I am aware of recent speculation about the size of any fund and redress payments. It is not possible to have certainty about the number of applicants at the moment. It is also premature to estimate the size of the payment awards, but we are working to make sure that the broadest number of individuals receive payments. We acknowledge that along with those who were dismissed and discharged, many who were not were also impacted by the ban.

Of the 16 outstanding recommendations, six are for the Ministry of Defence and the Office for Veterans’ Affairs to implement, including the delivery of the memorial at the National Arboretum, which I had the pleasure of visiting last week. We are progressing those with the excellent staff from Fighting With Pride, who are here today. Ten of the outstanding recommendations are for the national health service, as my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley mentioned, and my team are in touch with Department of Health and Social Care colleagues to track that process.

My hon. Friend highlighted harrowing stories about the ban, which are tragically all too familiar. The Defence Secretary and I have sat down with a number of veterans affected by the ban, and I have heard about the different and profound ways that it has harmed people’s lives. That is why I am determined that the Government shall address all the outstanding recommendations.

**James Asser:** One of the reasons why we are in this position, having made so much progress, is that under the last Labour Government, we made a lot of legal

changes, but we also worked to make societal changes, along with progressive colleagues from other parties. There is a lot of hope from the community that, with a new Government, we can pick up that baton and make progress again, so I am pleased to hear what the Minister says. Does he agree that resolving these issues quickly would send the message to the LGBT community that we are taking this seriously, and are keen to get on with making progress on equality again?

**Al Carns:** I absolutely agree. The quicker that we get this done and get due justice delivered, the better. That is absolutely where we want to go.

When I joined the Royal Marines in 1999, the shameful ban on homosexuality in the armed forces was still in place. Last month, the Defence Secretary and I presented Etherton ribbons to Emma Riley, Stephen Close and Carl Austin-Behan. The ribbon represents the commitment and sacrifices made in service by LGBT veterans, the suffering caused by the cruel ban, and the strength shown by those who stood against it. It is one of numerous steps that the Government are taking to ensure that the armed forces are tolerant and welcoming to all.

Our LGBT+ networks are helping us to improve the experiences of service personnel and civilian staff. I urge everyone affected by past failings to register interest in restorative measures by visiting the LGBT veterans support page on gov.uk. The Defence Secretary and I will drive hard to get this work done, until every recommendation of Lord Etherton’s review is implemented—to right the wrongs of the past and to ensure that every veteran who has helped keep Britain secure receives the respect and support they deserve.

*Question put and agreed to.*

4.58 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

*Thursday 31 October 2024*

[SIR MARK HENDRICK *in the Chair*]

## SEND Provision: Hampshire

1.30 pm

**Luke Murphy** (Basingstoke) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered SEND provision in Hampshire.

It is a pleasure to lead my first Westminster Hall debate under your chairship, Sir Mark, particularly on this important topic. I begin by recognising the parents, advocates and campaigners who have brought the issue into the public eye, especially the Kids nursery parent committee from Basingstoke, who are here today in the Public Gallery. Their dedication to advocating for inclusion and calling for urgent reforms to the special educational needs and disabilities system is inspiring, and their personal stories highlight the real impact of this crisis on children, young people and their families.

When I first stood as Labour's candidate for Basingstoke, I knew that SEND support faced challenges, but it was not until I met families across Basingstoke that I truly understood the depth of the crisis. I spoke to two mothers on the campaign, who live just two doors apart, yet both said they felt alone in their struggles with an adversarial and confusing system. They had no idea that their situations were nearly identical. Both were battling to secure essential support for their children, believing that they were alone in that fight. A mother in my constituency, Michelle, perfectly summarised the struggle. She told me:

"Raising children with SEND is incredibly challenging, exhausting and stressful. There isn't enough support for parents to cope. We face constant appointments, endless form-filling, and have to fight for the education our kids deserve. It shouldn't be this hard, and it doesn't need to be this hard."

No family should be placed in Michelle's position, having to fight tooth and nail for a fair, inclusive education for their children.

Just last week, the National Audit Office issued a report described by the Minister for School Standards as a "damning indictment" of the SEND system. The report highlighted that the system is not only financially unsustainable, but is failing to deliver the necessary outcomes for children. It is a broken system—a crisis we inherited, after 14 years of inaction. It is heartening to know, looking around this room, that the sentiment is shared across party lines. The last Conservative Education Secretary labelled the system she left behind as "lose, lose, lose" while current Tory shadow Ministers say that they did not do enough on SEND and should hang their heads in shame. We agree.

The NAO report underscores the reality that families and councils live with every day. The demand for SEND support has surged. Education, health and care plans have increased by 140% since 2014, with more than 576,000 individuals now needing that support. Local authorities are also struggling under a £4.6 billion deficit as high-needs funding, even at £10.7 billion, fails to meet demand. Tribunal appeals have risen by 334%, which is testament to a system where families must fight for basic rights rather than being supported to achieve them.

One parent shared her story with me recently. After waiting two and a half years following an initial needs assessment, her daughter finally secured a placement in a specialist school, but it is a 70-minute round trip for only two hours of schooling each day. That family's experience reflects a system that feels combative rather than supportive—where councils, as this mum pointed out, spend public funds on solicitors and barristers to deny or delay access to services that children are legally entitled to.

The impact of the crisis on families is stark. Nationally, only 50% of EHC plans met the statutory 20-week timeline in 2023—down from 60% in previous years. That failure to meet deadlines has left parents understandably losing faith in the system. It is little wonder that parents who have children with SEND are significantly more likely to consider home schooling than parents who have children without SEND—a sad consequence of a system that is failing them.

**Chris Bloore** (Redditch) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, and thank you, Sir Mark, for your chairmanship. I also thank the parents that my hon. Friend has brought along in support. I have the same situation in my constituency of Redditch in Worcestershire, and if it was not for the parents dotted around the country who fight for their children or grandchildren, we would not have such energy in the new Parliament to fight for the proper solutions for SEND. My hon. Friend talked about trust and the broken system; does he agree that it is essential, if we are to rebuild a system that is fit for purpose, to rebuild trust between local authorities and parents and grandparents, so that co-production can truly start again?

**Luke Murphy**: I completely agree with my hon. Friend: crucial to fixing the system will be rebuilding trust between parents, national Government and local authorities. There is much work to do, but I think yesterday's Budget showed that this Government are making a downpayment on that commitment—and there will be more to come. As my hon. Friend mentioned, the lack of adequate support has lasting impacts on families. Many parents have had to reduce their work hours or even leave employment entirely to care for their children when the local authority fails to provide adequate support. I know, from hearing families' stories, that many are reaching breaking point, and parents are exhausted from the constant battle against the system.

Hampshire county council, like many others, has been coping with a system in freefall. The number of EHC plans in Hampshire has nearly doubled, from just over 8,000 in 2019 to around 16,000 this year. Hampshire's cumulative deficit for the dedicated schools grant is now at £86.1 million, representing 9.4% of its total dedicated schools grant income. To put that in perspective, for every £100 that Hampshire receives for schools and SEND provision, it has accumulated nearly £9.40 in debt. That deficit is expected to reach £250 million by 2025-26 if nothing changes. Hampshire also currently spends £47.2 million annually on independent school placements, due to the lack of available spaces in state-funded options, underscoring the urgent need for expanded state provision and the need to support mainstream settings in providing essential SEND support.

I am particularly concerned about the exploration of the statutory override in 2026, which currently allows the education deficits to be kept off councils' balance

[Luke Murphy]

sheets. When the override ends, councils like Hampshire could face financial insolvency, forcing them to declare a section 114 notice and request Government intervention. The situation is clearly untenable, and serious reforms are urgently needed, but this crisis is not just about budgets or statistics; it is about real lives and families.

Eleanor, a mother in my constituency, told me about her son. When he turned two, she sent him to the local nursery to be with his older sister, but there it quickly became clear that his development was delayed. On multiple occasions, Eleanor would go to pick him up and find him playing alone in the toilets unsupervised. Quite understandably, that is not what she wanted for her son, but without sufficient support from early years education, and because he could not talk, he was left to blend into the background and slip through the cracks. Eleanor describes the process of fighting for SEND provision as “just terrible”—a constant battle with the local authority in a system that she describes as completely broken.

Another parent, Kelly, shared her story with me. After multiple appointments where she raised concerns about her son's development, she was told that he was simply the “lazy twin”. But Kelly did not give up. She described how, without clear guidance and support, parents go into the SEND system “blindfolded”, feeling their way through a complex maze that should be straightforward. Jodie, another mother from Basingstoke, told me that

“the only support you get consistently through the whole SEND journey is from other parents who are going through the same thing.”

It is a sad reflection of the system when parents find that their only reliable support is each other.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Alex Baker), who wanted to be here today, has heard similar experiences of a lack of suitable school places leaving parents with no option but home schooling for their children. That puts unacceptable pressure on parents, resulting in mental health issues and self-harm, while children miss out on vital opportunities to develop wider life and social skills.

A parent in my constituency described the impact of finally receiving specialist provision for her daughter as having a “halo effect”. It brought a sense of normalcy and confidence back to her daughter's life, sparking interests outside the classroom, but that positive impact should not just be the rare exception; it should be the standard experience for every family navigating the SEND system.

When I committed to a manifesto focused on building a truly inclusive, responsive and supportive education system, it was not just a pledge; it was a mission. Every child deserves an education system that meets their needs, especially those children with special educational needs and disabilities.

I am encouraged by the Government's actions in taking the first steps towards real change. Yesterday's Budget marked a significant commitment from the Chancellor, with a £1 billion increase in SEND and alternative provision funding. That is a 6% real-terms boost. The funding is a critical step towards improving outcomes for children and families, and guiding our SEND system towards much-needed financial stability, fixing the foundations to ensure that every child in England can achieve and thrive regardless of their background.

The children's wellbeing Bill, which was announced in the King's Speech, will mandate schools to collaborate with local authorities to improve SEND inclusion. That is a foundational step. Our commitment to expand early years support by investing in SEND-specific teacher training and establishing a framework for early intervention, such as the Nuffield early language intervention, is all part of a larger strategy to prevent children as soon as possible from slipping through the cracks. The Government have also said that they will ensure accountability in mainstream settings through bodies like Ofsted to guarantee that every school is equipped to meet the needs of students with SEND. More widely, the Government have committed to recruiting 6,500 new teachers to reduce class sizes, which I hope will also allow for more inclusive classrooms.

This crisis has stretched on for far too long and we must work on a cross-party basis to address it before the situation becomes truly unsalvageable. Every child, regardless of whether they have SEND or not, should have the support in place so that they can thrive in school and beyond.

Today, with the Kids parent committee from Basingstoke and the Minister both present in Westminster Hall, I want to amplify a clear message from families in my constituency: we need greater training and support for mainstream early years staff in SEND, because early intervention is crucial. By equipping early years staff with the skills to recognise and support children with additional needs, we can ensure that children receive timely help, giving both parents and children a solid foundation. I fully support that goal and will work alongside others to make it a reality.

In yesterday's Budget, the Chancellor announced an additional £1.8 billion to expand Government-funded childcare and allocated £69 million to grow the network of family hubs. This funding represents a chance to provide essential support and early intervention for SEND families across the country.

I hope that this debate shines a light on the reality of SEND provision for families, not only in Hampshire but across the country. Today I urge the Minister and colleagues from all parties urgently to support a reformed SEND system that lifts up our young people and their families.

The Government have rightly committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity for all, which must include children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. We know that there is no magic wand that can fix this broken system overnight, but I urge the Minister to collaborate with her colleagues across Government to urgently reform the SEND system, so that we can restore faith in SEND provision, and I am hopeful that this Government will lead the way in creating a system that truly works for every young person, every family and every community. As Michelle put it:

“It shouldn't be this hard, and it doesn't need to be this hard.”

**Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair):** I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to be called in this debate.

1.44 pm

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Mark. As the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Luke Murphy) and I were walking down to Westminster Hall, I asked if he would

be speaking and he said he was. I know that the debate is about Hampshire, but I always want to come along to support hon. Members who are bringing forward critical issues. I also want to add comments from a Northern Ireland perspective.

I am pleased to see the Minister in her place; I always look forward to meeting her and I know she clearly understands the issues that the hon. Member presented. I want to support him and his parents group, which has come here today. On the way here, he mentioned that those parents are the reason he secured the debate, and parents should be in everything that we do. These things are about our constituents and about what we can do to help them and give their perspective.

I spoke on this issue just last week; indeed, like almost everyone here, I have spoken in every debate on SEND education since we came back after the election. As I said, I want to give a Northern Ireland perspective, if I may.

I welcome the Budget, which allocated extra money to the SEND education system, as the hon. Member mentioned. I am always hopeful that some of that allocation will come our way through the Barnett consequential, which results in us gaining from investment here on the mainland.

**Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair):** Order. The debate pertains to Hampshire. Although you raise issues that are common, the subject is aimed in the direction of Hampshire. Can you please make the main points and try not to veer off the subject in terms of specifics in your own part of the UK?

**Jim Shannon:** I will make sure that whenever I mention Northern Ireland, I mention Hampshire as well. That will hopefully keep the perspective right, because what the hon. Member said happens in Hampshire happens in my constituency as well. I want to illustrate that and make some suggestions on how we can provide better help in the system. What we do back home in Northern Ireland can help those in Hampshire with how they move forward.

We have a clear teacher funding issue, especially in the SEND sector. One of my questions to the Minister, which I hope will be helpful for the hon. Member for Basingstoke and for the wider debate, is this: what has been done to ensure that there are more adequately trained people to respond to this issue?

I also speak in this debate because this matter is personal for me. I have six grandchildren, and three of them unfortunately have some difficulties with autism, learning and speech issues. I will not mention their names, because it would not be appropriate, but that is why this is personal.

Whenever I come here to make a contribution, it is clear to me what I am asking for: for the same things that have already been done back home. I will give a couple of examples of how things have happened and, by doing so, show what has made the situation better. I know that the hon. Member has referred to that.

A teaching assistant back home told me that she did a level 3 qualification on specialist support for teaching and learning in schools. If she lived here in England, she would fully qualify as a substitute teacher; in Northern Ireland, further training is necessary. That is an example

for us back home. With the same system here, someone qualifies, but with the system back home, they do not. That clearly highlights the issue.

Across Northern Ireland—the hon. Member's contribution has convinced me that this is similar to what is happening in Basingstoke and Hampshire—we have autism assessments, and some 66,000 pupils have some form of SEND. That is 20% of the population—the figures are similar to what the hon. Member referred to. Children fight for a diagnosis from the day they enter school, but unfortunately there are detrimental educational psychology delays, which coincide with delays in our health service. Even though we are focusing on SEND and education, will the Minister, when she responds, consider that there must also be a tight relationship between education and health? That is important and I hope she will respond in a positive fashion.

As I said, this issue is a personal one: three of my six grandchildren unfortunately have autism and speech therapy needs. I want to give an example of what has happened. I have mentioned diagnosis; get the diagnosis done early and we can change the child's life—wow! I will give an example that is personal, because it happened in our family. One of the grandchildren—one of the boys—was quite boisterous and seemed to have difficulty expressing himself. Unfortunately, the result was that when he was at nursery and early school, he was hitting out at other children and became quite a difficult child. It was nobody's fault; it was just that he was not able to express himself in the way he wished to.

We got the early diagnosis, and with the early diagnosis came the speech therapy, and with the speech therapy came an absolute change in that wee boy. When we were going to my son's house for Christmas, I said to my wife, "Sandra, there'll be some goings-on the day, when we get there," and she said, "You'll see a difference." I had not seen my grandson for a while, and what a difference there was in that wee boy because he had got the diagnosis and the speech therapy—you could not have kept him quiet. What a change in that wee fella because the system had worked and helped him.

I give that as an example of what can happen if we have the right strategy and the right way forward. The opposite is now true of the wee boy: he never keeps quiet. It is lovely to have a wee boy in the corner who is so boisterous and alive and so respectful—we heard so many pleases and thank yous. There can be such a difference as a result of the system when it works. We now have two others coming through, and the provision of an early diagnosis has to be the same for them. The hon. Member for Basingstoke has asked for that, and I am sure the Minister will respond.

Another example is about how education can help. This is an example to help the Minister, because I think the great advantage of these debates is that we can give examples of where things have been going the right way and thereby exchange ideas on ways forward and how we can do things better. Movilla high school in my constituency increased its enrolment from 401 to 600, because the education authority enabled it to extend the special provision for pupils with autism to include 10 and 11-year-olds, and it has established what are called nurture classes. It is not a novel idea, but it is a good idea in terms of helping to move forward education and mainstream education in particular.

[Jim Shannon]

Those are just two of the points I want to raise: early diagnosis and the nurture classes that we have in my constituency of Strangford. I do not know what the reason is, but in the last number of years—the last 10 to 15, in particular—I have certainly seen more children there who have difficulties with autism and other issues. More should be done to create specialist nurture units within mainstream schools and to support specialist training for teachers of all ages. There must be the capacity for us to do our best for pupils who require additional support; they should not have to suffer because of a funding crisis.

I look forward very much to hearing the Minister's thoughts and those of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild). Around this room, we have people with incredible knowledge, and I look forward to all their contributions. I hope the Minister can undertake further discussion with the devolved nations on this matter. I said earlier—I mean it, and it is true of any debate I come to—that there are always lessons that can be learned regionally, and we can then share them in this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. There is that benefit that comes from regional knowledge, which may be specific, but which can help us all to do things better. With that, I commend the hon. Member for Basingstoke for bringing the debate forward. I hope my contribution kept exactly to the line that you asked me to keep to, Sir Mark. Thank you so much.

1.54 pm

**Darren Paffey** (Southampton Itchen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Mark. I am still learning about these things, but I believe I may need to refer to my interest as a member of the Education Committee.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Luke Murphy)—my childhood home—for securing this important debate for our county. I fully recognise the picture that he so comprehensively and eloquently set out. As a former council cabinet member for education in Southampton and a proud dad to an amazing SEND child, both my professional and personal experience move me to take part today. I am grateful for the opportunity to do so representing the people of Southampton Itchen—I did move further south in the county a few years ago.

The debate could not have come at a better time. Not only is the need for SEND reform at its greatest after being overlooked by the Conservative Government for 14 years, but the debate follows the announcement of £1 billion of extra SEND funding in yesterday's Budget, as my hon. Friend mentioned. I do not intend to repeat the points he made, but I will take this opportunity to share three reflections from my experience that hopefully contribute to a way forward for SEND children and their families in Southampton and across the county.

I will start by saying as clearly as I can that inclusion in mainstream schools is the right approach for many. However, the metrics around schools must change. I can tell Members what inclusion is not: it is not just putting a child with SEND in a mainstream classroom and then, "Job done!" It is not just a box to tick or a target to meet; it is a fundamental shift in how we think about education—not only how we define school success but, far more importantly, each child having the opportunities they deserve opened up to them.

Our current metrics of attainment 8 and progress 8 often fall short in recognising a school's full achievements. In Southampton Itchen, and I am sure in other parts of the county, we have seen promising improvements in school performance, and schools are making remarkable strides towards inclusivity, but the performance metrics often do not reflect that. Teachers are working incredibly hard to meet the needs of students with special educational needs and disabilities, tailoring their classroom approach to ensure that those students are not left behind in their learning journey. Yet those efforts—that dedication, adaptability and commitment to inclusivity of our teaching staff—are somehow not considered a measure of a school's success. I want to argue that they absolutely are and should be.

In our very welcome Ofsted reforms, will the Minister consider how we might ensure that not just statistics, but inclusive practices that open up opportunities for SEND children, count towards the new report cards? In that way, we can expand measures from just academic achievement to educational practice that makes a difference to whether SEND children have the opportunity they need and deserve.

My second point is on the National Audit Office report mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke. Some 1.7 million young people are identified as having special educational needs and disabilities in UK schools, but the report notes that there have been no consistent improvements since 2019 in outcomes for those children and young people. That is a huge swathe of our children—our future—that cannot, should not and must not be left behind.

In Southampton Itchen, the rate of growth in the number of children with SEND is outpacing the national average. Dealing with that increased need inclusively in mainstream schools relies on adequate teacher training and teachers' preparedness for future trends. Yet the current national standards require teacher trainees to spend just one day of their placement in a SEND setting. Contrast that with what they face in the mainstream classroom, where one in five school pupils in England has identified special needs. There needs to be much more attention to the needs of those children and much more preparation in teachers' professional development.

The professional evidence is that when we get the inclusive approach right, the benefit is felt not just in the outcomes for SEND children, but by all children. Will the Minister consider revising the initial teacher training framework so that all new teachers coming to Hampshire and other parts of the country will have received training on how they can best support, draw out the best in, and provide the greatest strides forward for those who will be in their care in the classroom? We must ensure that teachers' needs for comprehensive training and support are met to empower them to meet pupils' needs.

Finally, no discussion of the issue can avoid money completely. Resourcing has been a key issue in recent years. In particular, independent SEND provision is growing. While we recognise that those places are needed, it means that councils are at the mercy of market prices set by market providers. No one in their right mind would deny those children the provision they need, but it puts a significant strain on council budgets dedicated to SEND children. Yesterday's announcement of £1 billion in extra funding is a welcome and much-needed step

but, if we are to make the most of the investment, we need to ensure that it supports state-funded special schools and mainstream schools with inclusive practices, so that every child can make the strides they need and deserve, and gets the support that they are due.

We are not just talking about more money. Schools in my constituency tell me that they need certainty about what will happen with the proposed national funding formula and top-ups. Can the Minister give a timeline of when we can expect that certainty to come? Can she also confirm what will happen to the statutory override for the dedicated schools grant?

We must get this right if the Labour Government are to achieve our mission of breaking down the barriers to education and opportunity that too many SEND children face. I am aware of the scale of the challenge, and no one is more aware of it than the families in the Public Gallery today. It is my belief that the Government will deliver the long overdue changes for families here and in my constituency seeking support for their children with SEND.

2.2 pm

**Alex Brewer** (North East Hampshire) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Luke Murphy) for securing this debate and it is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Mark. In North East Hampshire, as in many other places, special educational needs and disabilities come up repeatedly in casework, constituency surgeries and local council meetings. The system, frankly, is broken. I welcome the calls from the hon. Member for Basingstoke to work across parties on a solution.

Children are frequently not getting the support that they need, schools do not have the funding for further provisions, and Hampshire county council is running at an £86-million deficit trying to meet the need. As a result, children and their families suffer, despite the hard work of headteachers, teachers, teaching assistants and parents. I have met constituents to talk about these challenges, as well as meeting charities that support families in the local area and local councillors to talk through the concerns. I pay tribute to all those who support our children with additional needs, despite the complexity of the system as it stands.

Raising a child with additional needs is hard. We cannot deny that there is an additional parenting burden, although parents, of course, bear it willingly. There is also an additional administrative burden, and council budgets are squeezed so hard that they cannot meet that need.

The number of parents who have to make appeals for SEND support has more than trebled since 2014. When provision is scarce and parents have to fight for it, it becomes an exhausting battle just to have their child's needs met. The increasingly cited narrative—that pushy parents are just trying to get a bit of extra help for their child—is utterly nonsensical given how much work it is to ensure even the most basic provision.

North East Hampshire is a beautiful place to live, but as a largely rural area with many small villages, hundreds of children have to travel a long way to their nearest school. Those families who live a long way from their nearest suitable provision have to deal not only with the stresses of the system, exclusion, lack of academic progression, high levels of anxiety and the opaqueness of the process, but with transport. Due to the severe lack of public transport, they often have to take private taxis.

According to the Department for Education, the net planned expenditure on SEND transport in Hampshire for the '24-25 financial year is £56,795,000, yet I hear time and again from my constituents about the failure to secure transport in time for the start of the school year. The lack of a secure transport route can have a huge impact on a child's relationship with school and their real and perceived safety. It also increases the pressure on working parents, who frequently must leave work or reduce their hours due to the lack of accommodation for their child's needs. The result? A postcode lottery in access to support.

One of my constituents had SEND transport approved in June. We are now on the last day of October and they have not received any further information—two months of the school year have been missed. That is not good enough, and the situation is not unique in my constituency. Another child in North East Hampshire has been told to use a bus stop a mile away from her home, but because of her disability, she and her parents are understandably anxious about the safety of this journey each morning, given the challenges and dangers she faces when crossing roads.

Prior to being elected this year, I was the chief executive of a charity that supports children and young people with Down's syndrome and their families. I saw at first hand what those families must grapple with to secure the right educational support for their child. The charity provides specialist support throughout a child's education—a service that used to be provided by many county councils across the UK.

Charities are often left to pick up the pieces. I recently met Special Needs Jungle, which analyses the sector, provides recommendations and supports families. The Hampshire Parent Carer Network is also a helpful source of support and information. But these organisations cannot find additional services out of thin air.

In the Budget yesterday, the Chancellor stated that she wants

“to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable children”,—  
[*Official Report*, 30 October 2024; Vol. 755, c. 822.]

but she also announced that VAT will be charged on private schools. That is highly concerning for North East Hampshire: we have at least four independent schools, each of which has explicit provision for SEND pupils, and our state schools not only are full but are telling us clearly that they cannot meet the needs of many children with additional needs under the current funding models. There is a budgetary disincentive to including children with additional needs in mainstream schools, which the Liberal Democrats have said we would halve.

The announcement of a £1-billion funding uplift for SEND in the Budget yesterday was welcome, but we must go further to clean up this mess. The system needs a complete overhaul, not just an increase in funding. We must undo the damage inflicted on our wider education system by the previous Conservative Government. We must ensure that early help is restored so that children develop the tools to navigate the school system as early in their lives as possible. We must rebuild play into our early years programme and dispense with testing at age five. We must build outdoor learning into our core curriculum and much more besides.

One school in my constituency is building a new room. It is not for teaching and it is not a classroom; it is a welcome room where children who are refusing to

[Alex Brewer]

go to school can come and feel safe, secure and welcome. It is a bridge between school refusal and school acceptance. It is a great idea, but it should not be needed.

SEND provision must be flexible, tailored and suitable for all communities, both urban and rural. Most of all, it must be available, and that includes the transport required to get to the school gate. I close with a sentiment from an assistant headteacher in North East Hampshire, who said:

“Parents and families shouldn’t have to fight against systems that are meant to be helping their children.”

2.9 pm

**James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Sir Mark. I congratulate the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Luke Murphy) on securing his first Westminster Hall debate on such an important topic for children and parents in Hampshire—it is good to see a number of them in the Gallery listening to the debate. This is the third debate on SEND that I have taken part in since the election, which reflects the importance of the issue to hon. Members in Hampshire and across the whole county, including in Northern Ireland, who all see the challenges and demands facing the sector.

Those problems are familiar to us all. As has been mentioned, last week’s National Audit Office report into support for children and young people with special education needs highlighted the 140% increase in the number of children with education, health and care plans since 2015, and there has been a 93% increase in Hampshire since 2019 alone. Overall, half of those EHC plans are not delivered within the 20-week timeframe, although, in Hampshire, around three quarters are issued on time, a timeframe that my own county of Norfolk aspires to. The NAO also recognised the significant increase in high-needs funding to £10.7 billion put in place by the last Government, but demand continues to grow and there are still big deficits in local authorities that need to be addressed.

That report highlighted the need for whole-system reform; an integrated approach to improve outcomes, which has rightly been mentioned; and the financial sustainability of funding. It also recommended research to understand the root causes driving the increase in SEND and in the demand for EHC plans. I know that the Department is funding some work—I think through the University of Newcastle, and others—to look into those issues, and that there is action to put the budgets of local authorities on a sustainable footing.

I was a member of the Public Accounts Committee a few years ago when another NAO report looked at the SEND system and identified similar problems. The report that we as a Committee put forward helped to inform the SEND and alternative provision improvement plan that the last Government came forward with. We all recognise and accept that the system needs to be reformed; it is not working at the moment.

First, we need a national framework and standards to address the inconsistent support across the country. The previous Government’s plan set out a blueprint for a unified system for SEND and AP that would be driven by new national standards. The first area that we were going to bring forward was around speech and language therapy, and, in a recent written answer to me, the Minister

confirmed that the Government are still considering doing that, which we welcome. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) referred to the powerful impact that early diagnosis and access to speech and language therapy can have. It is great to hear such stories, and they should be told far more often.

We also need to improve the EHCP process because, as the constituent of the hon. Member for Basingstoke said, it shouldn’t be this hard. As constituency MPs, we see the families who have had to battle. We help them to get through the system, but they should not have to come to us. Our plan also committed to improving the timeliness of those plans through a standardised and digitised approach. I would like to hear from the Minister whether the Government will proceed with those proposals as well.

The second area where we need reform—again, there is a lot of consensus—is around building capacity and expertise in mainstream schools, with a focus on early help. As I said in the Chamber last week during an urgent question, we wholeheartedly support the focus on inclusivity. That means improving skills and training in the SEND workforce, with a particular emphasis on early intervention, and sharing the real expertise in specialist schools with those working in mainstream settings. I have mentioned in previous debates that I have been to specialist schools where the teachers are desperate to get into mainstream schools and talk about the activities and expertise they have to support children with those needs in mainstream settings.

Some people clearly do need specialist school support, however, and I understand that Hampshire has been expanding such provision with three new schools, including one that I think was approved shortly before the election. I hope that the Minister will confirm that that school is not part of the review of free schools, but will be proceeding and will be funded.

Hampshire, like my own county of Norfolk, is one of the counties that spends a huge amount of money on transporting children to schools with specialist provision. The hon. Member for Basingstoke referred to the impact on children of being stuck in taxis or buses, and travelling long distances for learning. The hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Alex Brewer) also talked about the impact on parents and their ability to work—and, importantly, on the safety of children, who have to get to bus stops far from their homes.

The third area on which we need to focus is partnerships between education and health groups; we need to ensure that they are working together to lead the change. The NAO said the current system has

“misaligned incentives, accountabilities and priorities across the system”.

That creates challenges in a whole-system approach. Collaboration between key partners is important, and the last Government proposed measures for SEND and AP partnerships. We look forward to proposals in the children’s wellbeing Bill that look to achieve the same outcome.

We all want to see a bit more leg from the Government about their plan for reform and inclusivity. We know that the SEND team in the Department has been moved into the schools unit to help bring greater focus. That sounds perfectly sensible. In yesterday’s Budget, as has been referred to, there was also an additional £1 billion for SEND and AP funding.

Additional funding for SEND is needed and welcome, but I suspect that hon. Members and families listening to the Budget would expect that to be used to provide additional support to their children and the inclusive practices to which the hon. Member for Southampton Itchen (Darren Paffey) referred. Can the Minister confirm, however, that the Government actually expect £865 million of the £1 billion to be used by local authorities to reduce their deficits in SEND? Clearly, financial sustainability and addressing deficits—including the statutory override, which a number of Members mentioned and which I have referred to in every other debate we have had on the subject—is important, but we should be clear about where the extra £1 billion of funding is going and what we are going to see on the ground as a result.

Beyond funding, the Minister has regularly said that we need significant change, but despite last week's urgent question, we are still lacking clarity on what that change looks like, although one thing that the Minister did say in response was that the Government would be looking at

“any legislation that needs to be amended or brought in to achieve our vision for an inclusive mainstream education”.—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2024; Vol. 755, c. 419.]

Can the Minister confirm that she was referring to the Children and Families Act 2014, which established EHCPs, and what is her timeframe for potentially reviewing that legislation? Is her intention that the number of EHCPs required will be reduced, and will she consult widely before implementing any such changes?

In yesterday's Budget, the Government put up taxes by £42 billion, but one area where they were actually honest with the electorate that they would put up taxes was the 20% education tax. We now have the Office for Budget Responsibility assessment, which says that up to 37,000 pupils will leave or not enter the independent schools sector as a result of the new tax; and many of them may be in independent schools that offer specialist support for children.

More than 100,000 children in specialist schools do not have an EHCP. Those are children whose parents have decided that that is the best place for their child to be educated. However, in response to the technical consultation, the Government have refused to exempt them from the new tax, as they believe that there must be a formal independent assessment that a child's needs cannot be met in the state sector. I repeat a question that I have asked before, because I do not think I have had an answer: how many extra EHCP applications do the Government expect local authorities will have to assess?

Since the election, the Minister has said that the Labour Government are absolutely committed to fixing the SEND system. I know that she means that, and the Opposition want to work with her to achieve that. Every hon. Member wants to ensure that families get the support that their child deserves to realise their potential, so our offer is: let us work together to improve outcomes and give children the best start.

2.19 pm

**The Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell):**

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Luke Murphy) on securing a debate on

this incredibly important subject. I know that he, like every Member here, has been supporting families in his constituency to navigate the SEND system. He has raised this issue in the main Chamber regularly, particularly during oral questions. In his opening speech, he spoke incredibly passionately on behalf of his constituents, and I am sure that it will be a huge comfort to them to have their voices heard in such a powerful way in this Chamber.

Improving the special educational needs and disability system across the country is a priority for this Government. We want all children, regardless of where they are in the country, to get the right support to succeed in their education and lead happy, healthy and productive adult lives. Every child deserves the opportunity to achieve and thrive, but far from every child is getting that chance and, for far too long, families have been let down by a system that is not working. As my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke highlighted, a National Audit Office report last week echoed that, finding: a system that has totally lost the confidence of families; that children with special educational needs and disabilities are being failed on every measure; and that, despite the high-needs funding for children and young people with complex special educational needs and disabilities rising to higher and higher levels, the whole system is not delivering and is clearly in need of reform.

I want to give a sense of light at the end of the tunnel. Our promise to families is that we are completely committed to improving the SEND system and rebuilding the confidence that the education system will provide for every child. I know that there are families in the Gallery today, and I am glad that they are here to hear this message. Last week, we published independently commissioned insights showing that if the system was extensively improved, using early intervention and better resourcing in the mainstream schools, it could lead to tens of thousands more children and young people having their needs met without an EHCP and in a mainstream setting, rather than in a specialist placement.

To do that, we need to urgently improve the inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools while ensuring that there are special schools that can cater to those with the most complex needs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton Itchen (Darren Paffey) said, this requires a holistic approach to reform: getting more teachers into our schools; creating a voice for support staff, who we know are so crucial in supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities, through the school support staff negotiating body that we will bring forward in legislation; and improving training for support staff, teachers and leaders to ensure that we have a curriculum and assessment system that truly serves every child and enables them to thrive, with a broad curriculum that gives them the opportunity to have a rich education that taps into their skills and talents.

Of course, we also need to look at Ofsted and how it is motivating the school system to be as inclusive as possible. We want to see all schools co-operating with their local authorities on admissions, strengthening the accountability of the mainstream system to be more inclusive through Ofsted and supporting the mainstream workforce to have that SEND expertise.

We want to see early intervention and identification improved and supported, which is why—as the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for North West Norfolk

[Catherine McKinnell]

(James Wild), said—we have announced that the ongoing funded support for schools registered with the Nuffield early language intervention programme will continue. It is so important that children get speech and language intervention support at the earliest stage possible, so that they can find their voice and we can identify challenges at the earliest stage possible.

As hon. Members have highlighted, improving the SEND system is vital to fulfilling our opportunity mission to break the unfair link between background and opportunity, and that starts with giving every child with SEND, along with all children in our system, the best start in life. But this is huge, complex reform: there is no magic wand or quick fix, and the Government cannot do it alone. That is why we will work with the sector. It is essential that we work with valued partners to ensure that the approach is planned and delivered together with parents, schools, councils and expert staff, who we know already go above and beyond to support children. We ask for patience, but we will work as fast as we can to make the changes that we know families are crying out for.

Following the Budget announcement yesterday, high-needs funding will increase by almost £1 billion in 2025-26 compared with 2024-25, which brings the total high-needs funding to £11.9 billion. The funding includes £90 million to increase the high-needs element of the 2024-25 core schools budget grant to the full-year equivalent, which will be incorporated with the other teachers' pay and pension grants for 2025-26 to make sure that they are fully funded.

We are now in the process of calculating the high-needs national funding formula, which will provide local authorities with their indicative allocations for 2025-26. We expect to publish that by the end of November. The structure of the high-needs national funding formula remains largely unchanged in 2025-26 because we want to take time to consider what changes are needed to make sure that we establish a fair education funding system that directs funding to where it is needed and to support the special educational needs and disability reforms that we want to take forward. That will take time, so we ask for patience.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton Itchen asked specifically about the statutory override. We recognise the unprecedented pressures that local authorities find themselves under. We are providing almost £1 billion more for high-needs budgets in 2025-26, as I mentioned. The impact on individual local authorities' deficits will be variable, and the statutory override is a temporary accounting measure that separates local authorities' dedicated schools grant deficits from their wider financial position so that they can manage their deficits.

It remains important that every local authority continues to look at what it can do within the current system to manage its high-needs budget while continuing to provide the support that children with special educational needs and disabilities need. We are working to consider how we can help councils manage the impact of the dedicated schools grant deficits on their accounts within a SEND system that is in desperate need of longer-term reform.

With reference to Hampshire specifically, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission jointly inspect local area SEND provision to ensure that there is a joined-up approach

for children and young people. The inspections enable the Department to intervene in cases of significant concern and to work with local areas and professional advisers to try to address weaknesses that have been identified.

The last joint local area SEND inspection in Hampshire took place in March 2020. Inspectors visited a range of providers and spoke to leaders, staff and governors to determine strengths and weaknesses in the local area's SEND provision. The inspection found that leaders in Hampshire at the time were highly ambitious for children and young people with SEND, and although the inspection did identify areas for improvement, it did not identify areas of significant weakness. Since that inspection, the Department for Education and NHS England have stayed in regular contact with Hampshire local special educational needs and disabilities officials to discuss the local area's strategic direction and to offer support where needed.

As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) rightly pointed out in his characteristically constructive contribution, there is a significant need for the Department for Education and Department of Health to work closely together at a local level on this issue. Hampshire will be inspected under the new area SEND inspections framework, which came into effect in 2023, in due course

**Jim Shannon:** The Minister has very kindly given us some hope about the way forward. I should have mentioned the Department for Work and Pensions earlier. It is important that parents are aware of all the help in the system—for instance, there is disability living allowance. Whenever somebody comes to me with a child who has experienced educational issues, I always ask them, “Are you aware that there is a system set up to help you?” Is that something we should emphasise a wee bit more strongly?

**Catherine McKinnell:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. That should happen at the earliest possible point, because we know—I have mentioned this already—that children's earliest years make the biggest difference to their life chances, and high-quality early years education can lead to much better outcomes for all children. Arrangements are in place to support early years providers and access to early education, including disability access funding and special educational needs inclusion funding, but he is absolutely right to highlight the ways in which we can help children and families to access support. If we do that at the earliest possible stage in a child's life, we will be able to improve children's outcomes and families' experiences.

We want more children and young people to receive the support that they need to thrive in their local mainstream setting, which reduces the need for them to travel a long way to access a specialist placement. Many mainstream settings are going above and beyond to deliver specialist provision locally through resourced provision and special educational needs units.

We know that there will always be a place in the system for special schools and colleges for children and young people with the most complex needs, so the Department supports local authorities to provide those places for children and young people through annual high-needs capital funding, which can be used to deliver new places in mainstream and special schools as well as

in other specialist settings. It can also be used to improve the suitability and accessibility of existing buildings, and we will set out plans for future high-needs capital funding in due course. The Government are committed to working with councils, school leaders and other sector partners nationally and in Hampshire to develop and improve inclusive education in the mainstream setting.

The hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Alex Brewer) raised concerns about transport. No child should struggle to get to school because of a lack of transport. Local authorities are obliged to arrange free travel for children of compulsory school age who attend their nearest school and cannot walk there because of the distance; because of a special educational need, disability or mobility problem; or because the route is not safe. There are additional rights to free travel for low-income households to help them exercise school choice, but we know how challenging home-to-school travel is for local authorities at the moment, in large part due to the pressures on the SEND system.

In our manifesto, we committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, which will mean that fewer children have to travel long distances to a school that can meet their needs. It will also reduce the pressure on home-to-school travel. I am keen to understand how well the school travel policy is working to support children to access educational opportunities, and I will continue to work with officials in the Department and across Government to improve the situation, because transport is a cross-Government challenge.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke again for bringing this matter forward and I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. We all care passionately about SEND outcomes in Hampshire and across the country.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the Minister for her comprehensive and helpful response. In my contribution, I referred to “nurture” classes in a school in my constituency, which bring together and look after children with educational challenges in a big school. That is in the education system in Northern Ireland, of course, but I know the Minister always makes contact with the Education Authority there. As I said earlier, different regions have ideas that may be helpful elsewhere, so will the Minister consider that?

**Catherine McKinnell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman and I will take that away, because we are open to examples of good practice and ideas for reform that can be rolled out and used in other settings. We do not want the SEND system to work only in pockets; it must work everywhere and we must have a reformed system across the board.

**Luke Murphy:** Will the Minister give way?

**Catherine McKinnell:** I am glad that my hon. Friend has intervened, because it reminds me that I have still not answered a couple of his questions—I will come to them.

**Luke Murphy:** The Minister talked eloquently about how the Government intend to work with councils, providers and others on the reform of the system. How can parents like those I represent in Basingstoke

and those represented by other hon. Members present inform and provide input into the future review and reform? Their experience and expertise would be incredibly useful.

**Catherine McKinnell:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, which the hon. Member for North West Norfolk also made. We are clear that the Government cannot deliver this work alone; it must be delivered with partners who are serving children in the community and in partnership with the families who we know are crying out for change. We are keen to consult and engage, and that must be done on as localised a basis as possible to get a real sense of the challenges in different areas. There are many common themes across the country, but there will be issues in particular areas that need to be addressed. I will take that point away and consider it.

Regarding the questions about education, health and care plans, figures released by the Department in September clearly show that children with special educational needs and disabilities are not having their needs addressed and are waiting far too long for action from a system that is currently creaking at the seams. Without further improvements, it is clear that it will just deteriorate further because a growing number of families need support. We know that local authorities have been affected by an increased demand for education, health and care plans, and that their workforce capacity to meet the demand has also been affected. A more efficient and effective service delivery, alongside communication with schools and families, is therefore central to improving the situation.

From this year, we are investing £21 million to train 400 more educational psychologists to support workforce capacity in local authority services, including for the delivery of statutory assessments. We will work as quickly as possible to ensure that there is more effective early identification, because, as I have already said, it is important to provide training to early educators so that we can identify the challenges that a child might face early in their life.

We will continue to monitor and work closely with any local authorities that have issues with their education, health and care plan timelines. Where we have concerns about a local authority’s capacity to make improvements, we will work with it to identify the barriers and to put in place effective recovery plans, which includes securing specialist SEND adviser support to help to identify the barriers to ECHP process timeliness and put in place plans for recovery.

There were questions about private schools and the VAT change. Private schools can provide choice, high-quality education, economic benefit and public benefit through partnerships, but most parents cannot choose private schools. We need to improve the provision for the 93% of pupils who are at state-funded schools—that is our focus. Parents who use private schools can pay to support that process by paying the VAT that would apply to other optional services. Ending the tax breaks that private schools currently enjoy will raise revenue to improve public services, including through the provision of 6,500 new teachers in our state-funded schools. Children whose place at a private school has been commissioned by a local authority—for example, under an education, health and care plan—will not be affected by the VAT change.

[Catherine McKinnell]

I absolutely acknowledge the hardship that too many families face when they try to secure the right support for their child with special educational needs and disabilities. I am determined that the situation will change, so I conclude by thanking all those working across the education, health and care systems in the interests of our children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, both in Hampshire and across the country. We need to deliver the very best for all our children and young people, including children with special educational needs and disabilities, and the Government are determined to do that.

2.38 pm

**Luke Murphy:** I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate and I will conclude by referring to some of their remarks. I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for highlighting the issue around early intervention, which many parents in my constituency have also recognised. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Chris Bloore) for recognising the great campaigning work of the parents who are here in Westminster Hall, and of parents in his constituency and across the country.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton Itchen (Darren Paffey) for highlighting the fundamental shift that is needed in inclusive practices in schools, the issues around teacher training and the fundamental importance of resourcing a reformed system. I thank the hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Alex Brewer) for highlighting an important quote, which echoes the comments of many parents I have spoken to, suggesting that this should not be a fight against the system, but that the system should provide support. I also recognise the transport challenges that she highlighted.

I thank the hon. Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild) for recognising many of the issues I highlighted around early intervention training in mainstream schools

and transport. Given how devastating the NAO report was, I gently suggest that he should acknowledge that that was a summation of where the system had got to over the last 14 years. None the less, I thank him for his contribution and the nature of the debate, which has been conducted in a cross-party manner. I also thank the Minister for recognising the challenges in the system and for her passion in committing to reforming the system and ensuring it works for parents and children in Basingstoke and across the country.

As other hon. Members have said, this is my first Westminster Hall debate and I thank the Minister and all hon. Members for contributing, as well as the Chair, the House officials and the officials from the Department. I also thank all the teachers and others in the education system in Basingstoke and beyond. I have had lots of conversations with primary and secondary school headteachers in my constituency who have talked about the challenges they face. I know that they struggle every day to do their best to provide opportunities for the kids who attend their schools. We must help them with that and ensure that it is not a struggle for them, the parents or the kids, but is instead a system that works and delivers for them.

Most of all, I thank the families and parents who have raised the issue with me. I look forward to continuing to campaign with them and to working with the Government and hon. Members on both sides of the House to ensure that we build a truly inclusive education system where every child has the opportunity to succeed.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered SEND provision in Hampshire.

2.42 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Cancer Strategy for England

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

3 pm

**Clive Jones** (Wokingham) (LD) [R]: I beg to move,

That this House has considered the potential merits of a cancer strategy for England.

It is an honour to serve under your guidance this afternoon, Mr Betts. This debate is significant to me for many reasons. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008, it came as a massive shock to me and my family. Questions whirled around in a haze of uncertainty: “Is it serious? What happens next? What does the future look like? What treatment will I have?” Some people think, “Am I going to die?”, and, sadly, far too many do.

Cancer is an evil that takes your life completely out of your own hands. The hardest thing I had to do was to tell my two daughters about my diagnosis. They were 13 and 14. It was a very emotional time. Was our family of four about to become a family of three? Because of the delay in diagnosis, my cancer spread. I had surgery twice, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. I was one of the lucky ones who survived.

Looking back on my personal experience of the NHS, I can only be grateful and thankful for the service I received. Our NHS consultants, oncologists, radiologists, radiographers, histopathologists and specialist nurses work with diligence and dedication to provide their patients with the best possible care. Yet it is hard not to reflect that being diagnosed in 2008 was in one respect a blessing, because cancer care in 2024 is simply not working.

Lord Darzi’s independent investigation of the NHS in England plainly said:

“The National Health Service is in serious trouble.”

It did not surprise me to read his report calling out the failings in cancer care. I felt genuine anger when he highlighted that some of our services are lagging behind those of other countries. As a stark reminder, the UK has higher cancer mortality rates than any comparable country. One patient in three waits longer than 31 days for radical radiotherapy. The national target to start treatment within 62 days of an urgent referral has never been met since 2015. The Conservative party should be ashamed of those statistics.

In my constituency of Wokingham, most cancer care is delivered at the Royal Berkshire hospital, and I am thankful that we have fantastic people working there. I am sure Ministers in the Department of Health and Social Care are sick of me saying this, but that hospital urgently needs a rebuild. The consequences of delay, disrepair and degradation put patients on the frontline of risk to their health, and they see at first hand the consequences of failing to invest in the future. That is especially clear in cancer care. Some of the Royal Berkshire cancer treatment is performed in buildings that were built when Viscount Melbourne was Prime Minister: in 1839.

A broken estate is one of many issues stopping cancer standards from being met and is putting patients at risk. Across the country, the target of 85% of patients starting their first definitive treatment within 62 days of referral is not being met. The statistics are shocking. These are people with families and friends. They deserve better.

**Ian Sollom** (St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. The statistics he has shared are truly shocking. I want to draw attention to the five-year survival rate for pancreatic cancer, which several of my constituents have raised with me. They have heartbreaking stories of losing loved ones from a position of diagnosis at stage 4. Does my hon. Friend agree that those statistics highlight the need for a cancer strategy in the UK in order to up early diagnoses and drive forward research?

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** Order. I remind Members that interventions are supposed to be brief and to the point, not a substitute for a speech.

**Clive Jones:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. This is why we need a national cancer strategy. So many cancers do not get the resources they need. Everything is a bit too general; a lot of cancers need the focused, targeted resources that will lead to better outcomes.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the hon. Member for hosting today’s debate. In the last Parliament, the Health and Social Care Committee carried out an inquiry into future cancer. From all the evidence we received, we came to the conclusion that a bespoke future cancer strategy was needed to support the NHS, and that it should not be combined in a major conditions strategy, which frankly went nowhere under the last Government. I congratulate the hon. Member on his advocacy; will he read the Committee’s report and our letter about all the interventions that this Government could make to drive forward cancer care?

**Clive Jones:** I am aware of that report and will refer to it later in my speech.

The challenges will only grow. Experts state that one in two of us will get cancer in our lifetime. An expanding and ageing population means that the number of cancer cases is only going to grow. Cancer Research UK projects that there will be about 2.2 million new cancer cases in the current five-year parliamentary term, a 21% increase on the previous term. Cancer services are struggling now, and they will continue to struggle to keep up with demand. We have a greater number of people being diagnosed, but we have services that are not working. The challenge is stark, but there is a diagnosis for the problem. We now need to deliver meaningful action to recover England’s cancer care to full health.

The Liberal Democrats have made cancer care one of our top priorities for health. There are many policies that we think are crucial to boosting cancer survival rates. We are calling for the introduction of a guarantee for 100% of patients to start treatment within 62 days of urgent referral. We cannot just be content with replacing old radiotherapy equipment; we need replacements, but we also need more equipment. We are calling for the recruitment of more cancer nurses so that every patient has a dedicated specialist supporting them throughout their treatment.

Those crucial policies all feed into the very first step we must take, which is to give England the dedicated cancer strategy that it needs. It beggars belief that we do not have one. A cancer strategy is the best route to delivering genuine improvements for patients, for their

[Clive Jones]

families and loved ones and for those who work in our health system to research, prevent, diagnose and treat cancer.

The recent announcement of a 10-year health plan for England and its aim to improve health outcomes for all is very welcome, but I fear that the plan for all could be a plan for none. For example, analysis from Bowel Cancer UK found that the existing NHS long-term plan failed to sufficiently address the barriers to early diagnosis for bowel cancer. That is the case for many cancers. The approach is just too broad. We need detail, we need political will to be focused and we need a rapid and urgent turnaround.

A dedicated cancer strategy would provide a huge opportunity to fix the entire system, not just for the present but for the future—for our children and our grandchildren. It will not be simple or easy: that is why a strategy requires political will and bold leadership to bring Whitehall together and make tackling cancer a priority.

It is clear that when there is strong, bold leadership, cancer strategies work. That is the case across the world. At present, internationally and across our four nations in the UK, England is an outlier in not having a cancer strategy. Comparable countries with a cancer strategy have seen greater improvements in survival rates. For example, having started from a similar position in the 1990s, countries such as Denmark have raced ahead of England in improving survival in recent decades. Denmark's success is linked to a series of cancer strategies that successfully and strategically built on one another over a 20-year period to tackle critical issues facing cancer services.

Past cancer strategies in England have worked. The 2000 cancer plan for England set ambitious targets across research, prevention and care outcomes. A report by the National Audit Office found that that strategy had supported progress in most aspects of patient experience.

The last Conservative Government launched a consultation on a 10-year cancer plan for England in February 2022. They promised to wage a war on cancer, yet the then Health Secretary, the right hon. Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Steve Barclay), scrapped the dedicated cancer strategy, turning it into a broader major conditions strategy. Delays, delays and more delays meant that the strategy was never published. That is just another legacy of failure from the Conservatives.

In May 2024, the Health and Social Care Committee wrote to the Government and argued that it was a mistake for the Conservatives to abandon the 10-year cancer plan. The current Government have the opportunity to turn that around. Having a cancer strategy is very popular with the public. Almost eight in 10 people think that the Government need to develop a long-term and fully funded plan for cancer. Organisations ranging from Cancer Research UK and Breast Cancer Now to global biopharmaceutical companies and medical institutions support having a cancer strategy for England. Yes, this requires effort, cross-Government thinking and focus, and the ambition to make England and the UK a world leader in cancer outcomes and research. But that effort will mean that we have the chance to save tens of thousands of lives and that millions of people will not need to suffer the upset of losing a loved one or friend.

Last week, I tabled a private Member's Bill—the National Cancer Strategy Bill—calling for the Government to implement a cancer strategy for England. But unlike other private Members' Bills, mine does not need to be law for that to happen; the Government could make the decision tomorrow to kick-start the work to implement it. Indeed, if my interpretation of *Hansard* is correct, they may well be intending to do so. In response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan), the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care recently said that the Government will

“work tirelessly through a national cancer plan to make sure that we deliver the cancer waiting time standards that the last Labour Government met”.—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2024; Vol. 754, c. 684.]

A national cancer plan sounds quite similar to a national cancer strategy, and I would like to use the final section of my speech to make some recommendations to the Secretary of State as to what his cancer plan could and probably should include, because if the Department is seriously considering doing this, it will need to get it right. Broadly, the plan needs to cover all aspects of cancer prevention, research and care. It requires political leadership to bring together stakeholders to develop a strategy and co-ordinate implementation. It requires dedicated governance. There must be a robust central oversight function with a mandate to bridge the gap between disconnected Government structures. It must clearly detail how it will implement the strategy, with measurable objectives and achievable timelines. It must have regular, robust and transparent reporting of implementation and, inevitably, it needs dedicated resources to enable the right change.

A cancer strategy also provides the opportunity for us to unlock innovation in the future. We are living in a golden age of cancer science. New types of cancer treatment, from immunotherapies to cell and gene therapies, are enabling clinicians to attack cancer from multiple angles. These advances are helping to improve cancer outcomes. Therefore, I implore the Government, if they do take up a cancer strategy, to look at how the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence can be reformed to unblock barriers to investment and to strengthen the current infrastructure to increase genomics and biomarker testing.

I could go on. We could discuss the historical lack of strategic direction in terms of having a national policy for blood cancer, or the fact that every day 12 children and young people hear the news that they have cancer. Sadly, 10 die every week, making cancer the biggest killer by disease of children and young people in the UK. Despite that, it remains overlooked in existing strategies and reviews. That reflects the scale of the challenge we face in English cancer services; it feels like a never-ending list of things that we need to fix.

I will use this opportunity to ask the Minister a few questions. Can he assure people living with cancer and cancer charities that the Government will address the current crisis facing cancer services and build long-term resilience through a dedicated cancer strategy? Will he give his support to my private Member's Bill, which would put into legislation a requirement for the Government to establish a 10-year cancer strategy? Will he meet me and, more importantly, representatives of the cancer community to discuss the need for a cancer strategy?

Finally, will he make the case to his colleague the Minister for Secondary Care that the Royal Berkshire hospital requires an urgent rebuild?

**Rachael Maskell:** The hon. Member is making an incredible and powerful speech. Will he add one more ask to his list: for the cancer strategy to be joined up with a life sciences strategy? The UK is fantastic at primary research around cancer, but there is work to be done in scaling that research and translating it into delivering a holistic product for the whole of cancer care, with the ensuing treatments and therapies.

**Clive Jones:** I thank the hon. Member for her very good intervention. We are lucky in this country to have many life science businesses, many of which would really like to work as part of a joined-up cancer strategy. I have several in my constituency that I know would really like to do that, so I thank her for making that very good point.

Let us utilise this crucial opportunity to fix our cancer services. Some 360 people will die of cancer in the Wokingham area in the next year, and there will be around 2,000 cancer deaths over the next five years of this Parliament. We need to do our best to ensure that that figure is not reached but comes down.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** Order. I count seven Members who would like to speak, so that gives us about a six-minute maximum for contributions. I am not imposing a rigid time limit, but that is an indication of how long you should try to speak for.

3.23 pm

**Tony Vaughan** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Betts. I thank the hon. Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) for securing this important debate.

I will start by talking about a constituent who emailed me last week. She is a cancer patient, and when she was discharged from hospital she was informed that there is no specialist cancer rehabilitation and recovery support in Folkestone—a town of 52,000 people. She was told that the nearest support could be accessed only in the neighbouring constituency of Dover or in New Romney, which is 14 miles away. However, she does not have a car, and the effects of the cancer treatment make it challenging for her to move around. Folkestone has been allocated a single cancer support nurse, but they are expected to cover the patients at eight GP surgeries in the area of Folkestone and Dover—a town with a population of 116,000. We obviously do not need to be maths geniuses to work out that the ratio of nurses to the population is unacceptable.

Cancer is the UK's biggest killer, and as we speak more than 3 million people are living with it. Lord Darzi's recent report highlighted in stark terms that cancer patients are waiting far too long to be diagnosed and treated, and when they leave hospital there is inadequate support for recovery and rehabilitation.

The lack of a national cancer plan correlates with, and is likely to be one of the causes of, the geographical inequalities in access to cancer care and rehabilitation, which affect my constituency. I appreciate that the NHS long-term plan includes important commitments for

cancer services, but it does not provide the comprehensive transformation needed across all areas of control, including research and prevention. A critical question for the Government is: what can we do to ensure that a national cancer strategy generates additional capacity in cancer care and rehabilitative support?

The statistics are shocking and a national disgrace. According to Macmillan Cancer Support, in 2023 almost 90,000 people with cancer across the UK waited more than two months from either urgent referral or when the cancer was first suspected to start treatment. The most recent cancer care waiting times for England, to July 2024, showed that only 68% of people received a cancer diagnosis and started treatment within 62 days of an urgent referral. As the hon. Member for Wokingham reminded us, the 85% target has not been met since 2015.

The situation is not inevitable. I agree that we need to start with a comprehensive plan for cancer of the kind that many of our European partners have. When the 10-year NHS plan is published in spring 2025, it should contain a national plan for cancer that focuses especially on how waiting times for diagnoses and treatment can be reduced and on how geographical variations in the quality of cancer treatment and care can be tackled. The plan should focus on how we as a nation can recruit and retain cancer care and rehabilitation specialists; how we can use new technologies and medicines to improve treatment outcomes and increase survival rates; and how we can use our thriving life sciences sector, to which my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) referred, to reduce diagnosis and treatment waiting times.

I fully appreciate the state of the NHS that the Labour Government have inherited—it struggles to recruit and retain, it has been starved of capital investment, and its workforce have had their morale beaten down by successive Conservative Governments—but we can do better. It falls to the Labour Government to lead the way forward so that we have an NHS that can effectively treat, rehabilitate and support patients, and prevent this terrible disease.

I pay tribute to charities such as Macmillan, which do a brilliant job of providing cancer care to patients. We must never forget their compassion, empathy and service; that should inspire us every day in this House.

3.28 pm

**Sir Roger Gale** (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): I do not want to go down the road of party politics. The previous Government poured shedloads of money into the national health service, but throwing money at the problem is not the answer. I am not saying that there is not any demand for more capital expenditure—there is—but that is not the point. Unless we get the structure right, we will go on wasting more and more money. We need to be grown up about this; we must all understand that.

In the few minutes I have, I want to concentrate on an issue that the hon. Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) touched on, but only briefly: the incidence of cancer in young people. It is many years since my eldest son used his wedding—and probably his bride too—to raise money for the Teenage Cancer Trust. In the time between then and now, sadly not a very great deal has changed. That is lamentable. The point was made that, every day, seven young people between their teenage

[Sir Roger Gale]

years and their mid-20s are diagnosed with cancer. By the end of this decade, that figure is likely to have risen to 10 per day.

Most of us in the Chamber probably have family members who have had experience of cancer—or even have personal experience, as the hon. Member for Wokingham clearly has. We all know somebody who has had cancer, and sadly some of us know, only too well, people who have died of cancer. But the instances of cancer among young people are widely disregarded and neglected within the health service and beyond. It is not infrequent for a young person, subsequently diagnosed, to have to make at least three visits to a general practitioner before even being referred, because it is assumed, completely wrongly, that cancer is something that affects old people—people like me. I am expected to get cancer, but young people do not get it, do they? Well, sadly, yes they do, at a rate of seven a day, rising to 10 a day by the end of the decade.

My plea is for the Minister to take away this message: however much money is being pumped into the health service and being made available for investment in diagnostic kit, there is a real need to address one area of the population that has been neglected. That area is teenage cancer victims. It is the largest single killer of young people in this country—bar none—yet young people are overlooked when it comes to clinical trials that could be lifesaving. There is a real reason why young people as a proportion of the population should be included in clinical trials, but they are not—they are overlooked. Why? Because there is the assumption that it is not a disease that affects young people. But it does.

I make my plea on behalf of those in my family who support the Teenage Cancer Trust, and those in the Teenage Cancer Trust who have taken the trouble to brief Members of Parliament. I ram home this message to the Minister and ask him to take it away to the Secretary of State: when we set up, as I am sure we will, a national cancer strategy, the Government must make certain that the 13-to-25 age group is given the recognition it deserves, so that they get the diagnoses in time, before they die, and the treatment they need, and so they are included in clinical trials.

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** I call Noah Law.

**Noah Law** (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Betts, but I will not make a speech.

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** Jim Shannon probably will want to make a speech.

3.33 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): There is hardly a day when I do not make a speech, Mr Betts.

I thank the hon. Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) for securing the debate and for sharing his personal story. Demonstrating an issue is best done with a personal story, if possible, so I thank him for that—it was incredible. I am minded of his story, and I think of my dad as well. My dad is dead and gone now, but when he was living in this world he had cancer on three occasions. It was many years ago, and the expertise for cancer care and healing were not as good then, but he survived because

of the surgeon's skill and the nurses care, and because he was a Christian and he believed very clearly in God's help and the prayers of God's people.

I start by saying how pleased we are to see £22 billion set aside for the NHS. That is constructive and positive and we should welcome it. Within that £22 billion there will be money for radiotherapy, and hopefully for training and bringing staff forward—it is important to have that as well. The hon. Member for Wokingham referred to the Royal Berkshire hospital, and in Northern Ireland we have similar problems.

I am going to tell a story that has been heard often. I am sure that most of us in this House were struck by the candid and very emotional video released by the Princess of Wales to inform the nation that she was going through the valley of cancer. The video was in response to a concerted campaign of disinformation against the princess of my heart, and probably all our hearts. She was disgracefully confronted with that every day. She was forced into a declaration of her intensely private journey with cancer, highlighting the effect on her husband, children and family. That very public declaration and the updates that she has so wonderfully provided have started a wide conversation about the dreaded C-word. We are deeply indebted to the Princess of Wales for that.

We also had the announcement about the King's health. I was surprised and I immediately prayed for him, as I do every day. But the announcement about the Princess of Wales, a young woman in her prime, goes back to what the right hon. Member for Herne Bay and Sandwich (Sir Roger Gale) said: many people do not see cancer as a disease of younger people. The Princess of Wales, who was apparently so healthy and vibrant, has caused many of our young people to remember that cancer is not a disease that is a respecter of person, age, religion or background. All are brought to their knees by this disease that is ravaging the nation.

In Northern Ireland the target is that at least 98% of patients diagnosed with cancer should begin their first definitive treatment within 31 days of a decision to treat. At least 95% of patients should begin their first definitive treatment for cancer within 62 days. The problem is that those timescales here on the UK mainland and for us back home in Northern Ireland are not always met—indeed, they are rarely met. That means that that first definitive treatment, which is so important, does not happen at the time it should, and the figures are not getting any better. With the £22 billion that has been set aside for the NHS, I am hopeful that, through the Barnett consequential for Northern Ireland, we will get additional money that we can use specifically for cancer treatment.

I want to make a point about research and development and make a plea for Queen's University Belfast and the partnerships it has with companies. It brings students from all over the world to find treatments and cures for cancer. I know that happens in many other parts of the United Kingdom, which is good. Research and development is so important, so perhaps the Minister will give us some ideas about research and development when he sums up. I am pleased to see him and welcome him to his place.

The question should not be about lowering the target, but about how we deliver and meet the target of curing cancer. Having spoken to cancer specialists, I know that

the need for more staff in radiology and in labs to provide a quicker turnaround, as well as the need to ensure that there are trained specialist cancer nurses and staff in place, is a long-term issue that needs to be dealt with not with words but with action. We need to spend the budget in a much better way throughout the UK—perhaps the Minister will indicate how that will happen. I believe the answer lies in the recruitment of staff in all facets of the cancer machine—labs, radiology, pharmacy and care. Every area needs specialist training. We need to keep staff in place with better working conditions, rather than the wonderful staff that we have simply burning out due to the pressure.

**Noah Law:** The father of my constituent, Eli Martyr, has been diagnosed with bowel cancer. Despite a difficult time, his father is being looked after amazingly well by NHS staff. If the Government commit to a national cancer strategy, will they ensure that the second biggest cancer killer, bowel cancer, is given sufficient attention? Can we address the staff and kit shortages and ensure that we improve the bowel cancer screening programme to improve the chances of survival?

**Jim Shannon:** I am of an age—I am not sure many others are in this Chamber—where I get a test for bowel cancer every year. A kit is sent out to do the job. Thankfully, every time I have done a bowel cancer test it has come back negative. To be fair, the NHS has a good system for that. When someone reaches 60, they are sent a test. They do the test and the NHS comes back very quickly. If something is wrong, they will hear right away. Although we sometimes criticise the NHS—rightly so—we should always recognise the good things that the NHS does. The hon. Gentleman was right to bring that up; I thank him for that.

The questions regarding cancer care in England are the same as for Northern Ireland: “How can we get the best outcome with what we currently have?” and “How can we plan to do better in the future?” Neither are easy questions, but the fact that some 9,000 new cancer diagnoses are made every year in Northern Ireland—these are drastic figures—in a population of 1.85 million, equating to one in two people developing cancer in their lives, means this issue must be a priority for us all.

I know that in his response the Minister will give us some positives in relation to where we are—I expect that, knowing the nature of the Minister—but it would also be helpful if we could have some idea about how we can better address this issue together, across this whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

3.40 pm

**Claire Young** (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Betts. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) for securing the debate. Some 2.2 million people are expected to be diagnosed with cancer during this Parliament, and almost one in two of us will get cancer in our lifetimes, so we should all be concerned about the crisis in cancer care that was highlighted by the Darzi report.

In my constituency of Thornbury and Yate, just over half of cancer cases are diagnosed early—that is around 2,500 people a year—but just over two thirds of those diagnosed are able to start treatment within two months

after being referred. That is far lower than the 85% NHS target. This Government have promised to do more to tackle the delays in cancer diagnosis and treatment, and I think a specific cancer strategy is the way to achieve that. I will illustrate that with two examples from my constituency.

The first constituent suffers from a rare cancer condition and sought treatment at Cheltenham general hospital, where they received immunotherapy treatment. However, they have since been informed that their treatment will cease on 31 January 2025, due to financial considerations. It simply is not acceptable to have a situation in which a patient is told that they need a particular treatment and then has it halted part way through, not because it needed to stop for their own best interests but because of financial constraints. That is absolutely appalling, and it is a glaring example of where the system is failing. Everyone who has cancer deserves timely and consistent treatment. That is the first thing I highlight for Ministers: when they are looking at producing a cancer strategy, will they look at the treatment and how it is delivered, to make sure that decisions are being made in the best interests of patients, rather than the accountants?

My second example shows how early treatment can save lives. This constituent told me how, in 2021, they were diagnosed with cancer in their eyes. They are one of the lucky ones: it was caught early by their optician and they got an urgent referral. Because they got treatment quickly, they are still cancer-free today. However, it is fair to say that they are not out of the woods; there is a high chance of recurrence and possible metastatisation in the coming years. They told me how that is hanging over their head every day, and made the point that one small change could have meant that, instead of living their life, they would no longer be with us.

That shows exactly why identifying and treating cancer as early as possible is vital. It highlights, in particular, the importance of professionals who are not specialists in cancer but play vital roles in identifying possible signs of cancer at the early stage. There are probably people up and down the country who can give examples of how pharmacists, opticians, dentists and so forth have been the ones who set them on the road to that all-important diagnosis. As we know from other debates in Parliament, all those professions are under strain. We know that people cannot get dental appointments, yet we know how important that is for identifying oral cancers. As I raised in the Chamber this morning, we also know about the issue of pressures on community pharmacists. When the strategy is drawn up, will Ministers look at the importance of non-cancer specialists in referring people for diagnosis, and ensure that that forms part of the strategy?

My hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham identified Denmark as a good example of a country that had been where this country is, but has managed to race ahead. The point is that it had a series of cancer strategies. Reference has been made to delays, or to the idea that we should make this part of a wider strategy. Let us get something done, as a starting point, and then it can be an iterative process. The strategy can be looked at again, and gradually we can make the improvements we need.

A dedicated cancer strategy would complement the Government's 10-year health plan by offering a clear road map for an integrated approach to improving outcomes across cancer prevention, diagnosis, treatment,

[Claire Young]

research and care. That is why we need a dedicated cancer strategy and a wholesale review of the system, to ensure that everyone gets an early diagnosis and the treatment that they need, when they need it, and are fully supported in their journey with cancer.

3.45 pm

**Mr Will Forster** (Woking) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) for securing this debate on the urgent need for a comprehensive cancer strategy, and particularly for his moving personal story, which I think touched us all. In Woking, my constituency, and Surrey, my county, the situation is increasingly concerning, in a similar way to the situation he presented.

Woking does not have a dedicated cancer centre, meaning my constituents have to travel outside of the area to receive specialist care. This adds to the burden of those already facing the weight of a life-changing diagnosis. My constituency, like the rest of England, really wants a strategy that actively meets the needs of our patients and improves access to timely, high-quality cancer treatment.

This year, 2024, is projected to be the worst year on record for cancer care since the NHS last met its 62-day target in 2015. Already, more than 72,000 patients across the country have not been treated within the NHS's 62-day window from referral to treatment. If those trends continue, we could see more than 107,000 patients treated outside the standard by the year's end. That is simply not acceptable.

To put that into perspective, the number of patients who did not start treatment within the 62-day timeframe in 2015 was just under 27,000. By the end of 2023, that figure had risen to more than 100,000, and it continues to climb this year. That near four-fold increase is staggering. Each of those statistics represents real people—our constituents—facing unnecessary delays at the most critical time for them and their families.

The causes are clear, and so are the consequences. Each delay not only impacts the outcome for patients, but places strain on the healthcare system and the wider employment system. What we need now is a long-term, well-resourced cancer strategy, exactly as outlined earlier, that prioritises investment in early diagnosis, improves treatment infrastructure and supports the research needed to make real progress in combating cancer. Patients in Woking and across the whole country deserve nothing less. A national cancer strategy would help to reduce the postcode lottery for cancer care, ensure prompt treatment and provide patients with the security of knowing that our health system is equipped to meet their needs. I urge the Government, and particularly the Minister, to work with us to reverse this distressing trend and deliver the strategy that we desperately need.

3.48 pm

**Tessa Munt** (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): I thank my colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones), for calling this timely and critical debate. It is good to see the Minister for Care in his place. I would like to mark the passing of many friends and some of my family who have lost their lives in a battle with cancer—a dreadful disease.

When I arrived here in 2010, my team and I started a five-year project tracking the use of radiotherapy in England, using freedom of information requests every six months to gather data on the availability and frequency of the use of stereotactic ablative radiotherapy in England's then 51 cancer centres. It was not a pretty picture.

It is a pleasure to return to the subject of radiotherapy, about which many of my constituents in Wells and Mendip Hills care deeply, as do I. I recall that the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) and I had common cause. He represented a constituency in the north-east and I one in the south-west of England, the two areas with the greatest incidence of cancer per head of population. I hope and trust that every one of us is persuaded that when confronted with a serious problem or challenge, the odds of successfully tackling it are immeasurably improved if one has a plan. Without a plan, there is a serious risk of misguided or confused action. Benjamin Franklin, one of America's founding fathers, reportedly said, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." That phrase is as relevant now as when he said it nearly 300 years ago.

In England we are in a battle royale against this deadly disease of cancer, which will directly affect one in two of us and indirectly affect almost every one of us through our connections to friends or family. The evidence is absolutely clear: countries with a dedicated cancer control plan show a better overall five-year cancer survival rate. That is not anecdotal; it is the clear result of an international cancer benchmarking partnership study published in *The Lancet Oncology*.

A report in *The Lancet Oncology* by 12 leading cancer experts published a blueprint for a national cancer plan. Those experts were from Imperial College London, #CatchUpWithCancer and Radiotherapy UK, the Faculty of Public Health and Policy at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and the Institute of Cancer Policy at King's College London. Their blueprint consolidates four reports published separately in *The Lancet Oncology* over two years, clearly outlining the necessary steps—a plan—to improve cancer outcomes.

The need for a plan is urgent. We had a 10-year one, which ran out in 2022. The then Health Secretary promised a new one. There was a five-month consultation, and then the next Secretary of State binned the whole idea. We are in a dire situation on the cancer front. Cancer mortality in this country is among the highest in the OECD. The key 62-day target to start treatment has not been met in England since 2015. When we consider that international research shows that a four-week delay in cancer treatment can increase the risk of death by 10%, this failure to meet that 62-day target has potentially fatal consequences.

If the Government are in any doubt about the consensus across the cancer care community on the need to get back to having a dedicated cancer plan, they need make only a cursory scan of all the charities and other stakeholders. Almost without exception, every organisation of any standing is in favour of getting a cancer plan and getting it fast. As is widely known, there are several main cancer cure pathways: surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Any cancer plan would obviously need to include all these pathways, but I would like to say a few words about radiotherapy in the context of any such cancer plan.

For clarity, I am talking about radiotherapy, not radiography. Radiography is vital. It is the use of techniques to scan an image to detect potential issues such as cancer. Radiotherapy is the use of high-energy radiation to kill cancer cells. If anyone is perplexed by my need to clarify that, they may understand when I say that some former Secretaries of State for Health and Social Care have been heard to confuse the two. I am confident that this Minister and the current Secretary of State will not suffer a similar confusion.

Radiotherapy offers technologically-advanced, cost-effective, personalised and precise solutions to treat more patients more quickly, more accurately and better. We have about 270 radiotherapy machines in England. Of those, 70 will pass their 10-year recommended life this year, and replacing them would cost £150 million. The Minister will know that this will be money well spent, as it takes people off the waiting lists and straight into treatment and gives them a life chance that is longer, and many will return to work, just like my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham.

Until recently, radiotherapy has been overlooked in both priority and investment, so I would like to pay testament to the impressive work of Professor Pat Price of Radiotherapy UK, the charity she founded and still leads. I also thank the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care for agreeing to meet Professor Price, representatives of Radiotherapy UK and me, so that we can all do what we can to help. I am sure that the Minister for Care will also be involved in that conversation. Professor Price's relentless campaigning is putting radiotherapy back at the heart of the political debate. This was reflected in the recent Budget announcement of £70 million for new radiotherapy machines. That money is not enough, but it is a really positive start.

The recent Radiotherapy UK productivity report shows that smart investment in the sector could create 87,000 new cancer appointments, and the need for a new national cancer plan including measures to boost radiotherapy is clear. Only 27% of cancer patients in the UK can access the radiotherapy that they need, compared with the international recommendation of 52% to 53%. In total, 7.4 million people in the UK live in radiotherapy cancer treatment deserts. Lord Darzi's independent review of the NHS revealed that more than 30% of patients are waiting too long for their radiotherapy cancer treatment.

Radiotherapy cannot be used on all cancers, but where it is appropriate a typical radiotherapy cancer cure can cost as little as £3,000 to £5,000, which is dramatically less than chemotherapy. The case for a national cancer plan is well made. I urge the Minister to bring the experts in and to produce such a plan.

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** I thank all hon. Members for adhering to the time guidance; that is really helpful. We now move on to the Front-Bench speakers, who will have 10 minutes each—

**Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD):** Sorry, Mr Betts—I wanted to speak.

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** Sorry; please take just three minutes.

3.56 pm

**Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD):** It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts, and I will be as brief as I possibly can be. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) for securing this important debate.

Two days ago, it would have been my father's 64th birthday, but sadly he died of lymphoma in 2018 aged just 57. Recently my family marked 18 months since my wife was given the all-clear after ovarian cancer. It is thanks to the skill of a highly-qualified surgeon, who removed an absolutely huge lump from her body, that she is with us today and I am very grateful to them every single day.

Much has been said about the need for a national cancer strategy. I will offer the Minister one local opportunity, and it is an opportunity because the previous Government, despite taking some political credit for it in Cheltenham, failed to offer very much money to the Big Space Cancer Appeal to revamp Cheltenham general hospital's oncology centre. As a regional cancer centre, Gloucestershire hospitals NHS foundation trust treats thousands of patients each year, but many of its buildings are now at end of life, many of the rooms have no natural light, and the outdated design is unsuitable for the number of patients in need of treatment.

We know that identifying cancer early and beginning treatment soon afterwards is key to giving people the best chance of survival. The staff at the trust work very hard but they are working under huge pressure and it is no secret that, as others have mentioned, targets are routinely missed. Our local trust is not alone in that. Many staff in the trust feel that the current space is not fit for purpose, and that certainly will not help their best efforts. That is why the trust has launched the Big Space Cancer Appeal. That situation is representative of the challenge we face in not having a strategy for dealing with cancer. The last Government gave almost no money for the project, and the £17.5 million that is being raised in Cheltenham is almost the entire capital cost of the project.

The new centre will offer patients a modern space and a better environment for treatment, healing and recovery. It will have modern consulting rooms, allowing more patients to be treated every day. That will help to cut down waiting times, so that targets can be hit and patients get better outcomes. For some people, this will mean the difference between life and death.

You asked me to be brief, Mr Betts, so I will draw my remarks to a close by thanking Dr Sam Guglani, Dr Charles Candish and all the staff at the trust's charity—the initiative is charity-led but backed by the trust, which does not itself have the funding to deliver it. I also thank Dr Diane Savory, who has been working extremely hard on the project.

If the Government are looking for opportunities to invest in cancer care—we have already heard about some of the consequences of not doing so in my area from my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Claire Young)—I urge them to get in touch, because there is a real opportunity with this project to make a huge difference on the ground.

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** We move on now to the Front Bencher. If they could just leave a minute at the end of the debate for the hon. Member for Wokingham to respond to the debate, that would be really helpful.

3.59 pm

**Mr Paul Kohler** (Wimbledon) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) for securing this important debate.

As so many have said, and as Lord Darzi has confirmed, our NHS is in crisis. Spiralling waiting lists, crumbling infrastructure and demotivated staff are symptoms of the mismanagement that was all too common under the previous Government. The current state of cancer diagnosis and treatment is a testament to their failure: a lack of vision and of strategic thinking has let patients and families down. Under NHS guidelines, 85% of cancer patients are expected to wait no longer than 62 days between referral and the start of treatment, but last year the figure was less than 65% and this year is shaping up to be even worse. On current trends, in excess of 100,000 patients are failing to begin treatment within that timeframe. That is simply not good enough.

The UK is a global hub for life sciences research, yet we lag behind many countries without that expertise when it comes to applying the very research that we have often pioneered. Cancer research is a top priority for the UK, but we must aim to lead the world in outcomes too. As the Health and Social Care Committee made clear earlier this year, that requires

“a long-term strategy...which has innovation at its core.”

We need a more integrated, forward-looking approach to cancer that ensures that research, policy and delivery pull in the same direction, not opposite directions. The current system is much too fragmented.

In my constituency of Wimbledon, there are concerns around breast cancer, for which early diagnosis and treatment is critical. Across Merton, the London borough within which most of my constituency lies, breast cancer screening rates are significantly below both NHS targets and the national average. In 2022, less than 57% attended a screening when invited, which is significantly lower than the 70% national standard required to make screening truly effective. Behind those statistics are lives and families. When breast cancer is diagnosed and treated at stage 1, survival rates are close to 100%, but lower uptake of screening inevitably leads to later diagnosis and a commensurate decline in survival rates. That is why my council colleagues and I have been campaigning for NHS England to provide a breast cancer screening site in Wimbledon, which lacks the screening infrastructure necessary to meet national screening targets.

At a recent Radiotherapy4Life session in Parliament, I heard similar concerns about the lack of investment across England in radiotherapy. Only half of those who could benefit from radiotherapy are accessing it, because—in the words of the medics I spoke to—this country lacks a cancer strategy. The entire set-up is far too fragmented. To take one depressing example, even though integrated care boards are responsible for radiotherapy, some 30% of them, when subjected to a freedom of information inquiry, did not even know that.

In contrast, when the cancer referral system works well, the approach is transformational. Two weeks ago, in the wake of an elevated prostate-specific antigen level, I was put on a two-week cancer pathway; two days ago, I had an MRI and received a clean bill of health. It took just 10 days to give me peace of mind. Not everyone will be so fortunate, but everyone deserves that

alacrity. A more integrated approach to cancer will speed up diagnosis and treatment and improve cancer outcomes. Consequently, I echo my colleagues' calls for the Government to introduce a cancer strategy.

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** For the Opposition, I call Ben Spencer.

4.3 pm

**Dr Ben Spencer** (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I thank the hon. Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) for securing this important debate on what is clearly a difficult subject, given how much cancer affects people: as several hon. Members have said, it affects all of us, not just those who are directly affected. I listened carefully to the powerful speeches that he and the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson) made about the direct impact that they have experienced.

I pay tribute to all the people who work in our NHS, the charity sector, the research sector and all parts of our community that are active in prevention and in supporting, treating and helping people through the journey with cancer. My speech cannot cover every cancer in the limited time I have, but I will focus on the major cancers, so to speak, in terms of prevalence and mortality rates. That is not to diminish the importance of the range of cancers: it is critical that we focus on rare cancers as well as the major ones.

I thank the hon. Member for Wokingham again for his speech and for sharing his personal experience. He did not mention the fact that he has raised more than £800,000 for cancer charities in his work following his diagnosis. It is important that we pay tribute to him for bringing forward this debate.

I was deeply concerned by the story told by the hon. Member for Thornbury and Yate (Claire Young) about the impact on her constituent of the cessation of their treatment as a result of financial measures. I hope that the Minister can meet her or take up the case; I would be interested to hear how that decision was taken. I hope that the family and the individual affected are doing okay with their treatment. My right hon. Friend the Member for Herne Bay and Sandwich (Sir Roger Gale) made important points, to which I will return later, about childhood and teenage cancer.

I was pleased that the hon. Member for Woking (Mr Forster), my constituency neighbour, raised the impact on his constituents in terms of seeking direct cancer care. As he knows, both of our constituencies are served by Ashford for broader cancer support. I would welcome the chance to meet him to discuss how we can help our constituents, particularly with journey times to access cancer care locally.

It is important to focus on data, so I will refer to data from the NHS and from Cancer Research UK. I have a series of questions for the Minister; I know that a lot may not be in his portfolio, but if he cannot answer today I will be grateful for a written response.

Fundamentally, the things that the state can do about cancer strategies break down into prevention, diagnosis, care and treatment, and research. All the major cancers have modifiable risk factors. Of the 44,000 bowel cancer cases a year, 54% are deemed to be preventable, with 11% linked to obesity, 28% linked to diet and fibre, 13% linked to processed meat and 5% linked to physical

activity. Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK: of the 56,800 cases a year, about 8% are believed to be linked to or caused by obesity. Lung cancer is the third most common cancer: of the approximately 50,000 cases a year, about 80% are preventable and 72% are linked directly to smoking.

Overall, tobacco is the largest preventable cause of cancer. Some 50,000 cancer cases per year are attributable to smoking. In the last Parliament, we introduced the Tobacco and Vapes Bill because we recognised the importance of reducing smoking. Can the Minister tell me when his Government plan to reintroduce that Bill, so that we can start to see its health benefits? Obesity is the UK's second biggest cause of cancer, after smoking. It is believed to cause about one in 20 cases: 20,000 cases of cancer per year are attributable to obesity. We brought forward an obesity strategy. Will the Minister review it and bring forward an obesity strategy in this Parliament?

On screening and treatment, while cancer outcomes continue to improve in comparison with the OECD, it is worth looking at the data in the Darzi report. One of the most interesting slides shows that over the past 14 years, we have improved relative to the gradient of cancer outcomes, but we started at a very low point. There are lots of questions to be asked about why we started at such a low point back in 2004. The NHS is still recovering from the disruption to cancer care caused by the covid pandemic, but thanks to the hard work of NHS staff, waits of more than 62 days declined between September 2022 and August 2024. Obviously there is still more work to be done.

Community diagnostic centres and surgical hubs made a difference. They were backed by a £2.3 billion investment, the largest cash investment in MRI and CT scanning in the history of the NHS; those scans, tests and checks are now being delivered in 170 CDC sites.<sup>1</sup> As the independent Health Foundation recently pointed out, surgical hubs have helped to build capacity and reduce waiting lists over the past few years. Although it was not mentioned in Lord Darzi's report on NHS performance, I welcome the Government's intention to expand surgical hubs. Will the Minister provide more details on how many new surgical hubs will be established? What plans have the Government to expand the CDC network further?

There is clearly more work to be done to improve cancer waiting times and outcomes. The major conditions strategy developed under the last Government was designed to provide more impetus for improving cancer outcomes, alongside those for other major conditions. Developing the strategy involved significant consultation and engagement with cancer charities and professional bodies. Since the election, the Government have decided to scrap the strategy. Can the Minister explain why he made that decision?

Given the time that cancer charities and organisations have put in, can the Minister explain how their contributions will be used to develop the 10-year plan for the NHS? Can he explain why, in the NHS consultation that is now being run, there are no cancer-specific questions? We heard earlier that eight people in 10 want a cancer strategy. Will he respond if similar results emerge from the consultation?

The Government scrapped the children and young people cancer taskforce, and we have yet to hear an alternative approach to improve of outcomes in that area. Will the Minister provide clarity on the Government's

plans on children's cancers and the reasons why they discontinued the children and young people cancer taskforce?

Research is most relevant to some of the rarer cancers that are often not talked about. We very much welcome the protection of Government investment in R&D, with £20 billion allocated to 2025-26 and core research spending protected. That includes a £2 billion uplift for the National Institute for Health and Care Research. I should mention that my doctoral research fellowship was funded by the NIHR, although it was mental health research rather than cancer research. It is great that we support that fantastic institution.

I am pleased that the Government have kept the current rate of research and development tax relief. However, the Minister will know that a lot of support and research is provided by or directly commissioned from charities, which are a critical part of the cancer care and treatment infrastructure. My understanding is that in yesterday's Budget, public services were protected from the rise in employers' national insurance contributions. Can the Minister explain what the impact of national insurance employer contributions will be on charities that provide care and treatment in this area? What conversations has he had with those charities, and what concerns have they raised with him?

In the Darzi report and elsewhere, there is rightly a focus on the diagnostic pathway and on the time it takes to diagnose and treat someone following a query as to whether someone has cancer. When does the Minister expect the huge £22 billion injection in the NHS to produce outcomes? Or does he agree with the comments in Lord Darzi's report that the NHS does not necessarily need more money for outcomes? It has had a lot of money from the former Conservative Government over the past few years. Does the Minister think that reform is the best way to ensure improvement?

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** I call the Minister. It would be helpful if he could finish by 4.28 pm to allow the mover of the motion a couple of minutes to respond.

4.15 pm

**The Minister for Care (Stephen Kinnock):** It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Betts. I thank the hon. Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) for raising this vital debate about the future of cancer care and the potential merits of a cancer strategy. I am aware of the impressive work he has done on access to primary care on behalf of his constituents in Wokingham and that, as he very movingly set out in his speech, he is a cancer survivor. I welcome and commend his efforts in campaigning for cancer charities. I understand that he has raised a mind-boggling £800,000 for charity, so I pay huge tribute to him. I also thank and pay tribute to every Member who has spoken today. They have spoken with such clarity and passion, and it became clear that many present have personal experiences of cancer, which adds a poignancy to our discussion that makes it even more powerful.

Access to cancer care is an important issue for many people, and it is at the heart of this Government's health mission to build an NHS that is fit for the future and to reduce the number of lives lost to the biggest killers. Our work will focus on three shifts: from hospital to community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness

1.[Official Report, 11 November 2024; Vol. 756, c. 6WC.] (Correction)

[Stephen Kinnock]

to prevention. On cancer services, I reassure the hon. Member for Wokingham and other hon. Members that the Government are absolutely committed to fighting cancer on all fronts, from prevention to diagnosis, from treatment to research. The NHS can be world-leading on cancer care as part of a wider health system that incorporates innovation and technology. It also benefits from access to world-class research and medicines, and we will look to realise the potential of both.

Nearly a third of patients are waiting more than two months for their referral before starting treatment. That is unacceptable, and the Government have made reducing those waiting times a core part of our health mission. Thanks to the hard work of NHS staff, we are now meeting the faster diagnosis standard so that more than 75% of patients get an all-clear or cancer diagnosis in 28 days. However, we know that there is much more to be done. The Chancellor set out yesterday how we will invest in the NHS to deliver 40,000 additional operations, scans and appointments per week as part of our commitment to cut waiting lists, and how we will invest in new radiotherapy machines so that cancer patients have access to the most effective treatment. NHS England is also working to make cancer diagnosis and treatment faster and more efficient through the use of innovative approaches such as teledermatology and faecal immunochemical test kits for risk stratification in bowel cancer.

The NHS has made historic strides in cancer care. Ten-year survival has doubled since the early 1970s—but that rate of improvement slowed in the 2010s, and there is still a lot of work to be done. Early diagnosis and innovative treatments are key to enhancing survival rates and quality of life for cancer patients, so we will ensure that the Government and the NHS work hand in hand with life sciences research institutions and industry to drive the development of new treatments and diagnostics. Members of all parties have rightly raised some of the deadliest cancers, including pancreatic and bowel cancers and cancers affecting children and teenagers. We recognise that different tumours have different diagnostic and treatment pathways, and will consider that as part of our cancer strategy.

Since taking office, this Government have wasted no time in taking steps to accomplish our vision. Earlier this month, we announced funding for a raft of new UK-created therapies for cancer that will be trialled in the UK. Developing early diagnosis technologies is a key aim of the National Institute for Health and Care Research funding. The potential to find cancers earlier will give patients more choice of treatment and enable us to save lives.

We also commissioned an independent investigation of the health service in England, carried out by Lord Darzi. Published in September, Lord Darzi's report set out in stark terms the profound challenges faced by the health service, and he was honest about the scale of the work that will be needed. He highlighted that people in the UK are more likely to die from cancer than in any other European and English-speaking country, and that improvements to survival rates have slowed. He also pointed to the need to improve waiting times for cancer treatment—particularly curative radiotherapy—and expand access to the most sophisticated treatment options, such

as genomic testing. Not enough progress has been made on increasing the number of patients diagnosed at stages 1 and 2—the best way to improve survival. However, Lord Darzi said that there are signs of hope, thanks to the success of initiatives such as the targeted lung health check programme. We are not daunted by the scale of the challenge; we know that we need to roll up our sleeves and get to work.

In response to the Darzi report, and as part of our mission to build an NHS fit for the future, we have launched an extensive programme of engagement to develop a 10-year health plan. The plan will set out a bold agenda to deliver on the three big shifts that I outlined earlier. This will be a team effort. We will listen to, and co-design the plan with, the public, the health workforce, charities, academics and other partners. I encourage every parliamentarian, in this Chamber and right across the House, to get involved in this big national conversation—the biggest conversation we have had about our healthcare and care system since the NHS was founded in 1948. Please go to [change.nhs.uk](https://change.nhs.uk) and get involved. There will also be approximately 100 deliberative events around the country so that Members and their constituents can get involved in the big conversation, which will lead to the publication of our 10-year plan strategy in spring 2025.

Organisations such as Cancer Research UK have been at the forefront of advocating for a robust cancer strategy. Their reports highlight the importance of dedicated cancer strategies in driving efforts and impact towards improving cancer research, diagnosis and care. We have launched the Change NHS online portal to facilitate that national conversation and help develop the 10-year health plan. The journey of developing a plan is as important as the plan itself. We want the public and healthcare staff in England, and all other stakeholders and people who care about the future of our health and care system, to share their views, experiences and ideas. The portal opened on 21 October and will run for several months.

To build an NHS fit for the future, we first need to listen. To reduce the number of lives lost to the biggest killers, like cancer, we need to learn from people with lived experience, researchers and our NHS staff. We also recognise the need for leadership by the Government, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been clear that there needs to be a national cancer plan. We are now in discussions about what form that plan should take and what its relationship to the 10-year health plan and this Government's wider health mission should be. However, we are clear that we must develop and publish the 10-year health plan in spring 2025, before we can publish a stand-alone cancer strategy. We will provide updates on that in due course. The sequencing is important; it is best to set the strategic framework through the 10-year plan, and then a stand-alone cancer plan will flow from that. I have absolutely heard the message about the need for a cancer strategy loud and clear from hon. Members, and I will convey it to my ministerial colleagues and to officials.

I thank the hon. Member for Wokingham for bringing this important matter to the House, and once again I thank all hon. Members who contributed. I also thank the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer) for the constructive way in which he has engaged in this debate. He asked me a vast range of

questions. It is probably better, in the short time that I have available, to say that I will write to him so that I can respond in the detail that is required, which I do not think I can today.

I am pleased to assure hon. Members that rebuilding our NHS and delivering world-class cancer services for every person remains a top priority for this Government. We have wasted no time in taking action, announcing funding that will make innovative treatments accessible to cancer patients. We have published an independent investigation of the health service in England, which has highlighted the challenges that cancer patients face and the scale of the work needed. With input from members of the public, researchers and NHS staff, we are now developing a plan to make the health service fit for the future and to reduce the lives lost to the biggest killers, including cancer.

The foundation of the NHS was, of course, one of the proudest achievements of the Labour Government of 1945 to 1951. We created a service that was right for the 20th century at that time. It now falls to the Labour Administration of 2024 to shape a health and care service that is fit for the 21st century, so let us work together to get our health and care service back on its feet and ready to tackle the scourge of cancer.

4.25 pm

**Clive Jones:** I thank you, Mr Betts, and the Minister for giving me a few minutes to sum up; that is very kind. I thank colleagues from all political parties who contributed to the debate. I made notes of what everybody said. I do not think that I can go through all of them, but I have to say that I agree with the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon): we have got from the Government another £22 billion for the NHS, and that has to be welcomed. I am also very pleased to say that I agree with everything that the right hon. Member for Herne Bay and Sandwich (Sir Roger Gale) said. Children should be included in clinical trials; I totally agree. I am

very pleased that he also said that there should be a national cancer strategy. I am delighted that the wife of my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson) has had successful treatment—the same that I had.

Both the Minister and the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer), were kind enough to mention that I have helped to raise over £800,000. But it is not just me; many other people have been involved in the raising of that £800,000. My daughters and I did skydives. They went out of the plane first, and that really made me decide that I had to go out as well—I did not want to! We have had dinners, tea parties and golf days with friends, and the two very big events have been fashion shows in front of 1,000 people. If Members think that it is daunting to make their maiden speech in Parliament, they should imagine what it is like to walk out in front of 1,000 people, dressed in a ridiculous pink three-piece suit. That was not the easiest thing that I have ever had to do.

I was really pleased to hear the Minister say that he has heard loud and clear the request from all of us for a national cancer strategy. I hope that in the next few weeks, few months, or certainly by the end of the spring and beginning of the summer, he will have been able to persuade the Secretary of State that we need a national cancer strategy. It is a very popular policy. Eight out of 10 people want us to have a national cancer strategy. Many, many cancer charities want us to have a national cancer strategy. It would be really good if the Minister and the Secretary of State could help to deliver one.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the potential merits of a cancer strategy for England.

4.29 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

*Thursday 31 October 2024*

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Public Library Usage: England

**The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant):** Libraries matter to people. They provide inspiration, education, entertainment and a safe haven for many thousands every week. In addition to their core function of providing books to lend or consult, they provide digital services, audio recordings and information that can be vital to building a local business as well as bringing people together across communities.

Despite the value and benefit of public libraries for users, the library sector has faced several long-term challenges, and the context for library engagement and delivery has changed significantly. Recent challenges include: the impact of Government-driven austerity, leading to cuts to local authority budgets; the covid-19 pandemic, which drastically affected people's engagement with and use of libraries; and the increasingly digital world. We cannot shy away from those challenges; the amount that councils are spending on public libraries in England fell by almost half in real terms between 2009-10 and 2022-23.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has a statutory responsibility to superintend and to promote the improvement of local government's provision of public library services in England. The Culture Secretary is responsible for ensuring that library authorities deliver a "comprehensive and efficient" library service for their communities. DCMS works closely with sector stakeholders to achieve this, as well as to advocate for public libraries across Government.

As part of that work, the Government are publishing DCMS-commissioned research by Ipsos on barriers to library usage by the general public. The research explored the barriers to and enablers of library usage through a number of focus groups and sets out potential policy interventions that could be deployed by local or national Government to promote library usage. A copy of the research will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

This research has identified a number of ways that public libraries could tackle these challenges and encourage more engagement from the public, including:

- raising awareness of the range of services that public libraries offer, particularly digital services;
- addressing practical barriers to engagement with public services, such as opening hours and parking facilities;
- clarification of the types of spaces available for all demographics; and
- harnessing the appeal of public libraries as spaces that enable and encourage community cohesion.

We are sharing the findings to ensure that library services across England can actively consider how they might act on the results. DCMS is commissioning further research to test the findings and insights from phase 1 at scale to inform policy design and implementation. I will also be meeting with library sector organisations and

leaders to discuss the challenges in the sector, reflect on priority policy areas and consider how best we can support the sector.

[HCWS178]

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### Afghanistan

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Hamish Falconer):** Today, I am updating the House on the efforts the UK Government have made to support those most in need in Afghanistan. The future of this country continues to matter to the UK due to the risk of terrorism, illegal migration, the humanitarian and food security crisis, and appalling human rights situation, particularly for women and girls.

Afghanistan remains in humanitarian crisis. According to the United Nations, over 23 million people—more than half the population—require humanitarian assistance in 2024. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has provided support to the most vulnerable and marginalised people in Afghanistan. In financial year 2023-24, we provided a total of £113.5 million in overseas development assistance to Afghanistan. All UK funding was channelled through UN agencies, non-governmental organisations and the Red Cross Movement. Through these partnerships last year, the UK Government supported access to humanitarian assistance for more than 2.7 million people, including providing assistance to prevent malnutrition to at least 1.5 million people. The UK also helped more than 1.4 million people, of whom over 1 million were women, to access essential health services. We aim to ensure that more than 50% of people reached with UK assistance are women or girls.

The Government have repeatedly condemned the Taliban's repressive policies and behaviour. However, like many of our allies, we maintain a limited and pragmatic dialogue with the Taliban where it is in our national interest to do so. This process was started by the previous Conservative Government. This engagement does not represent legitimisation of the Taliban's actions. We will continue to hold the Taliban to account for their actions, including on the rights of women and girls, counter terrorism, human rights and maintaining humanitarian aid access.

Government officials have engaged with the Taliban to help protect the operating space for humanitarian partners in Afghanistan, pressing on priority issues such as counter-terrorism and human rights, including the rights of women and girls. We have consistently underlined the need to ensure that women continue to play an active role in the humanitarian response to the crisis in Afghanistan, and can safely access assistance and provide feedback on the quality and appropriateness of the response. We will continue to push the Taliban on this issue, and ensure women and girls remain at the heart of our aid response.

Beyond immediate humanitarian needs, the UK Government are working with the international community to support longer-term basic services for the Afghan people, including health, education and livelihoods. Through our bilateral programmes, in 2023-24, at least 83,000 children, including 54,000 girls, were supported to access education

and at least 466,000 children, including 310,000 girls, were fully immunised. In February 2024, with strong UK support, the World Bank Board endorsed the provision of grant finance from the World Bank's International Development Association to Afghanistan. This funding, to which the UK Government contribute, will deliver further health, livelihoods and education programming in Afghanistan through the World Bank's Afghanistan resilience trust fund.

Through newly approved UK funding we will scale up livelihoods and agriculture programming to support vulnerable Afghans to grow more food, improve their income, and be more resilient to climate change, helping tackle the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan in more sustainable ways. New UK investments in health and education, with a focus on women and girls, support wider goals to champion rights, equality and a healthier world.

In August, the Taliban passed a "vice and virtue" law imposing wide-ranging restrictions on Afghan women, men and children and the media, including effectively removing women from public spaces. The laws have attracted widespread international condemnation. As the Foreign Secretary has said, the exclusion of women from all aspects of public life is another tragic setback for Afghanistan and its people. Officials have directly pressed the Taliban to reverse this law and, alongside like-minded international partners, have lobbied senior Taliban officials emphasising that we consider the law a grotesque backwards step. We have also condemned the law publicly through the UN, including the Human Rights Council. We will continue to raise our serious concerns and press for the reversal of these restrictions.

We continue to engage with Afghan women and are committed to providing platforms for Afghan women to speak out, advocate for their full inclusion in society, and promote their rights. In August, the Minister for the Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan hosted a group of senior Afghan women leaders to hear their perspectives and discuss the inclusion of women in Afghanistan's future political process. In September, the Minister delivered a speech to the All Afghan Women Summit in Tirana, emphasising the UK Government's continued support to Afghanistan and solidarity with Afghan women.

In September, the Afghan embassy in London closed following the dismissal of its staff by the state of Afghanistan. This decision was not made by the UK Government. In line with international law, specifically the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations, Afghanistan is responsible for the appointment and termination of staff at its embassies. The FCDO recognises that the closure will create challenges for Afghan citizens in the UK who require consular services.

We continue to work constructively with parties inside and outside of Afghanistan for an Afghanistan at peace with itself, its neighbours, and the international community.

[HCWS179]

### **Government Wine Cellar Report 2022-'24**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Catherine West):** I have today placed a copy of the report on the Government wine cellar for the financial years 2022-23 and 2023-24 in the Libraries of both Houses.

This biennial report meets our commitment to transparency on the use of the Government wine cellar, covering consumption, stock purchases, costs, and value for money.

[HCWS180]

## **HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

### **Housing and Regeneration: London**

#### *Maximising housing delivery around Euston*

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook):** Since the construction of Britain's first inter-city rail link between London and Birmingham, Euston has been not just a bustling London neighbourhood but a gateway to the west midlands, north-west England, north Wales and Scotland.

However, as in many of London's neighbourhoods, the need for housing in the area around Euston station far outstrips supply, resulting in higher housing costs, rising levels of overcrowding and workforce pressures. To meet the challenges and grasp the opportunities facing this important part of our capital city, bold action is required.

The Government are already taking forward plans for a much-improved Euston station, and my Department is committed to supporting the delivery of significant numbers of new homes alongside this project. To progress that work, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has established the Euston housing delivery group in partnership with the London Borough of Camden. This group will advise Ministers and local leaders on an ambitious housing and regeneration initiative for Euston, assessing the shape and scale of the opportunity for growth in the area, and acting as a driving force for new investment in the area.

My Department will work with local leaders and communities to ensure that the redevelopment of Euston is an example of exemplary place-making. Housing delivery and commercial development will be backed by the necessary social infrastructure and amenities to create thriving new communities and bolster existing ones. Ready access to primary healthcare, spaces in primary and secondary schools, and access to open green spaces for communities will be central to our vision.

Sustained economic growth is the only route to improving the prosperity of our country and the living standards of working people. That is why it is this Government's No. 1 mission. Regenerating Euston, at the heart of our capital city, will both contribute to meeting housing need locally, and support economic growth nationally by releasing the productive potential of this historic neighbourhood.

#### *The Euston housing delivery group*

As announced in the Budget, I am appointing Bek Seeley to chair the Euston housing delivery group. The group will:

- Assess the scale of opportunity for housing growth and regeneration beyond the existing Euston station site.

- Identify the infrastructure, services, and green space required to unlock maximum housing delivery.

Consider how these housing opportunities can be delivered across Euston, working alongside with the Department for Transport, the Greater London Authority, and the London Borough of Camden.

Advise central Government and local leaders on an ambitious housing and regeneration scheme, as well as the routes to deliver it.

Bek has worked in the public and private sectors, has held a range of operational and commercial roles in economic development, infrastructure, built environment and public services, and has overseen major housing projects in London, Birmingham and Manchester.

The delivery group will be made up of industry experts in urban design, architecture, affordable housing delivery and financing large-scale projects. Their core focus will be to develop a trailblazing regeneration scheme, which will unlock more investment in Euston and drive growth, benefiting the local community and the whole nation.

We will continue to update Parliament on the work of the delivery group.

[HCWS182]

### Greater Cambridge

#### **The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook):**

I am today updating the House on the next steps the Government intend to take, in collaboration with local partners, to support ambitious and high-quality sustainable growth in Cambridge and its environs.

Sustained economic growth is the only route to improving the prosperity of our country and the living standards of working people. That is why it is this Government's No. 1 mission. The economic growth of Cambridge has been a phenomenal success and the city's strengths in knowledge-intensive businesses within its unique innovation ecosystem are well documented, with strong connections between investors, researchers, businesses and local government. We know that greater Cambridge has the potential to make an even greater contribution to the UK economy, and the Government are determined to make this happen.

While local partners in greater Cambridge share the Government's ambitions, there remain significant barriers to further growth. It is essential that the Government help to remove them to overcome the issues that have held up planned development for essential housing and laboratory space. It is also vital that we take a collaborative approach to addressing the costs that have come with success, including housing affordability pressures, traffic and congestion, and air pollution. We know what can be achieved when local authorities, central Government and public bodies work in partnership to overcome these challenges. I want to sustain the constructive relationship I have established with local leaders and key partners over recent months.

#### *The Cambridge Growth Company*

The Deputy Prime Minister and I are determined to realise the full potential of greater Cambridge to the benefit of its existing communities and the UK economy. I am therefore appointing Peter Freeman to chair the Cambridge Growth Company, which will work with local partners to develop and start to deliver an ambitious plan for delivering high-quality sustainable growth in Cambridge and its environs.

Peter is a development and regeneration expert with a strong track record, working with private and public partners. He brings a wealth of experience in delivering complex mixed-use projects, including in his current role as chair of Homes England and through the renowned redevelopment of King's Cross.

The growth company will focus on the following core activities:

Enable and accelerate developments which align with the Government's ambitions for Cambridge, and unlocking development on stalled sites.

Develop the evidence base to support development of an infrastructure-first growth plan and a long-term delivery vehicle, working with experts to assess infrastructure requirements, including water and transport, and laying the foundations to establish a long-term delivery vehicle.

Identify solutions to complex constraints and support a cross-Government approach to unblock existing development, providing the right incentives for successful development in the long-term.

The work of the Cambridge Growth Company will be supported by £10 million of new funding committed at yesterday's autumn Budget. This funding will be used to develop an ambitious plan for housing, transport and wider infrastructure, and for the water needed to support sustainable growth.

We will continue to update Parliament on the work of the Cambridge Growth Company.

[HCWS181]

## TRANSPORT

### Civil Aviation Authority Annual Progress Report

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Kane):** The airspace modernisation strategy refresh, published on 23 January 2023, sets out, through nine elements, the ways and means of modernising airspace, focusing on the period until the end of 2040.

The Civil Aviation Authority must report to the Secretary of State annually on the delivery of the AMS, through an annual progress report. This report details the progress made by industry, as well as work the CAA have conducted against each of the AMS's elements. For 2022, the progress report reports on the previous AMS's 15 initiatives.

In total, six of the 15 initiatives are assessed as "requiring attention", two are on track, one has been implemented and six initiatives have been assessed as having "major issues".

The Department is working with the CAA to strengthen delivery and ensure greater progress is made in implementing the airspace modernisation programme. Ministers are giving the programme urgent attention and have already announced measures to tackle these challenges, including the consultation launched on 22 October on our plans to create a new UK Airspace Design Service. This will drive forward airspace modernisation and create a system fit for the future by delivering quicker routes, easing delays, and reducing harmful emissions.

#### *Areas of progress*

Free route airspace (initiative 2) was implemented in Scotland in 2021 and remains on track for deployment in Q1 2023 across south-west England and Wales. This will

see airlines being able to fly more direct routes in upper airspace, reducing aviation's carbon emissions, and will save 12,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year—equivalent to the power used by some 3,500 family homes.

The airspace classification review (initiative 10) has made significant progress with the publication of the findings into the review of the Cotswold region. This work has identified where airspace can be opened up for all airspace users to use (e.g. general aviation).

Under the deployment of electronic surveillance solution (initiative 11), the Department for Transport and the CAA established the Surveillance Standards Task Force, developing national, voluntary specifications for electronic conspicuity. This is a key enabler in the refreshed AMS, bringing together current and new airspace users, such as drones, in order to promote a safe and integrated lower airspace.

*Areas assessed as having major issues*

There are a number of initiatives assessed as having “major issues”, in part because of covid-19 recovery and the complexities of the airspace changes in the London cluster. However, formal acceptance of the Airspace Change Organising Group's masterplan iteration 2 in January 2022 was a critical milestone. This was enabled in part by £9.2 million Government funding. Iteration 3 will be published later this year following a number of public engagement exercises.

Of the six initiatives requiring attention, timescales and delivery plans have been reassessed and re-baselined as a result of publication of the refreshed AMS.

I will place a copy of the airspace modernisation strategy 2023 progress report in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS177]

**DVLA and VCA Business Plans 2024-25**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood):** I am pleased to announce the publication of the 2024-25 business plans for two of the Department for Transport's motoring agencies: the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and the Vehicle Certification Agency.

Each agency's business plans sets out:

The key business priorities that each agency will deliver and any significant changes they plan to make to their services, and;

The key performance indicators, by which their performance will be assessed.

These plans allow service users and members of the public to understand the agencies' plans for delivering their key services and managing their finances.

The business plans will be available electronically on gov.uk and copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency 2024-25 business plan will be published separately as we continue to work with them on measures to drive down practical driving test waiting times.

[HCWS183]

# Written Correction

*Thursday 31 October 2024*

## Ministerial Correction

### FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

#### Gibraltar-Spain Border Checks

*The following extract is from the urgent question on Gibraltar-Spain Border Checks on 14 October 2024.*

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): History shows again and again that appeasement does not work. It was inevitable after the abject surrender of the Chagos islands, for that is what it is, that the Spanish would try to exert pressure on Gibraltar. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members shake their heads, but the Government are so embarrassed by the Chagos deal that they will not even tell the House of Commons what we will have to pay to rent our own base.

Coming back to Gibraltar, my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) is right that under Blair, Labour tried to sell out the Gibraltarians for joint sovereignty and a referendum killed it. We could not trust Labour on Gibraltar before, so why on earth, after what it has done to Chagos and the Chagossians, should we trust Labour now?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I really regret this playground-style characterisation of issues that are so fundamental, particularly for those who live in Gibraltar. I mentioned the comments of the Chief Minister of the Falklands, and the right hon. Member has now forced me to quote them, given the nature of what he has just said. The Chief Minister said some of these claims are

“more about party politics, blame-gaming and Tory Party leadership issues...than”

they are actually about the sovereignty of people who live in the overseas territories. He could not have been clearer.

*[Official Report, 14 October 2024; Vol. 754, c. 608.]*

*Written correction submitted by the Minister for Development, the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds):*

**Anneliese Dodds:** I really regret this playground-style characterisation of issues that are so fundamental, particularly for those who live in Gibraltar. I mentioned the comments of the Chief Minister of **Gibraltar**, and the right hon. Member has now forced me to quote them, given the nature of what he has just said. The Chief Minister said some of these claims are

“more about party politics, blame-gaming and Tory Party leadership issues...than”

they are actually about the sovereignty of people who live in the overseas territories. He could not have been clearer.



# ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 31 October 2024

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Thursday 7 November 2024**

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