

**Tuesday  
12 November 2024**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**Tuesday 12 November 2024**

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# House of Commons

*Tuesday 12 November 2024*

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

## PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Climate Change: International Leadership

1. **Harpreet Uppal** (Huddersfield) (Lab): What steps he is taking to establish international leadership on climate change. [901214]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Kerry McCarthy):** Today, the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Ed Miliband), is already at COP29 in Baku, where he will be leading climate negotiations. He sends his apologies. The Prime Minister is also at COP29 and will be speaking at the global leaders summit, announcing our ambitious 1.5°C-aligned nationally determined contribution and showing that the UK is truly back on the international stage. A written statement will also be made later today.

**Harpreet Uppal:** I welcome the leadership the Government are showing, in particular on NDCs, as my hon. Friend mentions. The news that this year is likely to be the hottest on record across the world is deeply concerning and reminds us that climate breakdown is a global challenge that we must all face. Does the Minister agree that we must have ambitious plans at home, so that we can go to COP and challenge other world leaders to do more to tackle climate change?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. There is a direct link between taking action to protect the British people at home and leading on climate action abroad. If we want to protect our country from future energy shocks and the runaway cost of climate chaos, we must work with other countries to protect our planet. We now have the credibility to do that because of the action we have taken since entering government, as was apparent when I attended pre-COP meetings in Baku last month and as the Prime Minister will demonstrate in Baku today.

**Carla Denyer** (Bristol Central) (Green): I warmly welcome the new Government target to cut carbon emissions, and I know the Secretary of State and the Minister thoroughly understand the importance of joined-up action on climate justice. Can she tell us whether every single Government policy across every Government Department will now be assessed to check

whether it is compatible with 1.5°? What steps are the Government taking to ensure the global south is properly compensated for climate loss and damage?

**Kerry McCarthy:** On the second point first, at this COP we want to ensure that we fully operationalise the loss and damage fund, so we then start getting money into it and channelling money to developing countries. We also want to do that through the new collective quantified goal, which we hope will be ambitious and multi-layered.

On the question of looking at our policies across the piece, that is very much my job. We will be responding soon to the Committee on Climate Change's report, which the hon. Lady will know was quite critical of the previous Government's action. We will be setting out our plan to implement the NDC and looking at the next carbon budget. All those things require effort share across Departments to ensure we actually meet them. It is about not just setting ambitious targets, but making sure that, unlike the previous Government, we have a strategy to get us there.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** I call Noah Law. Are you standing?

**Noah Law** (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab) *indicated dissent.*

**Mr Speaker:** Okay, I call Toby Perkins. Here's a man who is ready to go!

**Mr Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): I am ready to go, and so is the Prime Minister—it is great to see him in Baku showing leadership. The recent Cali conference was a disappointment. Ultimately, nations were not able to reach agreement. Alongside the positive steps the UK Government are taking, what conversations are we having with international partners to recognise the necessity of an agreement that brings all western nations together in showing equal ambition?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I know he was at Cali. There was some progress on such issues as digital sequence information, but more needs to be done. We are very seized of the need to join up action on the nature and climate crisis. When I head out to COP29 tomorrow, Members will hopefully hear more from us on our efforts to protect forests and on the support we are giving to countries at risk of deforestation. We are also looking at nature-based solutions to climate change. The nature Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry East (Mary Creagh)—will be out there as well, and we will have more to say, but I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins) that we cannot deal with one crisis in isolation from the other.

**Jess Brown-Fuller** (Chichester) (LD): For the UK to be an international leader on climate change we need to bring the business community with us. The Summer Berry Company in my constituency recently invested £8 million in ensuring it is carbon neutral, but it was then quoted a further £3 million to be able to feed its excess energy into the grid. What is the Minister doing to make additional grid connections affordable and accessible for green businesses?

**Kerry McCarthy:** The energy Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks)—is very much involved with that issue. We have also set up the energy superpower mission board, headed by Chris Stark. I had a conversation with him yesterday about what we can do to ensure grid capacity and grid connections in the right places. If the hon. Lady has a specific issue to raise and would like to write to me, I will make sure it is passed on to him.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister, whom I welcome to the Front Bench.

**Joy Morrissey** (Beaconsfield) (Con): When I asked the Secretary of State about the appointment of Rachel Kyte as his international climate envoy during our last questions session, he failed to say whether Quadrature Capital's £4 million donation to the Labour party had been declared to the Department before her appointment, and I have still not received a reply to my letter of 17 October. Will the Minister tell me whether the Secretary of State declared those interests to the Department before Rachel Kyte's appointment, and whether Ministers have ever met directors of Quadrature Capital or Quadrature Climate Foundation?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I am sure that the shadow Minister will receive a reply to her letter in due course, but I can tell her that Rachel Kyte is extremely well respected, and that her appointment as our special representative has been welcomed across the board.

### Clean Energy by 2030

2. **Catherine Atkinson** (Derby North) (Lab): What progress he has made on achieving clean energy by 2030. [901216]

3. **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): What progress he has made on achieving clean energy by 2030. [901217]

16. **Baggy Shanker** (Derby South) (Lab/Co-op): What progress he has made on achieving clean power by 2030. [901231]

20. **Joe Morris** (Hexham) (Lab): What progress he has made on achieving clean power by 2030. [901235]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks):** In just four short months, we have made rapid progress on achieving our mission for clean power by 2030. We have set up Great British Energy and announced its headquarters in Aberdeen, secured a record-breaking 131 renewables projects, and consented to record amounts of solar. We are getting on with delivering lower bills, energy security, good jobs and climate action.

**Catherine Atkinson** (Derby North) (Lab): Rolls-Royce in Derby is an international leader in research on and the development of small modular reactors, and it is fantastic that the Government have acknowledged the role that SMRs will play in clean power generation, energy security and green jobs. In the Budget, we heard that the final decision on Great British Nuclear's SMR

competition will conclude next spring. Does the Minister agree that it is important for this opportunity to be seized as soon as possible?

**Michael Shanks:** I agree with my hon. Friend that nuclear will play a central role in our clean power mission, and will continue to be a critical part of our energy mix as we progress towards 2030 and far beyond. Great British Nuclear is continuing to drive forward the competition on small modular reactors, with bids currently being evaluated by the Department, and I look forward to having more to say about this in due course.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee.

**Bill Esterson:** The last Government held a consultation on electricity market arrangements, but despite having said that that was their flagship policy in this area, they did not publish the results of that consultation. Does my hon. Friend agree that electricity and, indeed, energy market reform is crucial to achieving the Government's stated 2030 clean energy targets and to reducing bills, and can he say whether this Government will publish the results of the last Government's consultation and if so, when?

**Michael Shanks:** I congratulate my hon. Friend again on his appointment as Chair of the Select Committee—he brings a huge amount of knowledge and experience to the role—and I agree with him about the importance of reviewing electricity market arrangements. We are building on the last Government's consultation, and we will have more to say in the months ahead. This is a crucial element of how we achieve clean power by 2030 and ensure that our energy system of the future is fit for what will be a different way of managing energy throughout the country. We will have more to say about that in the months ahead.

**Baggy Shanker:** Last week a report published by the National Energy System Operator noted that although the programme to roll out new small modular reactors was being developed for the mid-2030s, a 2030 roll-out date would in fact be possible. Given that SMR technologies hold exciting and significant potential for investment in jobs and infrastructure in constituencies such as mine, has the Minister considered the value of bringing the roll-out forward to 2030?

**Michael Shanks:** My hon. Friend is right to say that nuclear will play a vital role, and that it not only delivers on our energy security but creates good, well-paid jobs. Unlike the last Government, who in 14 years did not deliver a single nuclear project—there were many consultations and processes, but not a single nuclear power station was built—this Government are getting on with delivering a nuclear future.

**Joe Morris:** Last week's report from the National Energy System Operator showed that not only is clean power by 2030 achievable, but it can lead to lower bills and more secure systems. Does the Minister agree that the only way to protect bill payers permanently is to go as far and as fast as possible towards our clean power mission by 2030?

**Michael Shanks:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The report published by the independent National Energy System Operator laid out not only that reaching our clean power mission is entirely achievable, but that it will bring down bills. The importance of the report is that it set the course for how that is possible. The reality, which the Conservative party refuses to accept, is that the only way to get us off the rollercoaster of high bills is to deliver at pace the clean energy that we know will deliver energy security and climate leadership, and bring down bills for people right across the country.

**Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge) (Con):** I am delighted that the Minister is setting out that the report promises an extra £40 billion of investment a year in the energy sector and, presumably, the taxes to go with it, which will of course come from the businesses that are paying for everything else in the Budget that has just gone by. Is there anything at all in his proposals that will actually bring down the cost of energy and not be replaced by taxpayer funding? It appears at the moment that there is nothing, and energy prices are already going up.

**Michael Shanks:** I would encourage the right hon. Gentleman to read the NESO report, because it sets out in great detail not only that clean power is achievable by 2030, but that it will lead to lower bills. What he says about investment misses the point: in the last few weeks, we have announced billions of pounds of private sector investment in these projects; indeed, Scottish Power has announced today that it will provide £1 billion. Companies are choosing to invest in this country, whereas they did not under the Conservative party. The reality is that once upon a time, the Conservatives recognised that the drive to net zero was important. They have abandoned that commitment now.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con):** I thank the Minister for agreeing to meet the OffSET—offshore electricity grid taskforce—group of MPs later today; we are very much looking forward to the meeting. Does he recognise that achieving the 2030 deadline set out in the NESO report requires an acceleration of the process, which, in turn, is dependent on much higher levels of public consent?

**Michael Shanks:** I recognise the hon. Gentleman's point, and I am looking forward to meeting him and his colleagues this afternoon to discuss the particular issues in his area. We need to build more network infrastructure across the UK to make this endeavour a reality, but he is right: we want to bring communities with us on this journey. That is why we have said that we are looking again at what community benefits will look like, building on some of the work that the previous Government did in consulting on this issue. Crucially, however, if want to bring down bills and deliver energy security, we will have to build the infrastructure, and that is what this Government are committed to doing.

**Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD):** The Minister knows well the Liberal Democrats' commitment to community energy. Will the Government establish a clean community energy scheme, look at the barriers that currently face community energy projects and look at supporting the National Grid to deliver community energy?

**Michael Shanks:** The hon. Lady and I have had a number of conversations, and I recognise her commitment on this issue. We have committed in the local power plan to delivering investment in community energy across the country. Importantly, we want not only to invest in schemes, but to deliver across Government the mechanisms needed to make it more possible for communities to deliver such schemes. That will build capacity in communities so that we can see more community energy.

**Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con):** What is the beef behind the Government's reluctance to embrace with enthusiasm locally generated community energy? Why did they vote against the amendment tabled to the Great British Energy Bill by the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse)?

**Michael Shanks:** I think the right hon. Gentleman thinks that was a "gotcha" question, but, of course, the Conservative party did not vote for the Bill at all. Amendment or not, I do not think he can really speak about what Great British Energy might deliver, because, despite it being one of the most popular policies at the last election, the Conservatives failed to bother to vote for it.

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

**Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con):** Last week, the National Energy System Operator published a full systems cost analysis of the Secretary of State's flagship project to carbonise the grid by 2030. This morning, the Secretary of State said on several media outlets that the report shows that his plans will lower bills. I remind the House that the report assumes that gas prices are 40% higher than the Department's own estimates, that the price of carbon price is at least double what it is now, that the Government can commission more offshore wind in the next two years than in the last six combined without moving prices, and that they can build the grid at a pace we have never seen before in this country, without any delays. Even if all that is achieved, page 78 of the report shows that the cost of the system will be higher. For clarity, would the Minister like to repeat at the Dispatch Box the Secretary of State's claim that the NESO report shows that Labour's system will lead to a lower cost of electricity?

**Michael Shanks:** What the shadow Secretary of State has just outlined quite coherently is that the Conservatives have no ambition in this space whatsoever, but we do. I am very happy for the right hon. Lady to outline where our ambition is. We will build faster than the previous Government, although I have to say that that would not be difficult. The shadow Minister sitting next to her, the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), said quite clearly at their conference that the previous Government had built infrastructure far too slowly, and their former Energy Minister, the right hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), said that their onshore wind ban was "always mad". We are quite happy to pick up where they left off and deliver the clean power that this country needs.

**Claire Coutinho:** This is the ministerial team who told the electorate they were going to cut their bills by £300, without doing any homework to find out how those



plans would work. They voted against our amendment to hold them to account on their own pledge just two weeks ago, and now they are trying to claim that the NESO report shows that their approach will lower bills when in fact it shows in black and white that the system will be much more expensive. Does the Minister not see that if they follow this plan, we will be a warning, not an example, to the rest of the world and that the British people will be colder and poorer as a result?

**Michael Shanks:** Time and again, the Conservatives run away from their record on this in office. The reason why people right across this country are paying more on their energy bills is that the Conservatives did not get us off the rollercoaster of fossil fuel markets, but we are now moving at pace. The right hon. Lady may want to keep us in the vulnerable state where we are reliant on international gas markets, but we are determined that we will not do that. We will bring down bills and deliver energy security. I am not ashamed to say that we will move with great ambition to deliver what this country needs and to deliver the good jobs that go with it.

### Great British Energy

4. **Douglas McAllister** (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab): What steps he is taking to establish Great British Energy. [901218]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks):** We are moving at pace to set up Great British Energy. So far we have appointed the start-up chair, Jürgen Maier, we have announced that the headquarters will be in Aberdeen and we have progressed the Bill through the House of Commons. This builds on the first partnership announced for Great British Energy, with the Crown Estate, and on a recent new deal to collaborate with Scottish public bodies. We are getting on with the job of delivering 21st-century public ownership for the British people.

**Douglas McAllister:** Every family and every business in my constituency paid the price of 14 years of Conservative failure with rocketing energy bills because the last Government failed to invest in clean energy. The Opposition continue to oppose Great British Energy. Does the Minister recognise the absurdity of their argument that they are quite happy with foreign public ownership as long as it is not UK citizens who own our energy?

**Michael Shanks:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is important to remember that, despite what the Conservatives might have us believe, Great British Energy is overwhelmingly popular with the British people. That includes the people in Scotland, because of course it was not just the Conservative party who did not vote for Great British Energy; surprisingly, the Scottish National party also failed to vote for a publicly owned champion in our energy space. We are getting on with delivering jobs and growth, delivered with public ownership through Great British Energy.

**Neil O'Brien** (Harborough, Oadby and Wigston) (Con): Before the election, Labour said that Great British Energy would cut electricity bills by £300. After the election, the Labour Government voted against writing that into law and instead took away people's winter fuel payments and made their bills more expensive. The

Institute for Fiscal Studies has now said that their policies are fundamentally raising prices for consumers to the tune of £120 per household, and we know from the NESO report that this will get worse. Even if they triple the pace of wind roll-out, double the pace of grid connection and make other heroic assumptions, all of this is going to bump up costs further, is it not? We are doing this from the basis of having the high electricity prices in Europe. What assessment has the Minister made of the impact on British industry?

**Michael Shanks:** Question after question from the Conservatives shows that they do not recognise the part they played for 14 years in why we are paying higher bills than ever before. We are the only party with an ambitious plan to get us off the volatile fossil fuel markets. The Conservatives used to believe that, in our drive to net zero, we should build this infrastructure for the long term. They are now opposing it, but they will have to tell their constituents why they want to leave them exposed to rising bills.

### Fusion Power Plants

5. **Jo White** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Whether he plans to support the development of fusion power plants connected to the grid. [901219]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Kerry McCarthy):** We agree that fusion could be a globally transformative green energy solution. The UK Government's fusion programme continues to lead the world in the development of fusion energy, and our ambition is to continue to do so.

**Jo White:** Two weeks ago, the Budget announcement that the first fusion power plant will be built in Bassetlaw was welcome news. Can the Minister provide greater detail on this commitment, alongside the funding support being made available for the next financial year?

**Kerry McCarthy:** My hon. Friend is a great champion for her constituency, and I was pleased to meet her to talk about this issue and to hear her Westminster Hall debate. I look forward to visiting her constituency later this month to see the fusion café and to visit West Burton, the site of the STEP project, after which I hope to be able to share more detail on how we will support fusion.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Dounreay, in my constituency, was the site of the UK's first fission reactor. Today, we have a highly skilled workforce, a licensed site and a local population that warmly supports the industry. Will the Government seriously consider involving Dounreay as we bring fusion to its wonderful fruition?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I think fusion has huge potential, and so many companies stand to benefit. It is not just about the ultimate goal of fusion energy; it is also about all the technological advances we will discover. I have spoken to fusion companies which are, for example, finding uses for cancer treatment. I am very interested to hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say about the possibilities of fusion in his constituency. We want to see this proceed. If he drops me a line, I will be happy to explore the opportunities in his patch.

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

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): We have spoken a lot about the Conservative party's record in government, and I am very proud of our record on fusion. We launched the Fusion Futures programme to provide up to £55 million of funding to train more than 2,000 people, we became the first country in the world to regulate fusion as a distinct energy technology, and we launched the process to build the spherical tokamak for energy production—I cannot say that as quickly—at what will be the first fusion power plant at West Burton in Nottinghamshire. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] Members are very welcome. Will the Minister confirm that it is still the Government's intention, as it was ours, to have fusion power on the grid by 2040?

**Kerry McCarthy:** As I mentioned, I am very much looking forward to visiting West Burton soon. The Budget announced significant support for fusion energy in 2025-26 and, yes, we remain as ambitious as the previous Government for the potential of fusion energy.

**Andrew Bowie:** Having confirmed that 2040 is still the ambition, which does the Minister think will come first: fusion on the grid or the final investment decision on Sizewell C?

**Kerry McCarthy:** The final investment decision on Sizewell C, as I understand it, is expected soon. We will hear more about support for that in the next spending review. Fusion energy has huge potential, not just in the long term but from the innovation we are already seeing in that sphere, which I very much welcome.

### Carbon Capture and Storage

6. **Seamus Logan** (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): What plans he has to support the development of carbon capture, utilisation and storage projects at Acorn. [901220]

7. **Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): What recent steps his Department has taken to support carbon capture and storage. [901221]

**The Minister of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (Sarah Jones):** On 4 October, the Government announced £21.7 billion over the next 25 years to launch the UK's carbon capture, utilisation and storage industry. We will provide further details on the next steps for CCUS, including track 2 projects such as Acorn, in the coming months.

**Seamus Logan:** I thank the Minister for her encouraging answer. Acorn, including the St Fergus site in Aberdeenshire, not only has a significant role to play in achieving net zero in Scotland, but has the capacity to accept carbon from mainland Europe. This project could help the UK and Europe to achieve their net zero goals, and is significant not only for the port of Peterhead in my constituency, as the Minister knows, but for the local power station, which shares the same integrated ambitions. Acorn presents very significant opportunities, representing hundreds of millions of pounds in new investment, new jobs and economic growth for the north-east, for Scotland

and for the UK. Can the Minister accelerate the decision making on the Acorn project, and will she commit to funding in 2025?

**Sarah Jones:** We are committed to track 2, and I recognise the huge advantages of Acorn that the hon. Gentleman has highlighted. Our record £21.7 billion investment demonstrates our long-term commitment and gives industry the certainty it needs. The ups and downs of CCUS under the previous Government did not provide the certainty that people required, and certainty is what we are looking to deliver. We understand that people want clarity, and we will be making further announcements in the coming months.

**Dame Meg Hillier:** The path to carbon capture and storage is littered with failure: three previous projects never got off the ground, despite lots of taxpayer money going into them. What precisely are the Government going to do to ensure that this project delivers?

**Mr Speaker:** If the hon. Lady would look towards me a little bit, I will be able to hear the question.

**Sarah Jones:** We realise that CCUS is an emerging industry, but it is also one that we can lead on internationally, thanks to the unique geography of the North sea. We will do all we can to help industry scale up in this technology, which we believe will play a crucial role in our mission towards clean power.

### National Grid: Energy Mix

8. **Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Whether he has had recent discussions with National Grid on diversifying the energy mix of its network. [901222]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks):** The Government regularly meet stakeholders to discuss the development of our energy infrastructure. Last week, the Government received advice from the National Energy System Operator outlining its advice on the pathway towards clean power by 2030. Later this year we will publish our 2030 action plan, which will set out details on the future of our energy mix.

**Dr Murrison:** Offshore wind has been a real positive for our energy security and grid independence, but unfortunately not when the wind does not blow. Given the election of a President who tells us he is going to “drill, baby, drill,” what revision does the Minister anticipate to his timetable towards net zero?

**Michael Shanks:** As I said in my previous answer, later this year we will outline our action plan on how we will deliver on the 2030 target; there is no change to our timetable in that regard. The right hon. Gentleman raises a good point about what happens when the wind does not blow and the sun does not shine, and about ensuring we have a mix in our energy system. That is why we remain supportive of nuclear and why we have recently announced investment in long-duration energy storage, to ensure we can capture energy and use it when we need it.

**Jenny Riddell-Carpenter** (Suffolk Coastal) (Lab): I was delighted by Ofgem's announcement this morning that it now recommends that the proposed Nautilus interconnector should be located at the Isle of Grain, not on the Suffolk coast. Since I have been elected, I have made firm representations to the Minister and Ofgem, including via its consultation, that the Suffolk coast should not have been considered and brownfield sites should have been considered first. Will the Minister meet me to discuss other National Grid projects in my constituency?

**Michael Shanks:** Ofgem has announced today decisions on a number of interconnectors. Those are decisions for Ofgem and not for the Government. We have recently announced the launch of a strategic spatial energy plan, to ensure that we plan such projects holistically, across the whole of the United Kingdom, and take into account a number of schemes when planning future energy, such as those my hon. Friend mentions in her constituency. I will continue to have discussions about that with Members from across the country.

**Nick Timothy** (West Suffolk) (Con): China's largest offshore floating wind turbine company, Ming Yang Smart Energy, plans to build its first manufacturing plant outside China in Scotland. Ming Yang benefits from huge subsidies in China, but there are serious questions about energy security and national security. The Secretary of State says he wants to end reliance on foreign autocrats, but when he was asked about this on the radio this morning, he had no answer. Will the Minister rule out allowing any turbines that might be controlled by hostile states?

**Michael Shanks:** We are encouraging investment in the UK to build the infrastructure that we need in the future. Just today, we have announced the clean industry bonus that will give as much support as possible to companies to build their supply chains here in this country. We will continue to look at supply chains and, of course, we take seriously the companies, across the range of business projects, that are investing in this country. There is a series of processes already under way across Government. Whenever anybody wants to invest in this country, those processes will be followed in the usual manner.

**Ms Polly Billington** (East Thanet) (Lab): Mr Speaker, will you and the Minister give the House an opportunity to celebrate the £1 billion of investment announced today in offshore wind in this country? It will provide jobs across the country, as promised by this Government, which the British people are not used to after the past 14 years. Will the Minister meet me to discuss the infrastructure required to connect that clean, secure energy to our homes, in particular the Sea Link project that could have an impact in my constituency?

**Michael Shanks:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight the fantastic announcement today by ScottishPower of £1 billion of investment here in the UK, building the infrastructure that we need, and delivering jobs and skills in this country as well. It is one of a number of announcements that we expect, because we are not agnostic in this Government on delivering the industrial strategy that we need. My hon. Friend the Minister for

Industry is working on that at the moment. We will deliver the jobs in this country to build the clean power of the future. We will deliver good, well-paid jobs and the energy security we need.

### Renewable Energy: Job Creation

9. **Andrew Pakes** (Peterborough) (Lab): What steps she is taking to support job creation in the renewable energy sector. [901224]

**The Minister for Industry (Sarah Jones):** Delivering good jobs is the driving force behind our growth and clean energy missions. Great British Energy and the national wealth fund will crowd in private sector investment to spread jobs across the country through investment in clean energy. I am delighted that the Prime Minister has today launched the clean industry bonus, which will incentivise developers to invest in the UK's industrial heartlands, coastal areas and oil and gas communities, boosting jobs and delivering on another of our manifesto promises.

**Andrew Pakes:** I am also delighted with my hon. Friend's commitment to delivering clean energy jobs. It is important to constituencies such as mine in Peterborough, which could be the King's Cross for a new core hydrogen network—as recommended by the National Infrastructure Commission—thanks to National Gas's Project Union. National Gas has its hydrogen-ready gas compression site in our city and we are about to open a new green technology centre to develop new green jobs and apprenticeships. Will the Minister commit to working with local authorities such as mine, colleges, and businesses such as National Gas, to deliver new jobs across the supply chain and in all parts of the country?

**Sarah Jones:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend's sentiment and commend the work that he is doing in his constituency. Low carbon technology will of course play a critical role in our future, from hydrogen to carbon capture and to renewable energy. I am pleased that, in the Budget, we saw the funding of 11 hydrogen projects, which will drive jobs and growth. I am really keen to talk to him about his plans for Peterborough becoming the King's Cross for a hydrogen network and applaud the work that is going on in his constituency around green jobs.

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

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD) *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** I call Jim Farron.

**Jim Shannon:** Me or him, Mr Speaker? [*Laughter.*]

**Tim Farron:** Mr Speaker, perhaps if I start, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) could finish.

In order to safeguard renewable jobs and to create new ones, will the Minister consider a specific project that has hydro-turbine manufacturers such as Gilkes in Kendal, and many others around the country, working alongside our farmers to make use of streams, becks and rivers that go through farmland to create renewable industry and, indeed, new jobs?



**Sarah Jones:** We are ambitious to create all the jobs that we want to see in the green technologies of the future. I would be very interested to hear more about what the hon. Gentleman has to say. The Climate Change Committee estimates that up to 750,000 net jobs could be created by 2030. Opposition Members have decided that they do not support that path. The question is: why are they objecting to all these new jobs that we will be creating across our country?

### Warm Homes Plan

10. **Peter Swallow** (Bracknell) (Lab): What steps he is taking to introduce a warm homes plan. [901225]

13. **Sadik Al-Hassan** (North Somerset) (Lab): What steps he is taking to introduce a warm homes plan. [901228]

19. **Anna Dixon** (Shipley) (Lab): What steps he is taking to introduce a warm homes plan. [901234]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Miatta Fahnbulleh):** We are committed to an ambitious warm homes plan, which will upgrade homes across the country, making them warmer and cheaper to run, by installing new insulation and rolling out low carbon heating such as solar and heat pumps. As a first step, the Government have committed an initial £3.4 billion over the next three years towards upgrading homes. We have already hit the ground running with the roll out of our warm homes local grant, and our warm homes social housing fund. We will set out more details in due course.

**Peter Swallow:** Too many of my constituents are living in poorly insulated social housing. New mother Dionne, for instance, had the insulation from her flat removed last year by her social landlord because it was full of mould and mildew. She is now facing her second winter without insulation. Will the Minister confirm that the warm homes plan will introduce tough new standards to ensure that social housing providers get on and insulate their housing stock?

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:** Yes, absolutely. Raising standards in the social housing sector will be a critical part of our warm homes plan. We have already announced plans to lift 1 million renters out of fuel poverty by raising the minimum energy efficiency standard in both the private and the social-rented sector, which will ensure that renters no longer have to live in cold, drafty homes. We will also unlock £1 billion-worth of investment to the national wealth fund in partnership with leading banks to upgrade more social homes, and we will set out more detail to build on that in due course.

**Sadik Al-Hassan:** I thank the Minister for her commitment to the warm homes plan. Many of my constituents in North Somerset have written to me in recent weeks, detailing their concerns that the scheme does not take sufficient account of higher energy usage due to long-term illnesses. Will the Minister share whether the Department has any plans to look into uplifting the warm home discount for participants with relevant long-term illnesses?

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:** We recognise that many vulnerable people, including those with high energy usage, often bear the greatest burden when energy prices increase. That is why we are doing all we can, including by working with energy companies, to make sure that we are providing additional support this winter and beyond. I will take my hon. Friend's point away and follow up with him in due course.

**Anna Dixon:** Given that 64% of homes in Shipley have an energy performance certificate rating of D or below, I very much welcome the Government's commitment to the warm homes plan. The charity Groundwork provides a "warm homes healthy people" scheme across Bradford district, installing energy-efficiency measures, and offering advice and support on energy bills. Does the Minister agree that local charities need support to continue to help those who are most in need this winter?

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:** It is a national scandal that so many homes across the country have an EPC rating that is below C—a failure of the last Government to deliver the scale of home upgrades that we need. We are determined to end the injustice of people living in cold and draughty homes. I completely agree that we must do everything we can to support vulnerable households with their energy bills this winter. That is why we are providing 3.3 million households with the warm home discount, why we are working with energy suppliers to provide additional support, including through charities, and why we have extended the household support fund.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the Minister agree that we particularly need a comprehensive warm homes plan in rural areas in order to identify very old homes and ensure that insulation is targeted to maximise reduction in their energy usage?

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:** We will ensure that we see upgrades in every part of the country; we will be working with combined authorities, local government and the devolved Administrations to make sure that we are delivering the scale of upgrades needed across the country.

**Tom Gordon** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (LD): In the light of the warm homes plan, is the Minister aware of challenges faced by homeowners who used the green homes grant for spray foam insulation? Many now find their homes unmortgageable, and face significant costs for removal and repair. Will the Minister consider measures to support such homeowners as part of the warm homes plan?

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:** I am aware that many households have had upgrades that have not gone to plan. It is critical that we build confidence, because in the end we need to persuade consumers up and down the country to have these upgrades. There were schemes under the last Administration that were not regulated and did not have the correct standards, and we are working hard to make sure that we raise standards across the piece.

**Dave Doogan** (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): We are going to need a warm homes plan, because with the snow and ice coming in on a cold front, Scotland is seeing a "sum front" heading north from this Labour Government: a £600 cut to the winter fuel payment and the pensioners' cost of living payment—for winter weather that is here now. That was not in the manifesto. What

was in the manifesto was a £300 cut to fuel bills, but those costs are now up by £450. When will this Government do a single thing for people facing fuel poverty?

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:** We will work across the country to tackle fuel poverty, but I remind the hon. Member that fuel payments are devolved. The Scottish Government have been given the biggest budget, and it is time to get on with the job and fix the situation.

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

**Pippa Heylings** (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): Homes in the UK are among the least energy-efficient in Europe, with unparalleled health, productivity and carbon emission costs to society, as a result of the last Government's failure to act. I agree with the Minister: it is a disgrace that this is happening in one of the largest economies in the G7. We welcome the news of the warm homes plan coming next year, but does the Minister agree that an emergency home insulation programme this winter, with free insulation for people on low incomes, is necessary so that people in South Cambridgeshire do not have to face the choice between heating and eating?

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:** Let me assure the hon. Member that we are hitting the ground running with home insulations. We are rolling out our warm homes local grant and our warm homes social housing fund, to target people this winter—this year—because we need to deliver the biggest ever upgrade.

#### **Decarbonisation: Public Sector Bodies**

11. **Shaun Davies** (Telford) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support public sector bodies to decarbonise. [901226]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Miatta Fahnbulleh):** As the first step towards the warm homes plan, we have committed an initial £3.4 billion. That includes £1 billion towards public sector decarbonisation, because we know that we have to ensure that our schools and hospitals reduce their energy bills.

**Shaun Davies:** Decarbonising the public sector is good for our net zero target, but it also releases money for more teachers, nurses and street cleaners, so that savings benefit our communities rather than energy giants. Schools across Telford are crying out for that investment. Will the Minister do all she can to decarbonise the public sector in the years to come?

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:** I completely agree; decarbonising our public sector will not only reduce emissions but lower bills. We estimate that the £1 billion that we have allocated to public sector decarbonisation will reduce bills by about £40 million per year. That is a big step forward, but there is more work to do.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is clear that there is a role for all schools across this great United Kingdom to play in public sector decarbonisation. They also have a role in educating the children in their classrooms, who we want to be the pioneers of tomorrow. What has been done to ensure that the good things that

happen on the mainland of the United Kingdom are shared with regional Administrations such as the Northern Ireland Assembly?

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:** We will work on that with the devolved Administrations across the United Kingdom. Good practice is happening across local government and regional government. We will ensure that everyone can learn from it, and we will deliver the biggest upgrade in a generation.

#### **Great British Energy: Job Creation**

12. **Joani Reid** (East Kilbride and Strathaven) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of Great British Energy on job creation. [901227]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks):** The energy transition presents an incredible opportunity for job creation right across the UK, particularly in our industrial and coastal communities. Through Great British Energy, we will build on Scotland's reputation as a world leader in energy and secure long-term, well-paid jobs in the industries of the future.

**Joani Reid:** I recently had the privilege of opening an extension to the Kype Muir wind farm in my constituency. The extension alone will generate enough power for 53,000 homes for 30 years. My constituency is also home to part of Whitelee, the largest onshore wind farm in Europe. However, not one of those turbines was manufactured in the UK, let alone locally. What steps is the Minister taking to develop UK manufacturing capacity in that area?

**Michael Shanks:** I know well my hon. Friend's constituency—it is next door to mine—and both wind farms she mentions. She says quite rightly that, for all the expansion in those technologies over recent years, very few of those jobs, particularly in manufacturing, have been in this country. We will do everything we can, through Great British Energy and the clean industry bonus we have announced today, to grow our domestic supply chains, build industry in this country and win jobs for Britain.

**Harriet Cross** (Gordon and Buchan) (Con): Last week, just days after the Budget, Apache announced that it would exit the North sea by 2029. It said:

"The onerous financial impact of the energy profits levy...makes production...beyond 2029 uneconomic."

What assessment have the Government made of the impact of those policies on current jobs in north-east Scotland, and how will Great British Energy compensate for the loss of those jobs?

**Michael Shanks:** We are working with industry in the north-east of Scotland to ensure that this is a just and prosperous transition. We have announced our next steps of responding to court judgments, and a consultation is open at the moment. We will have more to say about that in the months ahead. The hon. Lady must recognise that if she wants to see investment from Great British Energy, she might actually have to support its creation in the first place. The Conservatives cannot have it both ways; either they want a public energy company to invest in the jobs of the future—

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge) (Con): We don't.

**Michael Shanks:** Or they do not, as her right hon. Friend has just confirmed from the Back Benches. She cannot have it both ways.

### Topical Questions

T1. [901238] **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Minister of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (Sarah Jones):** The Budget was a major step forward, paving the way for investment in clean, home-grown power, creating jobs and delivering energy security. Last week, the National Energy System Operator provided definitive evidence that our clean power mission is achievable and can give us greater energy security and lower energy costs. The Conservatives have spent the past year arguing for a system that would keep the British people locked into energy insecurity and higher costs. While they are locked in arguments about the past, we are getting on with delivering lower bills, energy security and good jobs for the British people.

**Christine Jardine:** The price cap rise, winter fuel payment cuts, higher standing charges and lower temperatures are all things that my constituents in Edinburgh West—particularly my pensioners—are coming to me with concerns about. What is the Secretary of State planning to do to work with Ofgem and the energy companies to come up with a fairer set of circumstances for my constituents and others in similar situations?

**Sarah Jones:** We are looking to bring down standing charges. The hon. Lady has mentioned a lot of cases where people are struggling; we appreciate that, and we are doing what we can. The Budget set out how we are going to protect the most vulnerable people and ensure that people are supported in the way they need to be. We have a lot to do after 14 years of Conservative Government; we are trying to unravel that and support people. Our push for clean energy by 2030 will lead to lower bills, and that is what we will be working on.

T2. [901239] **Dan Aldridge** (Weston-super-Mare) (Lab): Following on from the exciting announcement of the £1 billion investment in wind power, it would be remiss of me not to mention the Severn estuary to the west of Weston-super-Mare, with its transformative potential for the generation of clean, renewable energy. The potential of domestic energy has been neglected for far too long in a world where global energy markets and the cost of living are turbulent. Does the Minister agree that the Conservative party appears to have learned absolutely nothing during its time in office, presiding over the worst cost of living crisis in generations and failing to act—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Topical questions should be short and punchy. I am sure you are going to get to the end of your question any minute now.

**Dan Aldridge:** Can I urge the Minister to go further and faster in delivering clean power for our communities, which the NESO report so clearly stated would lead to lower bills and energy security?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks):** My hon. Friend is right; there are good projects right across the country that we hope to invest in in the lead-up to delivering in 2030. The NESO report clearly set out that our aim is achievable. The Conservative party wants to continue having the arguments of the past; we are determined, with ambition, to deliver on the arguments of the future.

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

**Claire Coutinho** (East Surrey) (Con): The Prime Minister is set to announce at the conference of the parties that he is making the UK's already stringent carbon emission targets even higher. That is despite the fact that we contribute only 1% of global emissions, while the leaders of the world's highest-emitting countries—making up over 60% of emissions—are not attending. The Climate Change Committee has said that this target will require, for example, an accelerated shift away from meat and dairy, less travel and a gas boiler ban for the British people, yet the Government's approach would see our reliance on imports from China—which is 60% powered by coal—go through the roof. Does the Minister agree that an approach that is asking for more sacrifice and hardship from the British people, in return for more goods from one of the world's largest carbon emitters, would mean fewer jobs in Britain and more carbon in the atmosphere?

**Mr Speaker:** Too long.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Kerry McCarthy):** I think the shadow Secretary of State needs to seek a debate if she wants to elaborate on these issues. Having attended COP last year as part of a cross-party delegation, I found it incredibly depressing to see the way the UK was received. It is really important that we are stepping up and showing global ambition. Reaching net zero in this country and getting to clean power by 2030 is a massive opportunity, not a cost.

T4. [901242] **Melanie Ward** (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): Some 824 former miners in Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy are rightly delighted that our Government have returned over £1 billion from the mineworkers' pension scheme to those who powered our country for decades. Does the Minister have plans to deliver similar justice to the 290 members of the British coal staff superannuation scheme in my constituency and, indeed, all those affected across the UK?

**Sarah Jones:** I am proud that we have finally ended the injustice of the mineworkers' pension scheme. Miners across the country powered our economy for decades, working in the toughest environments; they should not have had to fight for so long for a fair pension. I travelled to Barnsley with the Secretary of State to meet former mineworkers and talked about the difference that the Labour Government have made. Of course, we will look at any suggestions that the BCSSS comes forward with.

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



**Pippa Heylings** (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): The US President-elect, Donald Trump, has repeatedly called climate change “a hoax”. I share the concerns of young people in South Cambridgeshire that these views represent a threat to our efforts to tackle climate change. The global community is meeting right now at the international climate summit in Azerbaijan—COP29. Does the Minister believe and share with me the view that the UK must rebuild its leadership by getting back on track with our climate and nature targets?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I agree that it is now more important than ever that the UK shows global leadership, and that is exactly what the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Energy Secretary are doing with their presence at COP today—I will be heading out there tomorrow. I am very keen to work with the hon. Lady cross-party on these issues. Working with young people is very important as well.

T5. [901243] **Steve Race** (Exeter) (Lab): I am proud that Exeter is already a global leader in climate research. Does the Minister agree that this Government’s mission on clean power will deliver lower bills, energy security and allow this country to enter COP29 as a world leader when it comes to climate action?

**Kerry McCarthy:** As I have said, showing domestic leadership gives us the credibility to show international leadership too. We will be doing both.

T3. [901240] **Lee Anderson** (Ashfield) (Reform): Forests in North America are being chopped down to supply wood to burn at Drax power station, at a cost of £2 million a day in subsidies, while pensioners will perish this winter. Does the Minister agree that it is time to end this net zero madness and admit that fossil fuels are “a gift of the God?”

**Michael Shanks:** It perhaps will not surprise the hon. Gentleman or the House that I am not going to agree with his final point. Net zero is incredibly important to deliver climate leadership, lower bills and the jobs of the future. But on biomass, we rightly expect full compliance with all regulatory obligations on biomass, and consumers rightly recognise the high standard of accountability from generators.

T6. [901244] **Lee Pitcher** (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): In my constituency there are nearly 1,500 members of the mineworkers’ pension scheme. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the superb decision made in the Budget to return the investment of the reserve to them. I understand that this will mean a 32% rise in their weekly pension. Can the Minister confirm that this is correct?

**Sarah Jones:** That is correct. It will mean, on average, an extra £29 a week, putting right a wrong that has persisted for far too long. Although the money is important and a key part of it, we have done the right thing—and about time too. Some 112,000 members across the country will benefit.

**Richard Fuller** (North Bedfordshire) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for permitting me to raise this important constituency matter from the Back Benches. On 2 July

this year, during the installation of a ground source heat pump in a constituent’s back garden, a gas field was struck and gas was released. On 19 October there was an explosion, which resulted in the deaths of two of my constituents and the continuing evacuation of 50 households. Matters related to the period between 2 July and 19 October are subject to investigation. I am advised that this is the first such instance of gas being encountered, but given that ground source heat pumps are expected to play a significant role in decarbonising home heating, will the Minister undertake to review the regulations covering the installation of ground source heat pumps, and will she arrange a meeting for me with the relevant Minister to discuss these matters further?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Miatta Fahnbulleh):** I am sorry to hear about the incident that the hon. Gentleman has raised. We absolutely need to ensure, as we roll out all low-carbon technology, that standards are at the highest level. I undertake to meet him to understand the specific circumstances and see what we can do in terms of reviewing regulation.

T7. [901245] **Adam Thompson** (Erewash) (Lab): The Joint European Torus fusion experiment in Oxfordshire has been delivering fantastic scientific results, standing at the forefront of UK science and the fusion experiment internationally. As JET begins to be decommissioned as we move forward to our next large experiment in Bassetlaw, can the Minister comment on how we will retain all the excellent science expertise that has been built up in JET over the past decade?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I got to see the JET project when I visited Culham. There is huge potential for a cluster there. Many more companies are being attracted to that sector. My hon. Friend is right that we need to maximise the skills that are there, but I am confident, having spoken to companies that have been attracted to Culham, and having spoken to international companies too, that we will continue to do so.

**Helen Morgan** (North Shropshire) (LD): Many homes in my constituency are off grid, which means that their owners have to fill up the tank at the beginning of winter to keep warm. The pensioners who have lost the winter fuel payment are struggling with that up-front amount. Will the Minister review the level at which the winter fuel payment is removed, because the most vulnerable are struggling?

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:** We are doing everything we can to help the households that will struggle with bills this winter. We have had a big push to increase the uptake of pension credit and we are working with energy suppliers to provide additional support this winter, alongside our warm home discount, which will provide a rebate of £150 to households in fuel poverty. We have also extended the household support fund.

T8. [901247] **Joe Powell** (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): I have worked for many years with London School of Economics academic and UK resident Dr Gubad Ibadoghlu, who has been arbitrarily detained in Azerbaijan since July 2023 for uncovering corruption in the fossil fuel industry, despite a severe



medical condition. During COP29, will Ministers meet their Azerbaijani counterparts to urge them to drop the charges and to release him?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I understand that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Minister has raised the case with the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister and urged allowing Dr Ibadoghlu to travel overseas for specialist medical care if required. We will continue to use our diplomatic channels to raise our concerns about the protection of freedom and human rights in Azerbaijan, including for my hon. Friend's constituent.

**Gareth Davies** (Grantham and Bourne) (Con): Conservative Members will never stop holding the Government to account for their pre-election promise to cut energy bills by £300. Have civil service officials conducted any modelling whatsoever that can legitimise that figure?

**Michael Shanks:** We arrived at the figure through independent analysis. We stand by the reality that the only way to bring down bills is to commit to our 2030 target. The National Energy System Operator backs that, but the Conservative party fails to support that action. The hon. Member therefore must explain what the Conservative plan is for reducing bills for people who are paying more than they have ever paid.

**Tim Roca** (Macclesfield) (Lab): My constituents understand that tackling the climate crisis and getting lower bills go hand in hand, and they are excited about Great British Energy. Will GBE invest in community energy projects in places such as Macclesfield?

**Michael Shanks:** My hon. Friend is right to make a point about community energy. The local power plan that we are committed to will deliver community energy projects throughout Great Britain. I am sure that Macclesfield has some fantastic projects that Great British Energy will look at. We want to unleash the potential of community energy across the country.

**Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): National Grid's rationale for rebuilding East Claydon substation is based on speculative applications, not consented real schemes. Will the Minister therefore meet me to find a way to get National Grid more grounded in reality rather than speculation?

**Michael Shanks:** I am happy to look at specific cases, but the Secretary of State's role as final decision maker on some planning applications means that I cannot comment on them. However, generally speaking, the hon. Member makes an important point about looking at how we plan projects holistically throughout the country. That is why we have announced the first ever spatial energy plan for the whole of Great Britain.

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Ind): The devastating scenes of flooding in Spain remind us all of why urgent investment is needed to deal with the deadly consequences of climate change. Does the Minister agree that that investment should be paid for by the polluting companies that have caused the climate crisis?

**Kerry McCarthy:** We hope that, at COP29 in the coming weeks, we can settle on a figure for a new ambitious goal, which will not just bring in finance from donor countries, but mobilise private sector finance. We will use all the mechanisms we can to ensure that we get money to developing countries as quickly as possible. As my hon. Friend said, it is more urgent than ever to act.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I have got to get all Members in, and Ministers have got to help me and work with me.

**Alison Bennett** (Mid Sussex) (LD): Bolney and Twineham parishes in my constituency hosts the Rampion windfarm substation, which leads to several battery energy storage solution applications. What reassurance can the Minister give my constituents about the adequacy of the regulatory framework?

**Michael Shanks:** Batteries will play an important role in our energy mix in the short duration storage that we need. We will continue to look at whether the regulatory arrangements are sufficient. Obviously, we want all the applications to be for safe projects. The regulations are in place to ensure that. If we need to do any more work, we will happily look at that.

**Jayne Kirkham** (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): We had a very successful all-party group meeting last week on floating offshore wind in the Celtic sea. I know the Minister is supportive and ask him to consider mechanisms such as ringfencing contracts for difference and investment in ports to kickstart the investment in the Celtic sea.

**Michael Shanks:** My hon. Friend is right to raise the important potential of the Celtic sea in our green energy transition. I will be in Wales tomorrow to speak at a green energy conference on exactly that question. There is huge potential in floating offshore wind. We want to bring the manufacturing jobs in the supply chain to this country as well, which is why we launched today our clean industry bonus to bring that investment here to build the factories of the future and deliver the good, clean jobs of the future.

**Alicia Kearns** (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): The wind industry has rightly agreed a standard compensation package for rural communities with big wind plants. The solar industry, however, is, unsurprisingly, busy whitewashing Uyghur slave labour in its supply chains rather than doing that. If it will not act, will the Government step forward and recognise that they must support rural communities by creating a standardised compensation programme?

**Michael Shanks:** The hon. Lady has pursued this and several other issues to do with the solar industry for a long time. We are currently looking at all the options, particularly around community benefits, to ensure that they are at a scale—following on from the previous Government's consultation on whether they should be compulsory—that genuinely benefits communities.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): My constituent Konnie Huq, with Arts Council and Lottery funding, has compiled a kids' climate guide, with Jamie

Oliver among the contributors. Will Ministers join forces with her to get it out there, preferably to every school in the country, because we have got to start young?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I would be more than happy to meet with my hon. Friend and her constituent, who sounds rather familiar, to discuss what more we can do to support climate education among children, including in our schools.

**Patrick Spencer** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I met with National Grid yesterday and communicated my concerns about the Norwich to Tilbury line but we remained constructive and talked about community benefit schemes. Unfortunately, it told me that the Government were dragging their feet on defining community benefit schemes. Can the Minister update the House on when they will bring forward guidance, and can he promise that a community benefit scheme is a real, positive economic benefit for my residents who are impacted by the pylons?

**Michael Shanks:** Clearly I cannot speak for National Grid but I can speak for this Government and in four months we have moved as quickly as possible on what a community benefit scheme will look like for network infrastructure as well as for generation projects. The Conservative party had 14 years to put in place a different scheme and did not; in four months we are moving as quickly as we can.

**Perran Moon** (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): As Ministers know, the European powerhouse of critical minerals is Cornwall, including its vast quantities of lithium, essential for our transition away from fossil fuels. Will the Ministers agree with the industry's call for a target of 50,000 tonnes of lithium?

**Sarah Jones:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question and look forward to meeting him shortly to talk about tin among other things. We are looking at our critical

minerals strategy; there is a big role to play in his neck of the woods for lithium and tin, and we will be pushing that as hard as we can.

**Chris Law** (Dundee Central) (SNP): Ahead of the general election the Labour party was warned that its plans for the North sea in Scotland would lead to up to 100,000 Scottish job losses. Last week this became a reality when the US oil firm Apache said that it would end all its operations in the North sea by the end of 2029, citing this UK Government's Budget and tax regime. Can the Minister explain why this UK Government sees the jobs and livelihoods of oil and gas workers in the north-east of Scotland as expendable?

**Michael Shanks:** I do not believe that at all. This Government are committed to a just and prosperous transition. The reality is that 100,000 jobs have been lost in the oil and gas industry in the past 10 years. If we do not recognise that there is a transition under way and put in place the measures to produce the jobs of the future, we will have more losses. The party that the hon. Member represents could have done something about that by supporting Great British Energy headquarters in Aberdeen but he failed to show up and vote for it.

**Noah Law** (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): I declare an interest as a chair of the all-party parliamentary group for critical minerals. Domestic supplies of copper and, of course, Cornish tin are critical to the UK's energy security. What consideration has the Minister given to ensuring that copper and tin are recognised as critical minerals?

**Sarah Jones:** The process in terms of what is on the list of critical minerals is independent, but I have a strong interest, as does my hon. Friend, in ensuring that we produce as many critical minerals here as we can and that the supply chains around the world are working for us. I am looking at a critical minerals strategy, which will come forward in due course.

## Point of Order

12.39 pm

**Claire Coutinho** (East Surrey) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Ministers have repeatedly said today that the NESO report shows that their plans will lower energy bills, but page 78 of the report makes it clear that no such thing will happen. If Ministers read their own report and realise that they have misled the House, would it be appropriate for them to come back and apologise?

**Mr Speaker:** I am not responsible for Ministers' answers, but I am sure Ministers will have heard that point of order, and if they wish to correct the record, they can do so.

## Social Security Advisory Committee: Winter Fuel Payment

12.40 pm

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when she plans to respond to the Social Security Advisory Committee's letter, published on 17 October 2024, on the means-testing of winter fuel payments.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Emma Reynolds):** We welcome the letter from the chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee. We were hoping to respond to the letter on the day of the Budget. Regrettably, there has been an unexpected further delay, and we are due to issue the response this week. However, my officials met the committee in August to discuss the regulations, prior to the committee's formal scrutiny in early September.

I want to explain briefly why it is important to invoke the urgency procedure in this case. We needed to make the necessary Exchequer savings in the current financial year, as the regulations needed to come into force on 16 September. The previous Government left us with a £22 billion black hole, with Treasury reserves spent three times over. The day-to-day departmental spending set out by the previous Government in their spring Budget was not even close to reality. It is now up to us to clear up the mess of the previous Government, so we had to take some difficult decisions, such as means-testing the winter fuel payment, but we remain determined to do everything possible to support the poorest pensioners.

We have taken immediate action to increase the take-up of pension credit, working with charities and local authorities and through a campaign in print and broadcast media. The Government have written to more than 12 million pensioners about the changes to means-testing the winter fuel payment. We have also written to 120,000 pensioners on housing benefit, who could be entitled to pension credit, to encourage them to claim. We have extended the household support fund until March 2026. Thanks to our steadfast commitment to the triple lock, more than 12 million pensioners will see their state pension rise by up to £470 next year, and up to £1,900 over the course of this Parliament. The warm home discount, which we heard about a minute ago, is worth £150 off energy bills for low-income households. The warm homes plan will in the longer term insulate 5 million more homes.

By taking these difficult decisions, we were able to provide a cash injection of £22.6 billion to the NHS budget, which is the largest real-terms growth in day-to-day NHS spending—outside of covid—since 2010. That will bring down waiting times for people across the country, including many pensioners. We are taking the responsible and difficult decisions to clear up the mess of the previous Government, to fix the foundations of our economy and rebuild our public services.

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

**Helen Whately:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question.

[Helen Whately]

This Government made a choice to take away the winter fuel payment from 10 million pensioners this winter and to rely on the notoriously under-claimed pension credit as a system of means-testing it. That choice will make life harder for pensioners across the country. It will see 750,000 of the poorest pensioners miss out on much-needed help with the cost of heating, and according to the Labour party's own research, it could lead to 4,000 additional deaths this winter. The Government know that. That is why they have not done an impact assessment. Perhaps it is why, after seven weeks, they still have not responded to the concerns of their own advisory committee.

The committee wrote the Secretary of State a letter containing its concerns about how the policy will affect the poorest people. It said that 70% of disabled pensioners will miss out on their payment this winter, and it suggested expanding the eligibility for winter fuel payments beyond pension credit because the committee knows that the Government's savings are based on a third of the poorest pensioners missing out. In direct contrast to the Government, the committee said that

"a more detailed assessment is urgently required",

as colleagues from all parts of the House—including Labour Members—charities and pensioner groups across the country have also said.

Here we are, seven weeks later, and the Secretary of State is yet to even respond to the advisory committee. In fact, she is not even here to answer this urgent question. I ask the Minister: will the Government now, after seven weeks, respond to their own advisory committee? Will they now, after seven weeks, publish a full impact assessment for everyone to see? Does she accept that her Government have got this wrong? Does she recognise that they have negligently underestimated how many people will fall through the cracks? I suspect that deep down she is worried, as I am, about pensioners who cannot afford to heat their homes. I am sure her Secretary of State has been lobbying the Chancellor behind the scenes—perhaps that is where she is right now, instead of being here. Will the hon. Lady go back to her Chancellor one more time and try to make her think again?

**Emma Reynolds:** I do apologise for the delay in responding to the committee's letter; it is regrettable. The initial delay, as I set out, was because we were waiting for the OBR to come forward with its costings of the policy. Then there was another, unexpected delay. There has been a delay—[*Interruption.*] I do not know why I am being heckled; I am trying calmly to explain why there has been a delay, for which I do apologise. We will issue a response very shortly, and certainly by the end of the week. It is important that we respond to that letter. I respect that the hon. Lady is asking that question.

Regarding the public sector equality duty, we have done everything in line with the duty, which is to provide an equality analysis of the decision that we have taken. As hon. Members will know, that analysis was published in September. However—I say this gently—after the election we found ourselves in a situation of having a £22 billion black hole, with Treasury reserves spent three times over. The OBR has said that its assessment of the previous Government's Budget would have been

materially different had it known the pressures on spending and the real situation in the Treasury. I note that the hon. Lady does not come with an apology.

We have had to take the decision to means-test winter fuel payments. We did not want to do that, but we have had to take some difficult decisions to clear up the mess, to tackle our fiscal inheritance and to start rebuilding our public services, which pensioners across the country and many others rely on.

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Ind): Government Members will obviously not take protestations about poverty from the Conservative party with anything other than a mountain of salt. But the Government spend £1,300 billion per year and the cut to winter fuel allowance will save the Government about £1.4 billion per year, so that cut will save about 0.1% of Government spending. On that basis, as we look at all the welcome advances made in the Labour Budget—all the great stuff that we can talk about—and we consider that this measure saves only 0.1% of Government spending, I really urge the Minister to think again. I think the public would welcome that as a sign of real leadership. Not anyone or any Government always gets it right, and I believe we got it wrong on this occasion. Could the Government rethink on this issue?

**Emma Reynolds:** I am proud of the last Labour Government's record of lifting over a million pensioners out of poverty. We do expect to make savings of about £1.4 billion this year through means-testing the winter fuel payment. That is not an insignificant proportion of the £5.5 billion of savings that the Chancellor set out on 29 July.

**Mr Speaker:** We come to the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Steve Darling** (Torbay) (LD): Many of us in the Chamber accept that the new Government inherited a financial mess from the old Government. It is a pity that that is being balanced on the backs of pensioners. The Minister quite rightly highlighted how many of us have been championing our residents to claim pension credit, as I am in Torbay. She talked of unexpected delays. Many of us, including her own Department, face unexpected delays. In the light of that, will she extend the deadline for pensioners to claim the allowance beyond 21 December?

**Emma Reynolds:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. I am afraid that I cannot commit to extending the deadline. It is important that we encourage as many pensioners as possible—I know that he is working on that in his constituency, and I did a pension credit surgery in my constituency last week—to check whether they are eligible for pension credit. We have 160 local authorities up and down the country helping us to check the eligibility of those in need and those on the lowest incomes. That is the right thing to do. Those claims can be backdated by three months, and anyone who is eligible for pension credit in the qualifying week will also be passported to other benefits, such as the winter fuel payment.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): The advisory committee made several recommendations related to getting assistance to people who should be in



receipt of pension credit. Could the Minister indicate whether the Government intend to accept those recommendations?

**Emma Reynolds:** We are deploying an additional 500 staff to deal with the substantial increase—over 150%—in claims. That is the right thing to do. It is an operational focus for the Department to get through those claims as quickly as possible, to make sure that we get the help to those most in need.

**Alison Griffiths** (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con): The Social Security Advisory Committee estimated that more than 70% of people with a disability will lose their winter fuel payment this year. Does the hon. Lady really think that cutting benefits from this vulnerable group of pensioners is the right thing to do?

**Emma Reynolds:** If the hon. Lady looks at the equality analysis, she will see that those with a disability will be disproportionately likely to retain the winter fuel payment. I urge her to have a look at that.

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for her response to the urgent question. We had a Budget that did so much good for our country in the face of the most dreadful inheritance, and the Labour Government should be congratulated on that. But pensioners in Middlesbrough and Thornaby East are still looking to the Government to further mitigate the impact of the cut to the winter fuel payment. Much has been done by the elected Mayor Chris Cooke to embrace the issues around the household support fund and so on, but the Social Security Advisory Committee noted that the £1.4 billion was based on an increase of only 5% in pension credit take-up, from 63% to 68%. Could the Minister say what the increase in take-up has been to date, and what further steps she will take to provide yet further mitigations and reduce pensioner poverty?

**Emma Reynolds:** We will announce new statistics at the end of this month. The committee asked about the 5% increase; that assumption is based on what happened when the previous Government took away free TV licences and people had to apply for them. The OBR accepted our assumption.

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): What is the point of having a Social Security Advisory Committee if the Government do not listen to and take its advice? Would it not be better to abolish the committee if the Government are intent on ignoring it?

**Emma Reynolds:** No.

**Dr Scott Arthur** (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): I was reassured by the Minister's response that we will soon see a reply to that letter. My constituents are not fools—they can see that while Opposition parties oppose the cut, they are not proposing how they would fund the payment. My constituents also see the desperate lack of people claiming pension credit. I put on the record my thanks to Age Scotland for its guidance to my staff on how to ensure that more people in my constituency claim it. The letter refers to winter fuel payment claimants in England, Wales, the EU, Switzerland, Iceland, Lichtenstein

and Norway, but not Scotland. Is that because in Scotland, the Scottish Government have the power both to maintain the winter fuel payment and to fully fund it?

**Emma Reynolds:** Yes, as I understand it that is in the Scottish Government's gift.

**Damian Hinds** (East Hampshire) (Con): Has the Minister had the chance to visit the DWP library, and has she made a note of how many drives there have been over the years to take up pension credit, and whether any of them ever reached as high even as three quarters of those who are eligible?

**Emma Reynolds:** The previous Government promised 13 years ago to merge housing benefit with pension credit, which would be a significant advance towards improvements. We are introducing that in January. We will have been in power for only six months, but we will have done more than the previous Government did in 14 years.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Many pensioners are terrified of going into debt and do not want to switch on their heating in case they end up with massive bills. Temperatures will drop below freezing in Scotland at the beginning of next week, so will the Minister apologise to those pensioners across Scotland who will not be able to put the heating on because they fear going into debt?

**Emma Reynolds:** I urge the hon. Lady to look at the support available to low income households through the warm homes discount scheme, the extension of the household support fund and our commitment to the triple lock, which will ensure that 12 million pensioners see a rise in their pension of up to £470 next year, and £1,900 over the course of this Parliament. In the longer term, I urge her to look at the detail of the warm homes plan, which will transform homes across the country by making them cleaner and cheaper to heat.

**Alicia Kearns** (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): On 19 September, the Minister's Department told me in response to a written question that 48,351 people in my constituency had been eligible for winter fuel payments. While we are proud to offer forever homes to so many pensioners, that is a preposterous figure, relating to a heartless and unnecessary decision that will cost more in the long term. How do I or any of my residents have confidence in what the Government are doing, since they believe that more than half my constituency is made up of pensioners, and cannot even get the basic numbers right?

**Emma Reynolds:** I quote one of the hon. Lady's fellow politicians:

"I have people in my constituency telling me that they don't need the winter fuel payments that we give them because they can afford it."

Those are the words of the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for North West Essex (Mrs Badenoch).

**Ann Davies** (Caerfyrddin) (PC): The Social Security Advisory Committee's letter calls for an urgent amendment to allow those in receipt of pensioner housing benefit to

[Ann Davies]

receive the winter fuel payment this year. I believe the UK Government should go further, extending eligibility to people on council tax support, attendance allowance, disability living allowance, personal independent payments and carer's allowance. Will the UK Government rethink their position on eligibility and reduce pensioner hardship this winter?

**Emma Reynolds:** The hon. Lady's question allows me to focus on the communications around this change. It is not just about pension credit, but about people on working tax credit, child tax credit and other benefits. The committee was concerned about pensioners in receipt of child tax credit; pensioners should check whether they are eligible for other qualifying benefits for winter fuel payments, because it is quite a complicated system. It is not just about whether someone is already on pension credit.

**James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): The Government say that they want everyone who is eligible for pension credit to claim it and get it, but as the Social Security Advisory Committee points out, they expect only a 5% increase in uptake. Is the reality not that the Government need hundreds of thousands of pensioners not to claim this entitlement that they deserve, in order to make their figures add up and to cut £1.4 billion from winter fuel payments?

**Emma Reynolds:** I would be very pleased if all pensioners who are eligible for pension credit applied and received the help that they deserve.

**Iqbal Mohamed** (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): The Minister will be aware that billions of pounds in benefits and financial help, including pension credit, goes unclaimed every year due to the stigma associated with claiming benefits, and the huge difficulty that claimants encounter when navigating the system. What measures are the Government taking to encourage greater take-up and to simplify the benefits system?

**Emma Reynolds:** We have run several campaigns, the latest of which was launched recently on radio and TV and in print media, to urge those who may be eligible to apply, and to urge their loved ones to encourage them and help them to apply. We have also asked officials to see how we can improve the form to make it easier, but more than 90% of claims are now made online. Pensioners can get help either from a loved one or from charities and local authorities, which are helping to ensure that they get the support that they deserve.

**Lewis Cocking** (Broxbourne) (Con): Some 16,600 pensioners in Broxbourne will lose their winter fuel payment. How is the Minister helping those who cannot do online applications for pension credit to make an application? Will she commit to continuing to write to all those who will lose their winter fuel payment until they sign up for pension credit?

**Emma Reynolds:** We have written to all pensioners to tell them about the change in Government policy to ensure that those who are not in receipt of pension credit or other benefits know that they will not be getting the winter fuel payment this winter.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Minister, it is always good to have the necessary answers. The report notes savings of £1.5 billion. The increase in pension credit take-up from 63% to 68% represents an additional 100,000 households. Any take-up negates savings made by the Government. The fact is that pensioners who would qualify have lost out this year and are struggling now. What can be done to expedite their applications and to deal with the long waiting list for decisions, which means that, for many, the potential for additional income to ease their situation and help in the winter months will be too little, too late? The reason I make the point is that the system is taking too long to make a decision and those people need the money right now.

**Emma Reynolds:** As I said, we have redeployed an additional 500 members of staff to process applications for pension credit and we are mostly hitting the target for processing times.

## National Youth Strategy

1.1 pm

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I will now make a statement on our new national youth strategy.

The challenges facing young people today are profound: they lived through a pandemic during which they were denied the chance to test boundaries and gain confidence; they are at the sharp end of a revolution in social media; the pressures on young girls are significant; the effects of antisocial behaviour and violence are stark; and while talent is everywhere, opportunity is not. Despite that, this generation is as ambitious for themselves, their families and their communities as any other before them, and they deserve a Government with a plan to match.

When I became Secretary of State, I was shocked to find that there was no single strategy in place for young people. I am absolutely determined to put that right. This is personal for me: one of my first jobs was at the youth homelessness charity, Centrepoin. I learned everything I know about politics from those brilliant young people, who understood the challenges they faced better than any Government could. That is why today we are kicking off one of the biggest national conversations the Government have ever held with young people—led by, and for, young people.

As we embark on an ambitious plan to devolve power to local leaders and communities, we are determined to champion that change not just at national level, but in every part of government. We will take this conversation to our towns, villages and cities in every region on their terms, not ours, to allow young people to challenge us every step of the way. They will be in the driving seat. We will make sure young people are empowered at local, regional and national level, so that funding flows to the things that matter to them. In the coming months, these conversations will feed into a report, “Today’s Youth, Tomorrow’s Nation”, detailing young people’s priorities to inform our new approach. Next year, we will present to this House a co-produced national youth strategy that is fit for the decade ahead and ensures every young person can live the richer, larger life they deserve.

We disagree on many things in this House, but I believe every single one of us shares a common desire to see this generation thrive. They deserve politicians who respect what they have to contribute. That is what this Government are going to do, and that begins today.

In line with this new approach, I have to tell the House that we are going to wind down the National Citizen Service programme from the end of the financial year, and the National Citizen Service Trust when parliamentary time allows. Since its launch in 2011, the NCS has provided over 1 million young people with opportunities. The NCS met the needs of the moment and rightly put active citizenship at the heart of the Government’s programme for young people. It has played a hugely important role in supporting young people to build their confidence and bridge social divides. I would like to thank each and every staff member past and present, the NCS board, and the previous and current CEOs and chairs. I also thank every young person who has contributed to the success of the NCS.

In 2011, when the National Citizen Service was established, Facebook and X had only 700 million users. Now, they have over 3 billion. TikTok had not even been dreamt of. In 2011, an estimated one in eight 10 to 15-year-olds had a probable mental health problem. Now, it is one in five. The world has changed and we need a youth strategy that reflects that. This is not a decision we take lightly. I have spoken to the chair and chief executive. I am so grateful to them for their commitment to work closely together to protect young people and staff, to share learnings and expertise, and to ensure there is an orderly transition from the end of the NCS programme to what comes next. I am delighted to announce that the current NCS chair, Harris Bokhari, will be an adviser on the national youth strategy. His experience will be invaluable as we step into a new way of working together with the country’s young people. As part of this, I would also like to thank the NCS youth advisory board. I hope it will play a major role in our strategy. It is committed, as we are, to building a country of connected, confident and caring young citizens.

We will work closely with the whole youth sector to transform our work so that it better supports youth workers. Local authorities’ youth funding fell by 73% under the previous Government and we know that this presents a significant challenge. Despite the disastrous economic situation we inherited, I am determined that we will rise to this moment. For so many young people, it is councils and combined authorities who hold the key to unlocking their potential. To facilitate them, I will be launching a local youth transformation pilot in the next financial year to support local authorities to build back lost capability and provide tools, guidance and funding to improve their youth offers and empower young people in every community. I have also decided to increase the total funding for other Department for Culture, Media and Sport youth programmes to ensure that young people can continue to access opportunities, no matter where they are from.

We recognise the urgent need for young people to have welcoming places that they have a stake in. That is why, in the next financial year, my Department will allocate over £85 million of capital funding to places where it is most needed. That includes launching the new better youth spaces fund, with at least £26 million for youth clubs to buy new equipment and do renovations. We will also complete the youth investment fund projects that are under way. True to our commitment to putting young people back in charge of their own destinies, we will ensure that they guide our decisions when we choose the spaces to support.

We know that buildings are worth nothing without the army of trusted adults dedicated to helping young people to thrive. As we develop the youth strategy, I will continue to ensure we are recruiting and training the youth workers who are a lifeline for young people. From the initial youth guarantee areas, which will help young people into employment or training, to the first young futures hubs and local prevention partnerships, this Government are committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity. We are also expanding the creative careers programme to widen access to creative employers across the country, and we have committed to continued investment in multi-sport facilities.



[Lisa Nandy]

In addition to that funding, I am announcing that youth, financial inclusion, social investment and community wealth funds will each receive a significant portion of the next £350 million of dormant assets funding. I am pleased to tell the House that, of that, £100 million will be dedicated to youth outcomes between 2024 and 2028. There will be more detail to come when we publish our dormant assets strategy.

Throughout history, the programmes that have made the greatest difference have been the ones that met the challenges of the moment and were built to last: the Children Act 1989, delivered by a Conservative Government, enshrined it in law that the best interests of the child take priority above all else; and the last Labour Government's Every Child Matters programme put children's views and needs at the heart of a Government that changed lives everywhere. I look forward to working constructively with Members across the political divide to get this right. Together, we will grip these challenges to give young people chances and choices, put them at the heart of government and unlock the potential of a generation. I commend this statement to the House.

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

1.9 pm

**Stuart Andrew** (Daventry) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of her statement.

Let me begin by saying that the Opposition really do welcome any focus that the Government are putting on young people. I recall from my time in the Department that spending time in the youth sector provided some of the most inspiring moments of my time as a Minister. In government, we had a proud record of listening to young people and putting their views at the heart of our agenda, and our record shows that. Indeed, I always ensured that young people were around the table when we were making decisions that would affect them, and would often say that I wondered how a middle-aged, grey-haired man could know exactly what young people wanted.

It was because we listened to young people that we allocated £500 million over the next three years to fund the national youth guarantee, ensuring that every young person aged 11 to 18 in England had access to regular clubs and activities, something to do after school, experiences away from home, and opportunities to volunteer. That is what young people told us they wanted. As part of the national youth guarantee, we allocated £300 million to youth facilities, improving and developing 300 of them.

We welcome the Government's commitment to the youth investment fund projects that are under way, but will the Secretary of State confirm the fate of those that are not? In government, we delivered £1.3 billion-worth of sports programmes, developing and improving sports pitches across the country. Can she confirm that they will still be invested in, given their importance as a resource for young people?

Of course, the importance that we placed on young people went much further. Whether the issue was housing, the national living wage, education or apprenticeships, we listened to their views at the very top of Government. That is why we welcome some of the measures in the statement, such as the focus that the Government will

place on youth workers through the local youth transformation pilot. The relationship between youth workers and young people is one of the most important, especially for young people with challenging backgrounds.

One element that we cannot support, however, is the scrapping of the National Citizen Service. The NCS has grown since 2011, when it first supported 158 participants. Over the last 13 years, more than 750,000 young people have taken part in its programme. I had the pleasure of visiting many of them, and what struck me most was the sight of people from a mix of different backgrounds coming together. It was a great scheme which had cross-party support.

If the Government intend to listen to young people, can the Secretary of State explain why it is scrapping a scheme with which 93% of participants were satisfied? She says that we do not need citizenship because of social media, but I would argue that we probably do. The cancellation of the NCS also means that a hole will develop in youth services being delivered in 2025, so can the Secretary of State tell me what immediate action will be taken to prevent it from developing, and how she intends to spend the £50 million of savings that she has announced—or is that a loss to the sector?

The NCS is not the only scheme that is being scrapped. I do not need to remind the House of the importance of cadets both to their communities and to young people, especially following the remembrance services that took place yesterday and over the weekend. It is a great shame that the Government have cut grant funding for cadets, and I hope the Secretary of State will reconsider that. As for the issue of dormant assets, this is money that we announced in government, but may I ask how quickly that funding will be in the hands of those who need it?

Giving young people the best start in life is something about which I—and, I know, many other Members—care passionately. I assure the Secretary of State that we will work constructively with her when we see opportunities to improve services, but we will also challenge it when we think that she has made the wrong decision. I am sorry to say that, in my view, the cancellation of the National Citizen Service is the wrong choice.

**Lisa Nandy:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his constructive challenge. I welcome him to his place, and I look forward to more of this in the coming months and years.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about grassroots sports funding and the facilities that we make available around the country. He will have noted that over the summer I announced that the Government would invest in that significantly, and that we provided further details following the Euros—where a whole generation was inspired, not just by the men's team but by the incredible success of the Lionesses, and many other sports besides. We know how important this is. We have made a commitment to ensure that that funding matches the demand that is being placed on us by young people in particular.

As for the importance of youth workers, I could not agree more with the right hon. Gentleman. I do not want to get into an arms race about who cares more about this issue, but the truth is where the last Government left us a good inheritance, we will acknowledge it,



support it, and ensure that it continues. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman will rightly agree that the challenges facing young people are far too important for us to play party politics with them. I hope that young people will recognise from this exchange that they have a group of parliamentarians who are determined to work together to get this right, and who will challenge one another when they think they are not doing so.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the £50 million cost of NCS. We are working with the NCS Trust to ensure that we manage the closure in an orderly fashion, and that all associated costs are met. The Department is currently engaged in a business planning process. However, he will have heard what I have said in the House previously and what I will continue to say to colleagues today: we recognise the funding challenges that affect the entire youth sector. The series of announcements that I have made today, including the announcement about dormant assets funding, are intended to ensure that we start to put rocket boosters behind young people.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about other youth organisations, and in particular about uniformed youth. We do intend to increase funding for some of those organisations, especially those that have received funding previously through the National Citizen Service, to ensure that no gap is left that would prevent them from being able to honour the commitments that they making to young people. As for the general question—why the NCS?—I want to impress on the right hon. Gentleman that we were strong supporters of the dedicated programme for young people that was established by the Cameron Government. I was also a strong supporter of vInspired, which preceded it, but the incoming Government at the time decided that they wanted to move with the times and wanted to change the programme.

What we have learned from that episode is that an orderly transition is very important. With vInspired the funding was cut but the programme continued, and it finally closed in 2018 with more than half a million pounds of debt. We are determined not to allow that to happen again, which is why we are working closely with the NCS Trust and others to make sure we do this properly. However, I have a responsibility to millions of young people around the country, and I think it only right to say that the system is far too fragmented, and not aligned with their priorities. I make no apology for putting them back at the centre of government, where they belong.

**Natasha Irons** (Croydon East) (Lab): I welcome the Government's commitment to bringing youth services together, and we in the all-party parliamentary group on youth affairs, which I chair, look forward to playing our part. However, owing to the 73% reduction in youth services at a local level, local groups such as Croydon Youth Consortium in my constituency have had to step up where local government has stepped back. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the Government will leverage, rather than working against, the best practice that those groups have established by working together and not competing against each other for certain types of funding?

**Lisa Nandy:** I welcome my hon. Friend's commitment to young people, which was known about before her election. I have deliberately placed an emphasis on what

happens at local and regional level. As this Government seek to embark on the biggest devolution of power out of Westminster and Whitehall in a generation, we must ensure that young people are empowered to play their full part, not just with national Government but with local and regional government as well. We announced funding for the local youth transformation fund to help local authorities learn from the best practice in this area. I am also very committed—as is the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley South (Stephanie Peacock)—to ensuring that we are in towns, villages and cities across the UK, listening to the experience of young people who face very different challenges in their lives depending on where they are from, but who have also found extremely innovative solutions. I look forward to working with my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon East (Natasha Irons) and other colleagues to make good that commitment.

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

**Max Wilkinson** (Cheltenham) (LD): I welcome today's announcement. A national youth strategy can finally bring the joined-up thinking that is needed to deliver the outcomes that our young people deserve. On the point about putting rocket boosters behind young people, those kinds of high-octane opportunities were not available at the youth clubs that I attended, but it sounds like an innovative form of youth work.

I have seen the results that can be achieved by youth work when an effective approach is taken. One success story is that of Cheltenham Festivals, which supports tens of thousands of young people in the arts and culture every year. I know that the Secretary of State learned more when Cheltenham Festivals recently visited Downing Street and she got to meet Supertato—one of her heroes. What role is there for organisations such as Cheltenham Festivals as part of the strategy? Does the Secretary of State agree that in order to deliver long-term, joined-up strategic thinking, now is the time for a Cabinet Minister for children and young people, as called for by the Liberal Democrats? Will whatever follows the NCS continue to report to her Department or another—perhaps the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, if local councils are to have a broader role?

The scale of the mental health crisis among young people in this country gives us pause for thought every day. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to commit that this Government will deliver a dedicated mental health professional in every primary and secondary school? The physical health of our children and young people is also in urgent need of support as we seek to fight childhood obesity. Will the Secretary of State's announcement on dormant assets funding bring any benefits in the area of sports and physical activity?

**Lisa Nandy:** It was indeed a pleasure to meet Supertato at the recent reception that we hosted in Downing Street. I know Mr Speaker got the reference, but I am not sure that anybody else did—Supertato is a legend.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's emphasis on Cheltenham Festivals, and on arts and culture. We think that every child and young person in this country has the right to a richer, larger life, and he will have seen that one of the first things that the Education Secretary and I announced was a review of the curriculum in

[Lisa Nandy]

order to put arts, creativity, sport and music back at its heart. For too many young people, the experience of the last decade and a half has been of arts, culture and sport disappearing not just from their classrooms but from their communities, and we are determined to set that right.

The hon. Gentleman asked me a specific question about having a Cabinet Minister for children and young people. I am pleased to tell him that we have one—he is known as the Prime Minister. Having worked for the Children's Society and Centrepunt when the last Labour Government were in office, my learning in this area was that although it was a great innovation to have a Department for Children, Schools and Families, the Every Child Matters programme was able to succeed only because there was a strong direction from the Prime Minister that every single Cabinet Minister had to play their part. I hope that the hon. Gentleman can see that, through the work we are announcing today, we are absolutely determined to ensure that.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): I declare an interest: for nearly 20 years, I have been the chair of trustees at the Samuel Montagu youth club in my constituency, and I have also been a senior play leader on an adventure playground and a youth worker.

The funding that my right hon. Friend has announced today will be welcomed by the youth work sector, particularly the £85 million of overdue capital and the £26 million for youth clubs, but may I make an appeal to her? I have been down this road many times before with Government funding, and the burden of bureaucracy when applying for money can sometimes exclude small organisations that just do not have the capacity. Can we make it simpler for people to apply for the money?

**Lisa Nandy:** I look forward to visiting an adventure playground with my hon. Friend sometime soon. I could not agree with him more, and he is absolutely right to flag this issue to me. We are keen to make the interface between young people, youth organisations and the Government as painless as possible, particularly to ensure that we support local grassroots organisations that are achieving absolute magic with young people. We are working with the devolved Administrations, the Local Government Association, mayors, councils and others to get it right, but I would be very pleased to discuss this issue with my hon. Friend at a time that is mutually convenient, to make sure that we do.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Select Committee.

**Dame Caroline Dinenage** (Gosport) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. She is right to focus on this issue, and there are a lot of positives here. If I have any concerns, they are around the speed of the closure of the National Citizen Service and not knowing what will replace it. That could lead to gaps in provision, but also to some of the skilled and dedicated youth workers on whom we rely leaving the workforce. She spoke about an orderly transition, and she is absolutely right to do so. I have a few of questions for her. What are the estimated costs of winding down the NCS? Would it be possible for it to continue without public funding if it were able to get access to private finance? How long

does she estimate that it will take before money for either existing or new youth projects becomes available, and when does she think they could be up and running?

**Lisa Nandy:** I thank the hon. Lady for her questions. Our intention is to close the NCS, but we must go through all the necessary steps, including engagement with His Majesty the King, as required, and with Parliament. She will know that it will take some time to pass the necessary legislation, but our intention is to honour the existing funding round until March 2025.

The hon. Lady asked about the costs of winding down NCS. We have done some provisional work on that, but we are working closely with the NCS board and trust to make sure that we fully understand the implications of those costs and that we do this in the most cost-effective way, with value for money. She also asked whether it would be possible to continue with the NCS, but without Government funding. We are very much marked by the experience of the last Government and the closure of vInspired. Without a forward-looking and viable business plan, we are concerned that we would end up repeating the mistakes made under the last Government. As I said to the right hon. Member for Daventry (Stuart Andrew), vInspired eventually closed with a significant amount of debt.

We have looked at every different scenario, and the hon. Lady will appreciate that this is not a decision that we took lightly, but we have come to the conclusion that it is the right thing for young people. It is right to be clear that we are closing the NCS. This will be the last round of funding, and we will legislate after going through the necessary processes.

**Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Secretary of State's important statement. I think we in this Chamber all agree that supporting the next generation of people in my town of Harlow and across the country is really important. May I make a plea to her? It is really important to hear young people's voices in this process, but what steps will she take to make sure that young people who are often forgotten and left behind are heard? Having worked for a charity that supports young carers, I can say from personal experience that their voices must be heard as well.

**Lisa Nandy:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and I pay tribute to him for the work he is doing and for standing up for a group of young people who mean a great deal to me too, having worked for the Children's Society. They have often lacked a voice. It is fantastic to see him in his place and to know that they have a strong voice in him. We are working with a full range of youth organisations, drawing on the relationships that we have across the Department to make sure that we reach the right young people. We are in the process of establishing a youth advisory group, which is helping to make sure that we reach the widest range of young people in every part of the country, and I make a commitment to my hon. Friend that we will specifically include young carers in that group.

**Jess Brown-Fuller** (Chichester) (LD): I am pleased that the Secretary of State's statement talked of widening the Creative Careers programme. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for performing arts education

and a proud graduate of Chichester University with a creative degree, I am living proof that a creative degree can take people many places, including Parliament. I am sure the Culture Secretary agrees that the narrow nature of the English baccalaureate is reducing the take-up of creative qualifications among our young people. How soon can we expect reform in that area?

**Lisa Nandy:** The Education Secretary has laid out the terms of the curriculum review and wasted no time in appointing the chair of the review, and that work is under way. As well as making sure that all young people have access to a broad curriculum, my Department is working with many of the organisations that Members have described, such as the Royal Shakespeare Company. We are seeing the great work that is already happening in communities and schools, and considering how best we can make sure that all schools and all children can get access to incredible opportunities. We know that children and young people have been waiting too long to access such opportunities, so we are looking at the broadest range of ways to address that as quickly as possible. My promise to the hon. Lady is that we will not waste a minute.

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for her magnificent statement, which is so timely and overdue. I think every one of us in the Chamber will know from their own constituency just how important youth services are and how they have been stretched over many years. There are so many tremendous suppliers and players in this area, but local authorities play a huge role. Could she say a little bit more about how she expects them to deal with any additional statutory responsibilities and, critically, about the funding needed to deliver absolutely essential services—not just for young people, but for our wider communities?

**Lisa Nandy:** I know that my hon. Friend has a great deal of expertise in this area, having supported young people in his constituency for a long time. We are acutely aware of the challenges facing local authorities. As a former councillor myself, and with experience in the youth sector, I know the enormous frustration when more and more responsibilities are placed on local authorities without the necessary support and funding to match. That is one of the reasons we have made today's announcement about the local youth transformation fund. We think that many local authorities need help, not just with funding but with ensuring that young people are at the centre of their youth offer.

To go back to the challenge that my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham and Chislehurst (Clive Efford) laid down, we must also make sure that we are hearing the fullest range of voices from young people in those forums. Some local authorities are doing a fantastic job, and have been extremely receptive to doing more. We are determined to learn from the best and ensure that every local authority in the country is putting young people at the heart of what they do.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): Earlier, the Secretary of State said that some funding would be protected for uniformed youth organisations. Could she spell out which organisations will not be receiving funding, given that the Government have announced cuts to the cadet forces? May I appeal to her to put somebody from either the Sea Cadets, the Army Cadets or the Air

Training Corps on the advisory board and to reassure the House that there is no institutional or departmental bias against young people wearing a uniform?

**Lisa Nandy:** I have heard the right hon. Gentleman loud and clear, and I absolutely, wholeheartedly give him that commitment. This is personal for me: in my own town of Wigan an enormous number of young people join the cadets and other uniformed groups every year, and we are tremendously proud of them. It was a privilege to be at the Cenotaph with His Majesty the King this Sunday and to meet some of the cadets from Dulwich who did such a fantastic job of welcoming the royal family and making that day a success.

It is our intention to honour all existing funding commitments, but we are planning to increase some funding streams, particularly to ensure that there is no detrimental impact on young people from the decision to close the National Citizen Service. That includes increasing funding to some uniformed groups, and I will be in a position to set out the specifics of that to the House once my Department has gone through business planning. I will also take the hon. Gentleman's suggestion about putting a member of those uniformed groups on the advisory board; I am sure we can manage to make that work. I am looking over at my officials and they are nodding agreeably. I will take that suggestion away, and I thank him for it.

**Dr Lauren Sullivan** (Gravesham) (Lab): The Secretary of State rightly pointed out the amazing work that trusted adults and youth workers do. Today, the average youth contract is about nine months. How will we address that in the national youth strategy, as well as support youth workers to access qualifications, to help them thrive and support our young people?

**Lisa Nandy:** My hon. Friend points to a very relevant problem. In the 20 years since I was in the youth sector, I do not think that problem has got any less acute. It forces organisations to reinvent the wheel constantly, or to stop doing work that is incredibly valuable. As the right hon. Member for Daventry (Stuart Andrew) pointed out earlier, the relationship between a youth worker and a young person is incredibly valuable and important to protect, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and I are well aware of that. I would be amazed if it did not come up through the call for evidence to young people. The consultation is being designed by them, for them, and I would be amazed if that issue did not form part of the recommendations that we take forward into the national youth strategy. In the unlikely event that it does not, however, we will absolutely make sure that we deal with that concern. I have heard my hon. Friend loud and clear.

**Iqbal Mohamed** (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): I welcome the statement from the Secretary of State and fully support her aims to provide fit-for-purpose and effective support to the young people in our country. One key component is the provision of sports and leisure facilities for young people. In September 2023, the Dewsbury sports centre and swimming pool were closed due to limited reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete. Last week I attended a full council meeting in which the Labour cabinet decided to close the Dewsbury sports centre permanently, citing repair costs of £9 million to



[*Iqbal Mohamed*]

£10 million and the lack of £1.13 million in running costs. The impact of the closure on my constituents, including thousands of young people, is catastrophic. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how the Government can help with the reopening of the Dewsbury sports centre as soon as possible?

**Lisa Nandy:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place. I do not think I have had the opportunity to congratulate him since he was elected. This Government are very committed to making sure that we provide the sports and leisure facilities that young people across the country are clamouring for. I have seen for myself in every part of the country how much it improves young people's confidence and educational outcomes, and also how it provides them with the opportunity to live richer, larger lives. I was very struck at the Olympics and Paralympics this summer by just how many of those athletes started out in the sort of leisure facilities that he describes.

However, we do young people a disservice if we are not honest with them about the problems and their causes. The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that councils around the country are not clamouring to close down their leisure facilities. Those councils have had the worst funding settlements from Government in living memory, and they are dealing with the human cost of that in their communities every day. They are on the frontline dealing with that. I congratulate those councillors who are prepared to go out and be honest with people about the challenges that they face and to seek innovative solutions. I give the hon. Gentleman a commitment that I will work with his council to help achieve our shared ambition of making sure that young people in Dewsbury get the opportunities that they deserve.

**Oliver Ryan (Burnley) (Lab/Co-op):** I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. She, like me, is a great champion for young people, and I am glad to hear her comments and commitments today about the new national youth strategy. This funding will be a lifeline to youth workers and to youth organisations such as the Burnley Boys and Girls Club, Participation Works and others operating in Burnley, Padiham and Brierfield. As she says, local authority funding fell by over 70% over the past 14 years, and because of that there is less space for young people to operate in and do what they want to do. I note her commitment to £85 million of extra capital funding, so will she ensure that schemes in Burnley, Padiham and Brierfield are fully considered? Will she meet me and partners in Burnley to talk about the potential for our already part-funded youth zone?

**Lisa Nandy:** I pay tribute to the Burnley Boys and Girls Club. We in Wigan liked it so much that we went out and got one of our own, and it has become the OnSide youth zone, which does fantastic work with the community. That is a really good example of a public-private partnership, where the council and the business community are jointly invested in the future of young people, and our youth zone stands in the centre of Wigan as a shining testament to how much young people matter to them. I know that that is my hon. Friend's ambition for young people in Burnley, and I would be more than happy to work with him to make that a reality.

**Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con):** The Secretary of State is right: the world has changed, and with the enormous prevalence now of electronica and social media, there is a bigger premium than ever on getting more young people out playing sport, doing music, joining uniformed groups and getting involved in all sorts of purposeful activity—even perhaps public speaking and debating. We need to make sure that we make full use of the assets and facilities we have, and successive Governments have tried to get schools to open up more. In some areas we have had renewed progress with the holiday activities and food programme and wraparound care, but what more can be done to ensure that those great facilities throughout the country are fully utilised?

**Lisa Nandy:** It is a long time since the right hon. Gentleman and I were on the Education Committee together, and a lot has changed in that time. We are very open to the suggestion of working more closely with schools to ensure that those tremendous facilities are open to more young people. I would say to him, though, that we do not think that that is the entire answer, because there are young people who do not feel comfortable or confident in schools. Part of the thrust of the work that I have done and the funding that I have announced today is to ensure that young people have spaces that belong to them, where they feel that they have a stake and some sense of ownership. For so many young people, that is the key to accessing services—on their terms, not ours—that genuinely help to transform their lives. But I am very open to the suggestion that we could do more by working with schools.

I would not want Opposition Members to misunderstand what we are saying about citizenship. Active citizenship is incredibly important for young people. In fact, there is no future to this country unless they have the opportunity to contribute to the rebuilding of Britain. That is why we named the state of the nation report in the way we did, and one reason I genuinely feel from listening to Opposition Members that there is an opportunity for us to work together to deliver on the promise to this generation.

**Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) (Green):** I give the Secretary of State my sincere and heartfelt thanks for the focus of her statement. I have worked with the youth sector to highlight the severe loss of professional youth worker jobs that occurred under austerity. Serious revenue funding is needed to fill this chasm, so can she give an estimate of the number of new permanent youth worker posts that revenue funding will create under these plans?

**Lisa Nandy:** I will have to write to the hon. Lady on that point, but I echo what she says. As I said in my statement, buildings are of no use without the army of adults who work with children and young people. Those relationships are hard-fought and that trust is hard-won, and it is something we are determined to protect. Many years ago, when I worked for the Children's Society, we held the largest consultation with children and young people we had ever run. The message that came through from every single submission was the importance of good, strong relationships and of having a trusted adult in their lives. I was horrified when I saw DCMS research showing that so many young people in this country do not have a single adult they would trust with their problems. We are determined to change that, but I will write to the hon. Lady on that specific point.



**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): I thank the right hon. Lady for her generous comments about the Thatcher Government's 1989 Children Act, and for saying that she will dedicate £100 million to youth outcomes over the next four years. Does she therefore share my concern, which I am sure may resonate with many young people, that we now know that more than £100 million has been wasted on the ludicrous High Speed 2 bat tunnel? Does that not show the importance of this House taking control of spending priorities in order to prevent such waste in the future?

**Lisa Nandy:** I am not sure whether that will form the centrepiece of what young people tell us in the consultation, but I reassure the hon. Gentleman that this Government take value for money very seriously. Although I would not suggest for a moment that there was not huge value in the National Citizen Service, one reason for today's difficult decision is that far too much youth-focused spending across Government is too fragmented and not aligned with the challenges this generation faces, as they have told us loud and clear. We are determined that that will change.

**Shockat Adam** (Leicester South) (Ind): I, too, extend my thanks to the Secretary of State for her statement and the promise of investment in this vital area. One of the greatest things about the NCS, according to my children, is the time spent outdoors. I am sure she will agree that outdoor play areas are vital not only for physical wellbeing but for mental wellbeing. Leicester South has some great outdoor play areas and adventure playgrounds, including Highfields and St Andrews. Unfortunately, both are under threat of closure due to a lack of funding. Does the Secretary of State agree that outdoor play areas and adventure playgrounds are vital for our children's wellbeing? What specific investment will there be for adventure playgrounds? Will she talk to her colleagues to ensure that any new housing projects make provision for outdoor play areas?

**Lisa Nandy:** Many years ago, the Government had a national play strategy, which my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Sir Nicholas Dakin) will probably remember. Since then, there has been a lack of focus on the opportunities for children to play.

I will take away the hon. Gentleman's point on housing and discuss it with my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. My Department has a specific funding stream for "adventures away from home," which will be maintained. I will also look for other funding sources that the hon. Gentleman and his constituents may be able to access to ensure that every child in Leicester has the outdoor play experiences and opportunities they deserve.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the Minister's statement—there is no one in the Chamber who is not encouraged by what she has said. She will know that there is great disappointment that youth services did not appear to be prioritised in the Budget. Early intervention allows children to go on to access training and apprenticeships, directing them away from criminal influences and gang membership. It gives them the confidence and self-assurance to combat mental health issues too. Is today's statement an indication that youth investment is a priority and that community groups will not have to scabble at the funding table? Will there be assistance for community groups to access finance and help?

**Lisa Nandy:** The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government inherited a disastrous economic situation, and not only because of how the economy had been mismanaged, but because of the lack of investment in public services over a long period of time. This has meant that so many local councils have focused on their statutory responsibilities, which has deeply affected youth services. However, the Budget made a number of announcements, including my Department's creative careers programme. There are fast-growing areas of the economy in every nation and region, and we are determined that not only will those communities benefit from good jobs, but young people in those communities will have the opportunity to get those jobs. I am sick and tired of visiting parts of the country where jobs are being created that the kids can see from their school playgrounds, but can no more dream of getting those opportunities than of going to the moon. We are determined that this will change under this Government.

## Powers of Attorney

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

1.46 pm

**Fabian Hamilton** (Leeds North East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about Lasting Powers of Attorney; to place duties on banks in respect of Lasting Powers of Attorney; to make provision about the powers of the Office of the Public Guardian to investigate the actions of an attorney; to require the Secretary of State to review the effectiveness of the powers of the Office of the Public Guardian to investigate the actions of an attorney and of its use of those powers; to make provision about the duties of care homes in respect of Lasting Powers of Attorney; to require an attorney to notify the Office of the Public Guardian of the death of a donor; to require the Office of the Public Guardian to take steps to promote the facility to request a search of its registers of powers of attorney; and for connected purposes.

Six years ago, I moved the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Consent) Bill under the ten-minute rule. This was the first legislative attempt to stop the practice of predatory marriage—a cruel form of abuse in which a person marries an elderly or vulnerable person exclusively for the purpose of gaining access to their estate upon death. In the years since, it has become clear that there are other ways in which unscrupulous individuals may target the elderly and vulnerable. Today, I ask the House to try to close one of these procedural gaps that harm so many people.

The simplification of lasting power of attorney processes in recent years was, I believe, short-sighted, and I will explain why. If I were to describe all the instances of abuse that have been shared with me in recent months, I would need far more than my allotted 10 minutes. Owing to the time constraints, I will therefore share the testimonies of just four people who have consented to be named and are not subject to current legal proceedings.

The first is Carolyn Stephens, whose elderly, widowed father met a woman in 2012. At first, Carolyn was pleased that her father had found a new companion, but she grew concerned when this woman began answering her father's phone. Over the next few years, Carolyn found herself systematically removed from her father's life. First, her father was taken to a registry office, where the woman tried to marry him, but the registrar refused, saying that Carolyn's father did not have the capacity because he could not even answer basic questions such as to provide his home address. A week later, a solicitor signed a piece of paper that gave the woman LPA over his finances, property, health and welfare, and the power to completely remove his daughter, Carolyn, from his life altogether.

After having had no contact for years, having suffered from emotional distress, accusations of abuse and harassment, and having no knowledge of where her father lived, Carolyn finally had a breakthrough. In December 2022, she found him on the electoral roll in a care home. The visiting log showed that her father was left alone for 346 days in 2022, without any visitors, not even on his birthday. Even after she found her father, the ordeal continued for several months. Eventually, the authorities acted and Carolyn was able to spend the last six months of her father's life by his side.

Another victim-survivor is Ann Berry. Without discussion or notice, Ann was removed from both her partner's LPAs because the Office of the Public Guardian had received two partial deeds of revocation apparently signed by him. However, because he had Parkinson's disease and Lewy body dementia, he had been unable even to sign a cheque for at least the previous year. That was reported to the Office of the Public Guardian, but Ann was denied access to a screenshot of her partner's signature to verify. For two years, the Office of the Public Guardian was unhelpful and consistently slow to respond to Ann. Her testimony shows how such protective bodies often prove to be toothless to those who need them most.

Another case is the story of Sareeta McLachlan, who has sadly not had the same resolution. Within two months of her mother being placed in a care home, her brother stopped Sareeta and other family members from taking her out for social and leisure activities. Five months later, he banned them from seeing her altogether, and the care home accepted his instructions as he had LPA. Her brother claims Sareeta was distressing their mother by trying to make her discuss financial affairs, and that their mother no longer wanted to see her. Nine years later, Sareeta's nightmare continues, with no explanation given as to why certain family members cannot visit, other than her brother alleging that is their mother's wish.

My final case history is that of my constituent Juliette Hirst. Juliette's mother was proposed to by a man after having been in a relationship for just 17 days. Over the following 20 years, Juliette's mother was coerced into only being allowed to speak on the phone if it was on loudspeaker, not being permitted to attend appointments alone, and not being allowed to decide which clothes she could buy or even wear. This culminated in the inheritance from her mother's late sister being transferred into a joint account, then into an ISA in only the man's name. He spent it all on new cars and on a much more expensive house, far away from the rest of the family.

Then Juliette's mother received a terminal diagnosis. At her mother's request, Juliette and her family arranged for a solicitor to visit to get her mum's affairs in order. However, the husband would not allow the visit without him being present. He stopped feeding or bathing Juliette's mother, and would not even help her to get to the toilet. When Juliette's mother lay dying in St Gemma's hospice, in my constituency, the husband bought another new car for £12,500 and transferred £50,000 into his bank account from their joint account while she was bed bound.

Almost as soon as Juliette's mother had died, the husband immediately moved a new woman into their flat, dumping Juliette's mother's possessions outside in a bin liner. Juliette wrote to me and said:

"It is a repeating pattern of behaviour and there needs to be more help out there, especially for the families of these victims. Banks can't talk to family members if they don't have a Power of Attorney, but coercive controllers don't allow any family members to get Power Of Attorney, as they want full control. There need to be changes with banks, otherwise there is no way of protecting the victims."

She is absolutely right.

I have been made aware of a shocking case involving a lodger gaining LPA over their landlord, providing that individual with access to thousands of pounds in

savings and the ability to remortgage, and of a man who could not even sign his own name, whose LPA was signed away using just his finger print. The scale of the abuse is already alarming and the simplification of obtaining lasting power of attorney is proving to be fuelling the fire. I am sure there are more, as yet unknown, victim-survivors.

My Bill is focused on prevention, removing the incentive for unscrupulous individuals to take advantage of vulnerable older people. Between 2019 and 2024, some 1,066 cases were received involving victim-survivors and lasting power of attorney by the Hourglass helpline. Between the same dates, casework interactions where powers of attorney were mentioned totalled 3,436. Some 2,251 of those cases were related to economic abuse. Of the 7,973 risk-assessed safeguarding concerns raised in 2022-23, some 7,175—or 90%—resulted in no action by the Office of the Public Guardian.

Family court data shows that over 50% of donors are over 75 years old at the point of the registration of their LPA. That means that, since 2008, over 4.5 million people were over 75 when they registered their LPA. They are vulnerable to this type of abuse. My Bill calls for the implementation of Government-regulated safeguarding procedures for all banks over the way they deal with LPAs and the accounts of donors. That would include contacting the donor or a GP before an LPA is activated, and monitoring spending prior to and after the LPA is activated.

There must be new powers for the relevant authorities to hold the Office of the Public Guardian to account on dealing with potential cases of abuse, including oversight of freezing orders that are rarely, if ever, used. Immediate

freezing orders should be used for those under investigation, so they cannot pay their own legal fees with the donor's funds, as has happened on many occasions.

The Office of the Public Guardian needs to remove its financial sustainability mission statement in favour of a mission about the safeguarding of vulnerable people. There should be more effort to publicise the OPG100, which enables the public to find out whether someone has a lasting power of attorney. That should include the introduction of online notices after the signing of an LPA and before the registration of such an agreement.

Care homes have a duty to protect new residents who lack capacity and where an attorney produces power of attorney. A care home, or other provider, should have an obligation to update the register with the Office of the Public Guardian.

Finally, I am grateful to Andrew Bishop of Rothley Law for the help he has given me in this campaign, as well as the four courageous people whose cases I have mentioned. The abuse I have described is clearly widespread. Cases from up and down the country are becoming more evident every day. I believe it is time we act to prevent such appalling injustice, and I commend this Bill to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Fabian Hamilton, Bambos Charalambous, Mr Mark Sowards, Paula Barker, Layla Moran, Tim Roca, Chris Law, Alex Sobel, Yuan Yang and Andrew George present the Bill.

Fabian Hamilton accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 126).*



## House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill

*Considered in Committee*

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Judith Cummins):** I remind Members that, in Committee, Members should not address the Chair as “Deputy Speaker.” When addressing the Chair, please use our name, “Madam Chair,” “Chair,” or “Madam Chairman”—we are all quite flexible.

### Clause 1

EXCLUSION OF REMAINING HEREDITARY PEERS

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**The First Deputy Chairman:** With this it will be convenient to consider the following:

Amendment 26, in clause 2, page 1, line 8, at end insert—

- “(3) Jurisdiction in relation to claims to hereditary peerages is to be exercised by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.”

*This amendment provides explicitly that the jurisdiction in relation to claims to hereditary peerages passes to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.*

Clauses 2 and 3 stand part.

Amendment 25, in clause 4, page 2, line 16, leave out from “force” to end of line 17 and insert—

“only when the House of Commons has agreed a resolution which—

- (a) endorses the conclusions of the report a joint committee appointed for the purpose specified in subsection (3A), and
  - (b) determines accordingly that this Act shall come into force at the end of the Session of Parliament in which this resolution is passed.
- (3A) The purpose of the joint committee of the House of Commons and the House of Lords referred to in subsection (3) is to consider and report upon the Government’s stated plans for reform of the House of Lords, including—
- (a) the removal of the right of excepted hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords,
  - (b) the introduction of a mandatory retirement age for members of the House of Lords,
  - (c) a new participation threshold to enable continuing membership of the House of Lords,
  - (d) changes to the circumstances in which disgraced members of the House of Lords can be removed, and
  - (e) changes to the process of appointment of members of the House of Lords.”

*This amendment provides that the Bill would only come into effect after the report of a joint committee on wider reforms of the composition of the House of Lords has been approved by a resolution of the House of Commons.*

Amendment 24, page 2, line 17, leave out “this Act is passed” and insert—

“the condition in section [requirement on Government to publish legislative proposals] is met”.

*This amendment provides that the Bill would only come into effect at the end of the Session of Parliament in which the government publishes legislative proposals meeting the requirements set out in NC19.*

Clause 4 stand part.

Amendment 12, in clause 5, page 2, line 21, leave out “(Hereditary Peers)” and insert “(Appointments and Membership)”.

*This amendment would change the short title of the Bill and is consequential on NC9 and NC10.*

Amendment 7, page 2, line 21, leave out “(Hereditary Peers)”.

*This amendment is consequential on NC3, NC4, NC5 and NC6. It would amend the short title of the Bill.*

Amendment 1, page 2, line 21, after “Peers” insert “and Bishops”.

*This amendment is consequential on NC1. It would amend the short title of the Bill.*

Amendment 8, page 2, line 21, after “Peers” insert—  
“and Proposals for a Democratic Mandate”.

*This amendment would change the short title of the Bill and is consequential on NC7.*

Amendment 10, page 2, line 21, after “Peers” insert “and Appointments”.

*This amendment would change the short title of the Bill and is consequential on NC8.*

Clause 5 stand part.

New clause 1—*Exclusion of bishops—*

“(1) No-one shall be a member of the House of Lords by virtue of being a bishop or Archbishop of the Church of England.

(2) No bishop or Archbishop of the Church of England is entitled to receive, in that capacity, a writ of summons to attend, or sit and vote in, the House of Lords.

(3) Nothing in this section prevents a person who is, or has been, a bishop or Archbishop of the Church of England from receiving, and exercising the entitlements under, a peerage for life in accordance with section 1 of the Life Peerages Act 1958.

(4) Nothing in this section prevents a person who is, or has been, a bishop or Archbishop of the Church of England from being permitted to enter the House of Lords for the purpose only of leading prayers in accordance with arrangements made by that House.”

*This new clause provides that bishops of the Church of England will no longer be entitled to membership of the House of Lords.*

New clause 2—*Exclusion of bishops: consequential amendments etc.—*

“(1) In the House of Lords Precedence Act 1539—

- (a) omit section 3 (places of the Archbishops and Bishops);
- (b) in section 6 (place of the King’s Chief Secretary) omit the words after “aforementioned”.

(2) The Bishoprics Act 1878 is repealed.

(3) In the Welsh Church Act 1914 omit section 2(3) (writs of summons to be issued to bishops not disqualified by the 1914 Act for sitting in the House of Lords).

(4) In the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975, in section 1(1) omit paragraph (za) (disqualification of Lords Spiritual).

(5) In the Northern Ireland Act 1998, in section 36(6) omit paragraph (b) (a person is not disqualified for membership of the Assembly by reason only that he is a Lord Spiritual).

(6) In the Scotland Act 1998, in section 16(1) omit paragraph (b) (a person is not disqualified from being a member of the Scottish Parliament because he is a Lord Spiritual).

(7) In the House of Commons (Removal of Clergy Disqualification) Act 2001, in section 1, omit subsection (2) (Lords Spiritual disqualified from being a Member of the House of Commons).

(8) In the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, in section 41, omit subsection (6)(b) (members entitled to receive writs of summons to attend the House of Lords by virtue of being an archbishop or bishop); but this subsection is without prejudice to the continued application of that provision in relation to tax years beginning before the commencement of this Act.

(9) In the House of Lords Reform Act 2014, in section 4(3), omit “or as a Lord Spiritual”.

(10) The Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015 is repealed.

(11) In the enactment formula used for Acts passed after the passing of this Act, where the phrase “by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons” appears, the phrase “by and with the advice and consent of the Lords and Commons” is to be used instead.”

*This new clause makes repeals and amendments to other Acts consequential on NCI, as well as providing for changes to words of enactment.*

**New clause 3—Mandatory retirement at the age of 80—**

“(1) A member of the House of Lords who reaches the age of 80 during a Session of Parliament ceases to be a member of the House of Lords at the end of that Session.

(2) No-one shall be eligible for a peerage for life to be conferred in accordance with section 1 of the Life Peerages Act 1958 after they reach the age of 80.

(3) A member of the House of Lords who has reached the age of 80 shall not be entitled to receive a writ to attend the House under section 1 of the Life Peerages Act 1958 or by virtue of the dignity conferred by virtue of appointment as a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary.”

*This new clause provides that peers who are over the age of 80 will no longer be entitled to membership of the House of Lords at the end of the parliamentary session they turn 80 and that no one can be appointed a Life Peer after they reach that age.*

**New clause 4—Minimum contribution in the House of Lords—**

“(1) A member of the House of Lords who is a peer and does not participate in the proceedings of the House of Lords or its committees during a period of eight consecutive sitting weeks ceases to be a member of the House.

(2) A person participates in the proceedings of the House of Lords for the purposes of subsection (1) if they undertake any activity which qualifies for financial support allowance under the scheme agreed by the House of Lords and then in force.

(3) Subsection (1) does not apply to a peer if—

- (a) the peer was disqualified from sitting or voting in the House, or suspended from its service, for the whole or part of eight consecutive sitting weeks, or
- (b) they fall within the terms of a Standing Order of the House of Lords providing for exemptions from the provisions of subsection (1) for reasons related to parental leave, illness, bereavement or other specified circumstances.”

*This new clause provides a minimum participation requirement for members of the House of Lords of one contribution every eight sitting weeks. A member who does not meet the minimum contribution requirement can no longer be a member of the House of Lords.*

**New clause 7—Duty to take forward proposals for democratic mandate for House of Lords—**

“(1) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to take forward proposals to secure a democratic mandate for the House of Lords.

(2) In pursuance of the duty under subsection (1), the Secretary of State must carry out the steps set out in subsections (3), (5), (6) and (7).

(3) Within twelve months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before each House of Parliament a consultation paper on methods for introducing directly elected members in the House of Lords.

(4) After laying the consultation paper under subsection (3), the Secretary of State must seek the views on the matters covered by that paper of—

- (a) each party and group in the House of Lords,
- (b) each political party represented in the House of Commons,
- (c) the Scottish Government,
- (d) the Welsh Government,
- (e) the Northern Ireland Executive,
- (f) local authorities in the United Kingdom,
- (g) representative organisations for local authorities in the United Kingdom, and
- (h) such other persons and bodies as the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

(5) Within sixteen months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before each House of Parliament a report on responses to the consultation.

(6) Within eighteen months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before each House of Parliament a draft Bill containing legislative proposals on each of the matters mentioned in subsection (3).”

*This new clause imposes a duty on Ministers to take forward proposals to secure a democratic mandate for the House of Lords through introduction of directly elected members.*

**New clause 8—Life peerages not to be conferred against recommendation of the House of Lords Appointments Commission—**

“(1) The Life Peerages Act 1958 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 1, after subsection (1) (power to confer life peerages) insert—

“(2A) The power under subsection (1) may not be exercised in relation to a person if the House of Lords Appointments Commission has written to the Prime Minister to recommend a peerage should not be conferred on that person.””

*This new clause would prevent a life peerage being conferred on a person if the House of Lords Appointments Commission has recommended against the appointment.*

**New clause 9—Life peerages only to be conferred on persons who meet propriety standards—**

“(1) The Life Peerages Act 1958 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 1, after subsection (1) (power to confer life peerages) insert—

“(2A) The power under subsection (1) may not be exercised unless the Prime Minister has received a letter from the House of Lords Appointments Commission stating that, in their view, the person on whom a peerage is to be conferred has met appropriate standards of propriety.

(2B) For the purposes of this section, “propriety” means—

- (a) the person is in good standing in the community in general and with the public regulatory authorities in particular; and
- (b) the past conduct of the person would not reasonably be regarded as bringing the House of Lords into disrepute.””

*This new clause would prevent a life peerage being conferred on a person unless the House of Lords Appointments Commission had confirmed to the Prime Minister that the person met the appropriate standards of propriety.*

**New clause 10—*Expulsion of peers on grounds of prior propriety advice*—**

“(1) It shall be the duty of the House of Lords Appointments Commission to inform the Lord Speaker by letter of each instance where a peerage has been conferred on a person who has been found in their view not to meet the appropriate standards of propriety.

(2) For the purposes of this section, “propriety” means—

- (a) the person is in good standing in the community in general and with the public regulatory authorities in particular; and
- (b) the past conduct of the person would not reasonably be regarded as bringing the House of Lords into disrepute.

(3) The Lord Speaker must lay before the House of Lords a copy of any letter received under subsection (1) on the next day on which the House of Lords sits.

(4) Any person who is the subject of a letter under subsection (3) ceases to be a member of the House of Lords on the day after the day on which a copy the letter is laid before the House of Lords.

(5) Where a person ceases to be a member of the House of Lords in accordance with this section, section 4 of the House of Lords Reform Act 2014 (effect of ceasing to be a member) applies as if that person had ceased to be a member in accordance with that Act.”

*This new clause would mean that any Member of the House of Lords who had been appointed despite the House of Lords Appointments Commission finding that they didn't meet the appropriate standards of propriety would cease to be a Member of the House of Lords.*

**New clause 11—*Expulsion of peers who have made donations to a political party*—**

“(1) A member of the House of Lords who has made one or more donation or loan to a political party with an aggregate value of more than £11,180 since 1 January 2001 ceases to be a member of the House of Lords on 1 February 2026 unless the condition in subsection (2) is met.

(2) The condition in this subsection is that the political party which received the donations or loans pays to the relevant member of the House of Lords the full aggregate value of those donations or loans on or before 9 January 2026.

(3) Where a person ceases to be a member of the House of Lords in accordance with this section, section 4 of the House of Lords Reform Act 2014 (effect of ceasing to be a member) applies as if that person had ceased to be a member in accordance with that Act.

(4) For the purposes of this section—

“donation” means a donation which is published by the Electoral Commission in its register of recorded donations under section 69 of the Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000;

“loan” means a transaction published by the Electoral Commission in its register of recordable transactions under section 71V of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.”

*This new clause provides for a member of the House of Lords who has made registered political donations or loans of over £11,180 since 2001 to cease to be a member of the House of Lords unless those donations and loans were repaid.*

**New clause 12—*Life peerages not to be conferred on donors to political parties*—**

“(1) The Life Peerages Act 1958 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 1, after subsection (1) (power to confer life peerages) insert—

“(1A) The power under subsection (1) may only be exercised to confer a peerage on a person in respect of whom the conditions in subsections (1B) and (1C) are met.

(1B) The condition in this subsection is that the person has provided the Prime Minister with a declaration that, since 1 January 2001, that person—

- (a) has not donated or loaned more the £11,180 to a political party; or
- (b) had made such a donation or loan, but that it has been repaid in full.

(1C) The condition in this subsection is that the Prime Minister is satisfied that the declaration made under subsection (2) is true.

(1D) For the purposes of this section—

“donation” means a donation which is published by the Electoral Commission in its register of recorded donations under section 69 of the Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000;

“loan” means a transaction published by the Electoral Commission in its register of recordable transactions under section 71V of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.”

*This new clause would prevent a life peerage being conferred on a person unless they had declared that they had not made a donation or loan to a political party of over £10,000.*

**New clause 13—*Exclusion of life peers who have recently been members of the House of Commons*—**

“(1) No person who was a member of the House of Commons shall be a member of the House of Lords—

- (a) during the Parliament in which they were a member of the House of Commons;
- (b) during the Parliament following the last Parliament in which they were a member of the House of Commons;
- (c) during a period of five years commencing on the last day on which they were a member of the House of Commons.

(2) Where a person ceases to be a member of the House of Lords in accordance with this section, section 4 of the House of Lords Reform Act 2014 (effect of ceasing to be a member) applies as if that person had ceased to be a member in accordance with that Act.”

*This new clause provides that no one who was an MP in the current or previous Parliament, or in the previous five years, is eligible for appointment to, or to remain as a member of, the House of Lords.*

**New clause 14—*Removal of power to make political appointments*—**

“(1) The Life Peerages Act 1958 is amended as follows.

(2) After section (1) (1) (power to confer life peerages) insert—

“(2A) No recommendation may be made to His Majesty to confer a peerage except by the House of Lords Appointments Commission.”

*This new clause would prevent peerages being conferred under the Life Peerages Act 1958 unless done so on the recommendation of the House of Lords Appointments Commission.*

**New clause 19—*Requirement on Government to publish legislative proposals*—**

“The condition in this section is that the Government has published a draft Bill containing—

- (a) provisions to remove bishops and Archbishops of the Church of England from membership of the House of Lords,
- (b) provisions to reduce the number of members of the House of Lords to no more than 650, and
- (c) such other provisions as the Government considers are appropriate to give practical and equitable effect to the provisions mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b).”

*This new clause requires the Government to publish a draft Bill to remove Bishops from the House of Lords and reduce the membership to 650 or less.*



New clause 20—*Purpose of this Act*—

“Whereas it has not been expedient at present for the Government to bring forward legislation to reform the House of Lords, the purpose of this Act is to provide that the Lords Temporal are peers appointed under section 1 of the Life Peerages Act 1958 on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.”

*This new clause describes the purpose of the Bill.*

Amendment 2, in title, line 2, after first “Lords” insert—

“to provide for bishops of the Church of England no longer to be entitled to membership of the House of Lords;”

*This amendment is consequential on NC1. It would amend the long title of the Bill.*

Amendment 3, line 2, after first “Lords” insert—

“to make provision for mandatory retirement from the House of Lords;”

*This amendment is consequential on NC3. It would amend the long title of the Bill.*

Amendment 4, line 2, after first “Lords” insert—

“to make provision for the expulsion of Members of the House of Lords for non-participation;”

*This amendment is consequential on NC4. It would amend the long title of the Bill.*

Amendment 13, line 2, after first “Lords” insert—

“to provide for a requirement for members of the House of Lords to meet standards of propriety;”

*This amendment would change the long title of the Bill and is consequential on NC9 and NC10.*

Amendment 14, line 2, after first “Lords” insert—

“to exclude from membership of the House of Lords persons who have made certain political donations or loans;”

*This amendment would change the long title of the Bill and is consequential on NC 11 and NC12.*

Amendment 15, line 2, after first “Lords” insert—

“to exclude former members of the House of Commons from membership of the House of Lords for a specified period;”

*This amendment would change the long title of the Bill and is consequential on NC13.*

Amendment 16, line 2, after first “Lords” insert—

“to preclude the conferral of life peerages other than upon the recommendation of the House of Lords Appointments Commission;”

*This amendment would change the long title of the Bill and is consequential on NC14.*

Amendment 9, line 3, after “peerages” insert—

“to impose a duty in connection with securing a democratic mandate for the House of Lords”.

*This amendment is consequential on NC7.*

Amendment 11, line 3, after “peerages” insert

“to preclude the conferring of life peerages against the recommendation of the House of Lords Appointments Commission;”

*This amendment would change the long title of the Bill and is consequential on NC8.*

1.59 pm

**The Minister without Portfolio (Ellie Reeves):** Thank you, Madam Chair. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, as I open this Committee of the whole House.

As I noted a number of times on Second Reading, this is a short and focused Bill. It delivers on the Government’s manifesto commitment to bring about

an immediate reform by removing the rights of the remaining hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords. This Bill is a matter of principle. In the 21st century, it cannot be right for there to be places in our legislature reserved for those born into certain families. Having now seen all the amendments tabled by parties from across the House, it is clear that there is no principled objection to the aim of the Bill, which is to remove the right of people to sit and make laws in our legislature by virtue of an accident of birth. Therefore, I hope that all Members across the House can join Government Members in voting for this important and long-overdue legislation.

I look forward to hearing from hon. Members over the course of today’s debate, but I shall start with the detail of the Bill itself. Clause 1 is clear, straightforward and central to the overall purpose of the Bill. It removes membership of the House of Lords from the remaining hereditary peers. Specifically, clause 1 repeals section 2 of the House of Lords Act 1999, which currently provides an exception to the general exclusion of hereditary peers from membership of the House in section 1 of the 1999 Act. Under that exception, 90 hereditary peers and those hereditary peers holding the office of Earl Marshal or performing the office of Lord Great Chamberlain continue to be Members of the other place.

The clause is a core part of the Bill and delivers the Government’s clear manifesto commitment to remove the right of the remaining hereditary peers to sit and vote in the other place. It will result in the removal of the 92 reserved places for hereditary peers. There are currently vacancies in the seats reserved for hereditary peers—at present, there are 88 hereditary peers in the other place. Such vacancies would usually be filled by a hereditary peer by-election, but such by-elections have been paused until January 2026 by changes to the Standing Orders agreed by the other place in July 2024.

The Government value the good work done by hereditary peers, and we have spoken on several occasions about the individuals who have served in Parliament with duty and dedication. These reforms are not personal, but they are long overdue and essential.

**Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): The Government would find considerable sympathy for their position if they were to make provision for those hereditary peers currently in the House of Lords who have done good work and who have acquired a lot of experience by possibly introducing a phase-out or a generous allocation of life peerages to those who are considered worthy on the basis of their past record of participation.

**Ellie Reeves:** I thank the right hon. Member for his intervention. There would of course be no bar on the Leader of the Opposition nominating any of those who have served as hereditary peers for life peerages in the normal way.

**Sir Julian Lewis:** That sounds reasonable, except for the fact that, unless there were a phasing of the process, it would not be possible within the numbers available to the Leader of the Opposition to nominate more than a small fraction. Can the Minister offer any more flexibility on that?

**Ellie Reeves:** I thank the right hon. Member for his intervention, but, with the greatest of respect, it is for the Leader of the Opposition to nominate those whom they consider appropriate for life peerages. On phasing out, the measures in the 1999 Act were meant only to be temporary ones. Twenty-five years later, we are still having these debates.

Clause 2 abolishes the jurisdiction of the House of Lords in relation to hereditary peerage claims. I appreciate that the subject of hereditary peerage claims may be a novel one to hon. Members and one that was not discussed on Second Reading, so let me provide a clear explanation of what hereditary peerage claims are, why they are mentioned in the Bill, and why the Government are proposing to remove the jurisdiction of the House of Lords. A hereditary peerage claim—or peerage claim, as I will refer to them—is when a person seeks to be formally recognised as the holder of the title of a hereditary peerage. Usually, the claimant of the peerage is the undisputed heir and is simply entered on the Roll of the Peerage following an application to the Lord Chancellor.

However, there can be some cases where the claim is disputed or complex. Currently, these cases are usually referred to the other place to advise the Crown on how to determine the claim. The House also confirms undisputed successions of Irish peerages in parallel with an application to the Lord Chancellor. Complex or disputed peerage claims occur very infrequently. There have been fewer than 10 claims considered by the other place in the past 50 years. Given that the Bill removes the final link between hereditary peerage and membership of the House of Lords, it is no longer appropriate for these issues to be dealt with by the other place. That is why the Bill would abolish the jurisdiction of the other place in relation to peerage claims. The intention is that future complex or disputed peerage claims that would otherwise have been considered by the other place will instead be referred to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council under section 4 of the Judicial Committee Act 1833.

Undisputed successions to Irish peerages will, like other types of peerage, continue to be dealt with by the Lord Chancellor. As hon. Members know, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, which is made up of justices of the Supreme Court and other senior judges, already has a well-established constitutional role in advising the sovereign and is the appropriate body to consider these matters. The Government have discussed this matter with the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, which is content to take on this function. Therefore, the Government believe that, following the removal of the hereditary peers, it is appropriate for the other place's jurisdiction in relation to peerage claims to come to an end.

I thought that it would be helpful to briefly address amendment 26 to this clause tabled by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart). The amendment makes it explicit that the jurisdiction for considering peerage claims would be transferred to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. The Government's position is that it is unnecessary to expressly state in the Bill the transfer of the jurisdiction of peerage claims. That is because, as I have set out, matters such as peerage claims can already be referred to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council by the Crown

under section 4 of the Judicial Committee Act 1833. I therefore urge the hon. Member not to press his amendment.

Turning to other parts of the Bill, clause 3 makes consequential amendments to reflect the repeal of section 2 of the House of Lords Act 1999, and more generally on the basis that there will no longer be any Members of the House by virtue of a hereditary peerage. The amendments reflect the fact that certain provisions in the Peerage Act 1963, the House of Lords Act 1999, the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, and the House of Lords Reform Act 2014 are now redundant as a result of this legislation.

Clause 4 sets out the territorial extent of the Bill and when it will commence. An amendment or repeal made by the Bill has the same extent as the provision amended or repealed. Subject to that, the Bill extends to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): There are those who believe that this reform is about making the House of Lords more democratic. Clearly, the Minister cannot be among them, because these provisions do not seem to make it any more democratic in a meaningful way. Can she confirm, therefore, that she is not in favour of a more democratically elected House of Lords?

**Ellie Reeves:** This legislation is the first step of reform of the House of Lords, as set out in our manifesto. In our manifesto, we committed to this reform immediately, which is why we are discussing it today.

On commencement, the Bill will come into force at the end of the Session of Parliament in which it receives Royal Assent. If the Bill passes in this Session, hereditary peers who are Members of the other place will depart at the end of the Session. The timing of the implementation of the Bill ensures the delivery of the manifesto commitment for immediate reform in a timely fashion while not undermining the business of the House with the sudden departure of a number of hereditary peers in the middle of a parliamentary Session.

**Sir Gavin Williamson** (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) touched on when the Minister thinks more legislation will be coming forward, and the Minister proudly boasted about delivering on one of Labour's manifesto commitments. When, over the next two, three or four years, does she anticipate the other pieces of legislation will be forthcoming to deliver on the rest of the manifesto?

**Ellie Reeves:** We have made it clear that this is a first step of reform. We are committed to the other reforms set out in the manifesto, but it is important that there is proper consultation and that we take time to ensure that they are done in the right way. That work is ongoing.

Subject to the timely progress of the Bill, it will give due notice to existing hereditary peers, allowing for opportunities to give valedictory speeches, which is consistent with the approach taken in the 1999 Act.

**Sir Ashley Fox** (Bridgwater) (Con): On the future reforms, does the Minister not accept that when House of Lords reform was discussed in 1998-99, the hereditaries were retained as a temporary measure, yet the Labour

Government never came forward with the second stage? Does she appreciate that many of us are slightly cynical about this Government's ever bringing forward a future stage, so the solution might be to delay commencement until they bring forward proposals?

**Ellie Reeves:** Opposition Members had 14 years to bring about reform of the House of Lords, if that was what they wanted to do—but alas, they did not. Instead, this Government are taking an immediate first step on the road to reform of the House of Lords. It is long overdue and we are getting on with it.

Clause 5 simply establishes the short title of the legislation as the “House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Act 2024”. If the Bill is passed in 2025, the short title will automatically be changed to the “House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Act 2025”.

I note that a number of new clauses have been tabled. Of course, I look forward to hearing from the newest zealous member of the cause for constitutional reform, the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson), as well as from the hon. Members for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) and for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart) and others. I will not prejudge what they have to say on these matters, but I note again that this is a focused Bill that delivers on a clear manifesto commitment.

As I have said, the Bill is the first step in the Government's broader plans to reform the second Chamber. We recognise that other elements of that agenda are more complex, and it is right that we take time to consider them properly.

**Freddie van Mierlo** (Henley and Thame) (LD): Why are the Government proceeding with such timidity and “first steps” when they have such a large majority and could push through their will if they wanted to?

**Ellie Reeves:** This is an immediate first step on the road to wider reform, and one that is long overdue since the 1999 Act. It is right that we are getting on with it, and doing so in the first Session of this Parliament.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Lady has tried to paint the Labour party as a great reforming party; yet in 2012, when there was an opportunity to reform the House of Lords systematically, Labour Members voted against it. Why is she so scared to take on more bold suggestions to deliver her manifesto?

**Ellie Reeves:** Previous attempts to reform the other place all in one go have failed. We want to see immediate reform of the other place, which is why we are getting on with this straightaway. We can then engage and consult on how best to deliver the other reforms, which we have set out clearly in our manifesto.

Alongside the Bill, the Leader of the House of Lords is engaging in dialogue with the other place on taking forward reforms to bring about a smaller and more active second Chamber. In fact, as we speak, she is leading a debate on that very subject in the other place. I look forward to further discussions on this matter in the House in due course, so that we get it right. None of the amendments that have been tabled contest the objective of the Bill to remove the right of people to sit and make

laws in our legislature by virtue of an accident of birth. They should, therefore, not prevent us from making progress on this important and long overdue reform.

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): It is an honour to speak to the Bill in Committee. When we last discussed it, on Second Reading, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Sir Oliver Dowden)—a very great man—set out why the Opposition do not approve of the way in which the Government are going about this change. We believe that this nervous little Bill is misconceived and perhaps, at its worst, dishonest.

2.15 pm

As my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) said, it is good to see that the Labour party has finally rejected the idea of a democratically elected upper House. That was always a bad idea—something that would impose upon the primacy of this place—and, after the better part of a century of to-ing and fro-ing on the issue, at last we see the Labour party put that bad idea to bed. However, it has other bad ideas, and what we see here today is really an attempt to gerrymander the membership of the House of Lords under the cover of a reform.

New clause 20, in my name, would allow us to call the Bill out for what it is. We would like the Government's failure to bring forward a proper plan for House of Lords reform, as promised in their manifesto, to be recorded in black and white as part of the Bill. We would like the Bill's true purpose—to enable, for the first time, all Lords Temporal to be appointed by the Prime Minister—to be placed on the face of the Bill.

Why does this matter? Well, nobody sits in the House of Lords now by simple right of birth. Before 1999, a hereditary peerage generally carried with it the right to sit and vote in the House of Lords, but the House of Lords Act 1999 removed the right of most hereditary peers to membership of the House of Lords. As we on the Conservative Benches know, Labour has a problematic relationship with history, and it seems to have forgotten that the reason 90 hereditary peers were left was as a firm marker for further reform—the idea being that there would be no more piecemeal reform of the House of Lords, but that instead a Government would need to bring forward a comprehensive plan for change.

The Labour Government are now, of course, asserting that the continued presence of excepted hereditary peers is an accident. That is not true. At the time, Lord Irvine of Lairg explained that the hereditary peers remained as a guarantee from the Labour Government that the second stage, or proper reform of the House of Lords, would take place. As he put it in 1999,

“a compromise in these terms would guarantee that stage two would take place, because the Government with their great popular majority and their manifesto pledge would not tolerate 10 per cent. of the hereditary peerage remaining for long. But the 10 per cent. will go only when stage two has taken place. So it is a guarantee that it will take place.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 30 March 1999; Vol. 599, c. 207.]

That lifetime guarantee appears now to have expired.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): I am a bit worried about what my hon. Friend is saying. Why do we need a comprehensive plan at all? Why not just leave



[*Sir Edward Leigh*]

it alone? As that great conservative, Lord Falkland, once said, “When it is not necessary to do something, it is necessary not to do it.”

**Alex Burghart:** As ever, my right hon. Friend is one step ahead of me. It is not that we seek a comprehensive reform of the House of Lords. It is that the Labour party promised that this would come. The Government promised that they would leave the remaining hereditary peers there until they had a plan for comprehensive reform, but that comprehensive plan is missing. Labour is throwing out the stone in the shoe of the accepted hereditary peers and dodging the hard, principled questions about how to ensure that the House of Lords functions most effectively.

**Sir Julian Lewis:** My hon. Friend made a passing reference to a fear that what is going here is a form of gerrymandering. Does he agree that if generous provision were to be made for really active remaining hereditary Members, of whom there are probably quite a few, to be given life peerages on a one-off basis, and on the basis of merit, that would dispose of the suspicion of gerrymandering?

**Alex Burghart:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. He strikes at the critical failure of the legislation, which is that really the Government are seeking to remove Members of the upper House who happen not to take the Labour Whip. What we all agree on—or what I hope we all agree on—is that the role of the Lords is that of a chamber of scrutiny, and we must welcome more expert scrutiny. We have seen from the behaviour, attendance and work of hereditary peers that they are an intrinsic part of that scrutiny, so it is highly suspicious that the Labour party should seek to remove them. Indeed, if we set the precedent that the Government of the day can remove Members of one House because they do not agree with them, where will it end? Those Cross Bencher hereditary peers who will be axed by the measures have, as far as I can see, done an excellent job, yet they are not being given another way out such as that suggested by my right hon. Friend.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman will know that provisions in the 1999 Act stipulate a specific number of hereditary peers by party affiliation, making the Lords the only place where the party of a by-election victor is guaranteed before a vote has been cast. He is worried about a loss of expertise in the Lords as hereditary peers are expelled. If those peers stay—I do not think that they should—does he acknowledge that the ringfence protecting party political positions ought to be removed?

**Alex Burghart:** My point is more that the Government are seeking to remove highly experienced people without offering another way out. We would have been happy to debate that, but we are instead seeing an attempt to deliberately cut out a group of peers from the constitution.

**Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): Will the shadow Minister clarify his party’s position on House of Lords reform? We have heard two or three different views from the Conservative Benches. I remind him that, if we

feel that hereditary peers are doing a good job, there is an opportunity for the leader of his party to give them life peerages.

**Alex Burghart:** It is very generous of the hon. Gentleman to say that the Prime Minister will create 40 peers at his command—I had no idea that the hon. Gentleman’s career was progressing at such a rate. We all know that that is not what is happening here; we all know that, in the coded words of the Minister, it is goodbye to the 88 hereditary peers, whose voices will not be heard any more. Our position is that it is time for a constitutional conference to consider these matters, and that the major issue is how to have an upper House that does not challenge the primacy of the Commons in conducting proper scrutiny of Government legislation in order to improve it.

**Sir John Hayes:** I am immensely grateful to my hon. Friend, who is making a speech in the spirit of his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Sir Oliver Dowden), on why the legislation does not pass the efficacy test that I set for it on Second Reading. There is no suggestion that it will make the House of Lords a more effective chamber. A reasonable test of the legislation is whether it improves the status quo. If it does not, why on earth are we pursuing it? Indeed, why are we even debating it?

**Alex Burghart:** As ever, wisdom from the Deepings. The truth is that this will not make the upper House a better Chamber for scrutiny. All it will do is remove some of the Labour party’s opponents from that House.

The Labour party promised in its manifesto that

“The next Labour government will...bring about an immediate modernisation”

of the Lords. The manifesto promised that that modernisation would consist of a mandatory retirement age of 80, a new participation requirement, a strengthening of

“the circumstances in which disgraced members can be removed” from that House, reform of the appointments process, and improvement of

“the national and regional balance of the second chamber.”

Although we on the Conservative Benches might not agree with those proposals, the Labour party promised to introduce them immediately, but the only immediate modernisation being undertaken is to remove a group of hard-working and diligent peers, including 33 Cross Benches and their Convenor, for the crime of not being Labour party placements.

**Freddie van Mierlo:** As I am surprised that the Conservatives, as the so-called party of aspiration, are stalwartly defending the principle of hereditary peers. Do they not accept that, in a meritocracy, positions in the legislature should be open based on merit, not inheritance?

**Alex Burghart:** The point that we are making through our amendments is that the Labour party is undermining a key facet of the upper House: scrutiny. We are talking about a body of 88 hereditary peers who have already been performing that job, and have done nothing wrong, but are losing that job because of the measures introduced by the Bill.

**Gareth Snell** rose—

**Alex Burghart:** I will give way one more time and then I will endeavour to conclude my remarks.

**Gareth Snell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for taking a second intervention. Is he suggesting that life peers—I declare an interest in that my partner is a life peer—are unable to undertake the role of scrutiny? Even with these modest reforms, which are a stepping stone towards greater reform, my party will still be only the third largest party in the House of Lords, while his will still be the largest by some margin. Is he honestly saying that his life peers are unable to take scrutiny seriously?

**Alex Burghart:** I am delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman has married so well. Of course, life peers do a fantastic job of scrutiny—they do so every day, and I enjoy reading their lordships' *Hansard*. What we are talking about is a group of 88 hereditary peers, who have done a very good job in scrutinising Government legislation, but who are being removed, through no fault of their own, simply because they do not fit with the Labour's party's views. We believe that that is wrong.

I turn now to amendment 25 in my name, which concerns the very simple Conservative principle that constitutional change should not be rushed, and should certainly not be proposed for political advantage. We have inherited a constitution that has evolved through the generations and has the distinction of working. The current constitution of the other place has been effective in bringing expertise and a degree of independence to the work of legislative scrutiny. Like much of the uncodified British constitution, one might not have created such a system from scratch, but the tried-and-tested checks and balances of the House of Lords have complemented the work of the elected Commons.

The Lords does not claim to be a democratic Chamber, and that is the point: our House has primacy. We can see the dangers of ill-thought-through constitutional change. None of us in this place will forget the difficulties caused by the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, a foolish measure introduced by the coalition Government that created all manner of unintended consequences. It was rightly repealed by the Conservatives in the last Parliament to reinstate tried and tested long-standing conventions. Let that be a warning to the Government as they meddle, in the name of petty politics, with long-standing conventions that work. Walter Bagehot eloquently described the “dignified” and “efficient” elements of our constitution. In a sense, the hereditary peers represent both thanks to the way in which they diligently scrutinise legislation. Labour must take care that pulling on one thread—in this case, that of the hereditary peers—does not unravel a great deal more.

Amendment 25 seeks to ensure that there is proper scrutiny of the changes to the composition of our legislature. It makes the simple request that a Joint Committee of both Houses should be allowed to scrutinise and report on the Government's so-called “immediate modernisation” plans, and that this place should agree before legislation comes into force. That plan would be led by the Conservative principle that constitutional change should not be rushed but carefully considered, and implemented only if the House is confident that it will work.

Amendment 26, which stands in my name, seeks clarity on the issue of disputed peerage claims. However, I have listened carefully to what the Minister has said, and I understand that existing mechanisms are in place. For that reason, we will not press it.

To conclude, we on the Conservative Benches think that this Bill is a sham of reform. It is fundamentally misconceived, focusing on the composition of the other place rather than on how we can ensure that it best performs its vital role of scrutiny. This is a Government and a Prime Minister who do not stand up to scrutiny—a Government led by politics, not by principles. My amendments seek to reinsert some principles into this process: that promises to both Parliament and the electorate should be kept, and that we should legislate only for what works, not for political advantage. I see no reason why the Government cannot accept the amendments today.

2.30 pm

**Gareth Snell:** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Madam Chair. I will keep my comments brief, because I know that that will entertain the Committee more. [HON. MEMBERS: “More!”] I have not started yet—give me time. I very much enjoyed the Bill's Second Reading, which is why I have come back for a second go.

I genuinely welcome the new reforming zeal of the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson), and I believe there are merits to some of the amendments that bear his name. I am glad that the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) has said that those amendments are part of our manifesto, because they are, as is this Bill. I am sure that means that he will want the Salisbury convention to be accepted in the other place when the Bill reaches it, meaning that Opposition Members in the House of Lords will make no attempt to prevent its successful passage. I am sure that at some point in today's proceedings, an Opposition Front Bencher will be able to confirm for the record that the Bill will pass smoothly once it has passed this House.

We have just heard the importance of the primacy of this House stated eloquently by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart). This House is going to make a decision on the Bill today—to decide whether we believe there should be a role for hereditary peers in the House of Lords—and it will then be sent to the House of Lords. Given the importance of convention, history and statute, I am sure that he will be able to confirm that the House of Lords will happily pass it, without any attempts by Opposition Members to amend it. I doubt it, but I hope so.

The point of the Bill, and the reason why I believe it deserves support from all sides of the House, is that—as my hon. Friend the Minister pointed out—this is the first step in a package of House of Lords reform.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is a serious individual on the Government Benches, and I respect him very much, but does he not understand that given the delicate set of constitutional arrangements we have, it is not unreasonable to expect the Government to come forward with a plan that sets out several steps, taking us on the journey that they intend to go on, with some substance behind it? Given the number of years the Government have had since the previous changes

[John Glen]

over a quarter of a century ago, it is not unreasonable to expect a little more detail on those second, third and fourth steps, or a timetable.

**Gareth Snell:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and to a degree, I agree. That is why we set out in our manifesto the package of reforms and changes that we hope to see made to the other place during this Parliament, in order to deliver on the promises we made in the election. He is absolutely right to say that constitutional reform is a delicate thing; that is why it is important that we make these reforms with consideration and in small steps, to make sure that the unintended consequences of large-scale reform are not felt.

The Conservative party made modest reforms during previous Parliaments, such as giving Members of the House of Lords the ability to retire from it. That was a small change, but one with consequential impacts—far more Members have left the House of Lords under that provision than will be impacted by the provisions in this Bill. That was done thoughtfully, carefully, slowly and, I think, consensually.

Similarly, I think that the principle of this Bill—that hereditary peers will no longer have the right to sit in the House of Lords—has already been established in this House. None of the amendments that have been tabled today seeks to overturn that; none of them seeks to make a case for the continuation of hereditary peers. As such, the consensus that the right hon. Gentleman rightly talks about exists in this Bill. The more we seek to tack on to the Bill—taking other elements of constitutional reform and adding them to the Bill—the more we risk that consensus falling apart. We risk this House not having a settled position, creating the opportunity for potential wrecking amendments. I do not suggest that Opposition Members are tabling wrecking amendments, but they could be tabled elsewhere to completely flatline what is a very modest and sensible reform.

**Sir Julian Lewis:** The hon. Gentleman is making a very reasonable speech. Would it be fair to say that he means this is almost a case of going for the low-hanging fruit on which everybody has a measure of agreement, while recognising that future steps may be a lot more complex and potentially dangerous if we get them wrong?

There is one aspect that is not of itself an argument for keeping the hereditary peers, but is something that will be lost if and when they go. That is, the hereditary peers are one group of people who are not appointed subject to prime ministerial patronage. Without straying beyond the scope of today's debate, could the hon. Gentleman give us an inkling of whether something like putting the House of Lords Appointments Commission on a statutory basis is a reform that the Government might consider, bearing in mind some of the controversial cases where people have been imposed on the House of Lords in defiance of the commission's preferences?

**Gareth Snell:** I could not possibly begin to offer an opinion on the thoughts of the Government, but I know that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench will have heard that question.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** He should be in it!

**Gareth Snell:** I know when to move on. [Laughter.] I would also never dare to call the hereditary peers low-hanging fruit, because that would be slightly disrespectful to them, but I understand the tenor and the tone of what the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) is saying, and I think he is right. This is about starting with something on which there is broad consensus and where the impact on the other House will change our constitutional set-up, but not in a way that will ultimately be detrimental to the important scrutiny role of the House of Lords.

I agree with the right hon. Member about the important role of the House of Lords Appointments Commission and the robustness with which its advice should be treated. Without wishing to go down the route of political point scoring, there is something to be said for independent verification of an individual's suitability for that place, and how that ought to be respected and put on a footing that would potentially mean that incidents like those we have seen under previous Prime Ministers would not recur. Again, I would love to be able to make a commitment in this Chamber, but the only things I can commit to are those relating to my constituency and my own personal opinions.

**Sir Ashley Fox:** The hon. Member spoke about the need for consensus. Has he read new clauses 1 and 2, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson), which would remove the bishops from the upper House? I am sure that is something on which there is great agreement on the Government Benches. Does the hon. Member feel able to support new clauses 1 and 2?

**Gareth Snell:** The hon. Gentleman has highlighted a great example of where on the face on it, there may seem to be consensus, but I fear the immediate impact would not be as simple as he thinks. We have an established Church in this country. The Church of England is an established Church—it is part of who we are. I fear that the removal of the bishops from the House of Lords would open up a whole series of other conversations about whether or not we still have an established Church. It would potentially open up questions about political and ecclesiastical overlap. Again, I think we should debate those things; we should have time to debate, discuss and consider the role of the clergy and whether it is right to have bishops in the House of Lords. I do not see why that has to be done through a tacked-on amendment to this Bill, but it is something we should discuss in the future.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** We do not usually have so much debate in Staffordshire on these matters; we usually have a lot of consensus in Staffordshire. I want to clarify that the amendments that I seek to make to the Bill would not disestablish the Church of England, but would remove from our constitutional arrangements an anomaly—just as the Bill attempts to remove an anomaly.

**Gareth Snell:** The right hon. Gentleman is right: this is probably more Staffordshire than anybody needs to hear in this debate, so I will conclude my remarks momentarily.



I do not disagree with the necessary principle that the right hon. Gentleman is putting forward about whether or not bishops should be entitled to seats in the House of Lords by virtue of their being bishops. On Thursday, a Bill is to be debated that would amend the right of women bishops to sit in the House of Lords, because we have always, over time, gently updated and amended our constitution to ensure that it reflects the society we want to be. I would welcome an opportunity to properly debate and consider this matter. The right hon. Gentleman says that it is not his intention to disestablish the Church of England by the removal of the bishops, but there are consequences to these actions, which deserve more consideration and debate—

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** What are they?

**Gareth Snell:** The right hon. Gentleman asks, “What are they?” That is why we should have a debate in the future to give us an opportunity to explore that. Today, having had a Second Reading debate, we have the Committee stage of this Bill to look exclusively at the responsibilities of hereditary peers and the role they play in our democracy.

**Nick Timothy** (West Suffolk) (Con): Instead of saying that we need a debate in future on whether such a reform might risk disestablishment, will the hon. Gentleman explain what he considers to be the legal and constitutional consequences that would risk disestablishing the Church?

**Gareth Snell:** I think the very fact that we that we would be seeking to expel the bishops, who are the representatives of the Church of England, from the national legislature, would by its nature start a consideration of that process. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman may say that it does not, but he does not know that. I fear that a well-meaning amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge would create a more significant debate about the role of the Church in our country. Although we may want to have that debate, I am not sure it should be triggered on the back of an amendment to a short, tightly drafted Bill about the role of hereditary peers in the House of Lords. If the hon. Member for West Suffolk wants to bring something forward, I would be more than happy to talk to him about how I could support it, but it should not be tacked on to a Bill on which there is already clear consensus around the role and responsibilities of hereditary peers. That, I hope, deals with the point that he raised.

Finally, on Second Reading we heard a great deal about our manifesto and the Labour party’s commitment to House of Lords reform. The ’99 reforms were one of the most significant changes to our constitutional settlement that there had been for a very long time. It was not just about the expulsion of the hereditary peers, but the creation of the Lord Speaker and the removal of the Law Lords to sit in the Supreme Court. It was a package that came forward, over time, in a series of Bills to implement the commitment that we made at the ’97 election. That, for me, is the start of where we are today. We will put through the Bill that does the first part, bank that and then move on. I know that there is an appetite across the House for considerable House of

Lords reform—that has been evident from Opposition speeches—but we need to bank what we have done and move forward.

I hope that today we shall pass the Bill through Committee unamended and on to Third Reading, so that it can make its way to the other place where, because of the commitment that I know the Minister will give in summing up later, the Salisbury convention will be engaged; that it can pass through the House of Lords quickly, without change; and that we can move on with the rest of the reform that we require.

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): I rise to speak in support of new clauses 7 and 8, which stand in my name, and their associated consequential amendments. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), simply because I think that much of what he said supports my amendments. Certainly some of the points he made, I shall be making also.

My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I are proud that it is our party that has for decades led the call for reform of the House of Lords with a democratic mandate. The Bill is a welcome step forward, and one that we support. However, we do believe that broader and bolder reform of our upper Chamber is needed, which is why I have tabled these two new clauses to extend the powers of this legislation. The new clauses would finally see the House of Lords with a democratic mandate and would ensure that the House of Lords Appointments Commission could never again be sidestepped and ignored by an unscrupulous Government.

2.45 pm

**Sir Julian Lewis:** I welcome the hon. Lady’s point about strengthening the House of Lords Appointments Commission, but at the risk of broadening the debate a little too far, can she explain why it would be a sensible idea to have a second Chamber of elected parliamentarians? It would be rather like more than doubling the size of this House, but with Members in two separate places, possibly elected by different electoral systems and at different times. It is impossible to imagine more of a recipe for deadlock and conflict.

**Sarah Olney:** I very much look forward to having that debate in a future Session of this Parliament and on a future piece of legislation. That is why I tabled new clause 7—to call on the Government to make a commitment to future legislation, so that we in this House can debate and support broader and further reforms to ensure the democratic legitimacy of the House of Lords.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Does the hon. Lady recall that, in fact, we have had that debate? We had it last in a proper sense in 2007, on Jack Straw’s proposals when, on the basis of the consensus that we are trying to establish here, consensus there was none, and the thing descended into complete chaos. Would she remember that, when making her proposals? If she thinks there will be consensus on this extremely difficult issue of an elected House of Lords, I am afraid she is in cloud cuckoo land.

**Sarah Olney:** Well, how polite of the right hon. Gentleman to say so. Obviously, I do not personally recall what happened in 2007. What we are trying to

[Sarah Olney]

establish today are the steps that can be taken to reform the House of Lords. We very much support the step that we are debating today—that first step upon which, as the Minister said in her opening remarks, there is broad consensus. We want to see broader reform of the House of Lords and we want the Government to bring forward further proposals in due course. New clause 7 is about pushing them to produce those further proposals in a timely fashion, so that we can hold that debate in this Parliament and progress the cause of measures on which we can find consensus across the House.

**Sir John Hayes:** Given that the hon. Lady's amendments are not likely to be passed, I assume that, on the grounds of logic and consistency, she will vote against Third Reading of the unamended Bill. As I said earlier, and she implicitly conceded, as it stands, the Bill does not make the House of Lords one ounce, one iota, one fraction more democratic.

**Sarah Olney:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. We intend to support the Bill, because we want to see the abolition of the hereditary peers; that is very much part of what the Liberal Democrats want. However, we want to see more; we want to go further; we want to see broader reforms. I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that I have heard not only an appetite from all sides to support the Bill—as the Minister said, there is broad consensus across the House for that—but a great zeal on the Tory Benches for further reform. I therefore do not understand why there would not be broad support for my new clause, which calls on the Government to enshrine in this Bill a commitment to go further, because that is clearly what so many Tory Members are saying they would like to see.

With so much trust in politics having been destroyed by the chaos of the previous Conservative Government, we must take this opportunity to underscore the integrity of Parliament, with transparency and democratic authority in our second Chamber. We are grateful to the Government for introducing this legislation so early in the Parliament. Fundamentally, the Liberal Democrats do not believe that there is space in a modern democracy for hereditary privilege.

New clause 7 would impose a duty on Ministers to take forward proposals to secure a democratic mandate for the House of Lords through introduction of directly elected Members. Around the world, trust in the institutions and levers of the democratic process have too often frayed over recent years. In our democracy, we must ensure that the vital link between the people and their institutions remains strong. A democratic mandate is central to that mission. Reform of our upper Chamber has been a long-standing Liberal Democrat policy. We must do all we can to restore public trust in politics after the chaos of the previous Conservative Government. By introducing a democratic mandate for Members of the House of Lords, we can ensure that trust in politics is strengthened.

The disregard with which the previous Conservative Government treated the public's trust threatened to erode faith in our democracy. The Bill is an opportunity to underline our commitment to democratic values and to begin to rebuild that trust. The new clause would

strengthen the democratic mandate of the second Chamber, and Liberal Democrats call on the Government to support it as well our calls for wider reform to modernise our electoral system.

We want to strengthen democratic rights and participation by scrapping the Conservative party's voter ID scheme.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I am sure that there is a lot on which Members of all parties can agree. As the hon. Lady noted, I tabled a new clause that would remove the bishops. Will the Liberal Democrats support that? It is a policy that Liberal Democrats traditionally supported. Will they support it today if it comes to a vote?

**Sarah Olney:** I am happy to say that we support that ambition long term. However, I do not believe that the Bill is the correct vehicle for it. As the Minister said in her opening remarks, there is currently a widespread consensus on the Bill and tacking on new clause 1, which the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson) tabled, would threaten its passage in the other place. I want the Bill to be passed as quickly as possible, so we will not support that new clause today.

We want to take big money out of politics by capping donations to political parties. We also want this new Labour Government to be bold in transferring more powers from Westminster and Whitehall. We believe that local authorities know best what their communities and towns need, and we want the Government to acknowledge that by boosting their authority and powers.

We continue to support the findings of the Burns report in 2017, which recommends cutting the House of Lords to 600 peers and outlines ways in which to ensure that that happens. Although the removal of hereditary Members is an important step in that process, we will continue to push the Government to make further reforms in future. In particular, we look to them to uphold their manifesto commitment to introducing a retirement age, a measure which would further aid the reduction and subsequent management of the size and membership of the upper House.

We want the second Chamber to have proper democratic legitimacy. Ultimately, we want to move towards replacing the House of Lords with an elected Chamber. We believe that moving to a fully democratic, elected Chamber is essential to strengthening the integrity of Parliament and the authority of our second Chamber. New clause 7 would enshrine a democratic mandate for our second Chamber in the Bill, thus strengthening the integrity of our Parliament.

New clause 8 would prevent a life peerage from being conferred on a person if the House of Lords Appointments Commission recommended against the appointment. We have consistently spoken out against the current system of prime ministerial appointments, which ingrains patronage, reinforces the elitism of British politics and contributes to so many people losing faith in our system.

We would like the Government to reassure us that they will not follow in the footsteps of the previous Conservative Government, who allowed the other House to balloon in size, and that they will do everything possible to prevent a culture of sleaze and cronyism from developing in their Administration, as we saw

under the previous Conservative Government. As former Prime Minister Boris Johnson proved by becoming the first Prime Minister to ignore the advice of HOLAC, making deeply inappropriate appointments to the other House, it is far too easy for a culture of sleaze to develop in the heart of Government.

It is essential that we strengthen and improve public confidence in politics. I hope the Minister agrees that accepting this amendment would strengthen the integrity of any Government and prevent the kind of behaviour I have described from returning to Westminster. The new clause would ensure that recommendations made by the House of Lords Appointments Commission could no longer be bypassed by the Prime Minister, improving the integrity and democratic powers of our second Chamber.

I am glad that the Government have indicated that the Bill is a first step in reforming the other place, and that in their manifesto they committed to reforms such as changes to the appointment process. I am grateful to the Minister for the Cabinet Office for his recent commitment to consider improving the mechanisms for reviewing appointments to the other House and implementing safeguards to protect against cronyism. If the Minister and the Prime Minister are sufficiently convinced that they will never override HOLAC—which they should be—do they agree that enshrining that principle in law is a good thing?

New clause 8 would strengthen the powers of HOLAC and I urge the Minister to support it to remove the perception that the House of Lords will now be more subject to patronage. I also ask him to set out a timeline for introducing broader reforms, which would bring the appointment of peers more in line with those of other honours, such as knighthoods, which require an overview of the relevant skills, knowledge and experience of the candidate.

We are clearly living in a new era of politics. Political engagement is at an historic low. Voter participation in our recent general election was the lowest since 2001, with fewer than 60% of eligible voters casting their ballot. It is vital that we do all we can to restore public trust in Government.

It is also important that Parliament represents and reflects the diversity and richness of the people and cultures that make up our country. Currently, not a single hereditary peer is a woman. The privilege of hereditary peer membership exacerbates the distinct gender imbalance of the second Chamber. The Bill, which removes the last remaining hereditary peers' membership of the other place, is a significant step in moving towards a more representative Parliament.

I hope we can all agree on the inappropriateness of hereditary status as a qualification for membership of a second Chamber in a modern parliamentary democracy, and that being the son, grandson or great grandson of a former courtier, colonial administrator, or 20th-century businessman is neither reason nor justification for a seat in a democratic Parliament.

My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I welcome the Bill and we are grateful to the Government, because in the legislation and subsequently we hope to see the most significant modernisation of the upper Chamber in a quarter of a century.

**Mr Mark Swards** (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): I am a proud, elected Member of this House. Like everyone in this place, I was sent here by my constituents to fulfil the greatest honour of my life for as long as the people of Leeds South West and Morley give me permission to do so.

I have heard Opposition Front Benchers say today that the Bill is based not on principle, but on political advantage. Serving in Westminster should never be an inalienable birthright. We can all get behind that basic principle. The very concept of hereditary peers remains indefensible in the 21st century. We are one of only two nations that currently has them. There should not be 92 seats in the other place reserved for people born into the right families. It is time to end that.

This Bill not only sets out our ambition to remove this archaic right, but shows our determination to make our democracy stronger and more representative. It is just the start of our commitment to reforming the other place and improving its ability to do what we were all sent here to do: serve the public. It is right that, after the immediate start on hereditary peers, the Government will take time to consider how best to implement further reforms, with the public and peers heavily involved in those discussions. Given the enthusiasm among Conservative Members for the changes that may be coming, I look forward to their leading the charge with us to reform the other place.

That said, there has been some confusion on the Conservative Benches about the Opposition's position on the Bill. On Second Reading, I enjoyed the suggestions that we were going too far, as well as the suggestions that we were not going far enough. Conservative Members appear to want more debate on the broader changes that we suggest for the other place, but they spent their time in government blocking such changes for more than a decade. Zero progress was made.

**Sir Gavin Williamson** *rose*—

**Nick Timothy** *rose*—

**Mr Swards:** I will happily give way to whichever Member is more enthusiastic.

**Nick Timothy:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and to my right hon. Friend. The hon. Gentleman has presented an argument that is based on the principle that hereditary peerages are wrong. Will he give us a clear, principled argument in favour of life peerages? Why does he believe that that is acceptable when those peers can legislate for a lifetime—for decades—with no accountability at all?

**Mr Swards:** I emphasise that hereditary peers are in the House of Lords because they are born into a particular family. That cannot be right. Life peers are there because they are appointed, usually because of expertise that they can offer in scrutinising legislation. I therefore suggest that life peers definitely have the advantage over hereditary peers simply because they are not there through the family they were born into.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his generosity in giving way. He makes a persuasive and strong argument. What right does he think the



[Sir Gavin Williamson]

Bishop of Winchester has to vote on matters relating to his constituents in Leeds South West and Morley, or to mine in Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge? What gives that bishop the right to be a legislator? What is the argument?

3 pm

**Mr Swards:** I have read the right hon. Gentleman's amendment and understand his arguments, but the changes that we are proposing today are quite simply a down payment on the broader changes we will be bringing to the other place. And when we bring those other changes forward, I look forward to marching side by side with him through the Aye Lobby.

I gently suggest that many of the problems in our country today have been made significantly worse because the Conservative party has often prioritised keeping its factions happy ahead of any coherent policy making for our country. We have seen a microcosm of that today, and we saw it on Second Reading. It appears from most of the amendments submitted in Committee that the Conservatives do not have a problem with the substance of the change that we are offering, so I look forward to seeing many of them march through the Aye Lobby with us.

The other place plays an incredibly important role in our democracy. Its Members both scrutinise and improve legislation passed in this place, which has been very welcome—depending on who we ask—over many years. But the change we are considering today is very simple and is necessary to fulfil the promise we made at the general election: that we would end the outdated practice of hereditary peers.

I may not look it, but I am old enough to remember the last Labour Government. They started the process of reforming the other place, and it was clear then, as it is now, that it was a transitional compromise. It may have taken a while, but it falls on this Government to see through the work they started. This is an incredibly simple and effective change to the other place and I urge all Members of this House to support it.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I appreciate having had the opportunity to table a number of amendments to the Bill, very much in the hope of improving it and ensuring that we get it into the best possible place to deliver change—change that will ensure that the laws going through Parliament are scrutinised better and more democratically.

I appreciate that in politics there is a certain amount of robustness, a certain amount of argument, a certain amount of the “Punch and Judy politics” at which we all despair. We should be looking to do more and to do better. There are a number of things that the Labour party set out in its manifesto that I think command broad public support, and there are a number of things that it did not spell out in its manifesto that it is implementing and that most certainly do not command support. What does command broad public support is some of the changes Labour set out for the House of Lords. That is why I have tabled new clauses 3 and 4. I firmly believe that there is strong support for the introduction of a minimum contribution requirement in the House of Lords.

**Freddie van Mierlo:** Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that new clause 4 does not take into account illness or maternity and paternity leave, and that perhaps eight weeks is a little too brief?

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** New clause 4 clearly sets out an intention to deliver on what Labour's manifesto wished to introduce, and I would be happy to work with Government Ministers and the Liberal Democrats spokesman to ensure that we get this legislation into the best possible shape.

Some of the attendance records in the upper House leave me a little shocked. In the 2019-24 Parliament, of the 966 Members eligible to attend at least some of the last Parliament, 28 did not attend at all—did not even bother to turn up—and 116 attended on less than 10% of the sitting days, which is not particularly active. I quite understand why Labour Front Benchers, when in opposition, alighted on that and felt that it needed to be included in their manifesto. That is why I tabled new clause 4. I firmly believe that there is support for it not only on the Labour Benches—Labour Members stood on their manifesto, so presumably they support that proposal—but on the Opposition Benches. During that same period, 158 Members of the upper House voted in less than 10% of the Divisions they were eligible to vote in.

**Sir Julian Lewis:** I hate to strike a discordant note with my right hon. Friend as he and I have fought shoulder to shoulder in many battles, but is it not an illustration of the Pandora's box one might be opening to consider what the situation would be if all these people turned up at the same time? I doubt very much that the upper Chamber would be capable of handling it, which then leads us to the question of how to reduce the numbers to a manageable proportion. So my right hon. Friend is getting into difficult waters with all of this; he had better be careful what he wishes for in getting all these people to converge on the House of Lords at once.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** My right hon. Friend and I agree on so many things, but perhaps I am just wanting to see this change happen. By adding new clause 4—introducing Labour's manifesto commitment as part of this Bill—we can significantly reduce the size of the upper House and avoid the kind of intimate crush that he sets out.

**Gareth Snell:** I do not wish to pause the right hon. Gentleman while he is in the middle of his intimate crush, but as someone who is always a fan of a clause IV, I understand what he is trying to achieve with this new clause 4. However, I would put to him one point. Under new clause 4(2), participation in a Division would in itself not be the only thing required; a Member could simply turn up, be seen and take their seat, and they would not have to take part in a Division or contribute. So his new clause would not achieve what he is seeking. He will undoubtedly bring this measure back in a future Bill, so will he consider retrospective application? One of my worries is that a number of Members of the other House have not turned up for many weeks or months, and in fact there are some who over the last two and a half years have an attendance rate of less than 5%, so would it not be wrong for them simply to turn up now, get their tick and then wait eight weeks? If we were to

say, “Let’s retrospectively apply this from today,” the right hon. Gentleman would have a huge clear-out of those who have not made any contributions so far, and given that they have not turned up so far, they would not be missing much.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I am getting excited that the hon. Member is discovering a little radicalism, because I always felt I was in his heart, but perhaps the eyes of the Whips have squeezed it out of him of late. The hon. Gentleman makes a very thoughtful and interesting point, and I would very much like to work on a cross-party basis to get the legislation into the best possible shape.

On minimum contributions, a number of peers in the upper House have continuously failed to make a significant contribution. There are routes for them to be able to exit out of the upper House, but they have chosen not to do so. That causes real problems and real challenges for the upper House, and new clause 4 would offer a way to tackle them.

**Dr Murrison:** I think I will agree with what my right hon. Friend will come on to suggest, but are we being a little unfair on their lordships, since clearly a lot of them did not get the memo that says, “You have been appointed to this high honour, and you will turn up and do some meaningful work”? Some of them think they are simply at the apex of the UK honours system. Is not the fundamental issue that we have failed to separate the honours system and doing a piece of work in our Parliament?

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** My right hon. Friend is spot on. There has sometimes been that confusion, and new clause 4, or anything that the Government would look to bring forward—as backed up by their manifesto and popular support for such a move—would mean that we could get the upper House working much better.

The introduction of a mandatory retirement age is another thoughtful and, dare I say it, far-reaching policy that was in Labour’s manifesto. I pay tribute to the Paymaster General. We all know he is one of the finest authors in this House, and his publications are still available on Amazon, although they are not quite as sought after as those of the former right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip. I am sure that the volume on the Prime Minister that will no doubt be coming forward will be a real hot seller, but the Paymaster General is a great author and he came up with the mandatory retirement age, I imagine, and it is a good policy. It is certainly worth including in this legislation that he is bringing forward.

It is not onerous in adding too much to the Bill, and it would have a significant impact in reducing the size of the House of Lords. We know that the House of Lords is the largest legislative chamber outside of the People’s Republic of China. The simple act of introducing a mandatory retirement age, which was a key part of the Labour party’s manifesto, would considerably reduce the number of life peers. It would also have a significant impact on reducing the cost of the House of Lords.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** I am sorry to declare an interest, but why is my right hon. Friend so ageist? Some people are wonderful at the age of 80, and others are useless at the age 50.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point. We have to respect the fact that Labour achieved a majority at the last general election. It had a manifesto to enact change—I think that was the phrase. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] This is an opportunity to do it, but the Government seem frightened. I would hate to make the suggestion that deals were done with previous Members of this House who were meant to be sent up to the other House, and that the Government would not introduce this change because it would lead to those people’s automatic exclusion or suchlike. I certainly would not want to imply that, but we need to see this change.

New clause 3 would enable the Government to deliver on their manifesto commitment, and that is important, because there has sometimes been talk about the breakdown in trust in politics. There has sometimes been talk that we need to build confidence in politics. The best way of building confidence in politics is to set out our manifestos, and one party wins, one party loses and then the winner delivers on that manifesto. This is a great opportunity to do that.

I appreciate that both the Paymaster General and his hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham West and East Dulwich (Ellie Reeves) have set out to Members that future legislation is coming. I personally think that is a slightly optimistic view, and I have sat on parliamentary business and legislation Committees in the past, so I understand the pressures on the legislative timetable. If the Paymaster General is under the illusion that he will be getting waves of new Bills going forward, he will end up at the end of his ministerial career slightly disappointed, because that eventuality simply will not happen.

Finally, I will turn to new clauses 1 and 2, which I accept were not in the Labour’s manifesto.

3.15 pm

**Melanie Ward** (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): It is great to hear the right hon. Gentleman speak of the Labour party’s manifesto at the last election and about how important it is that we can get through our programme for government, having been elected with such a resounding win. Does his support extend to other areas in our manifesto, such as the Employment Rights Bill? Will he also support that?

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** There are many areas of the Labour party manifesto that I would agree with, and there are many that I disagree with, but the hon. Lady is in the fortunate position of having a great deal more power than any Member on the Opposition Benches. She can bring influence to bear on those on her Front Bench, and I urge her to do so. There is an ability within this Bill to deliver on a number of the commitments that she made to her electorate and that the Prime Minister made to electors across the country. I encourage the hon. Lady to use her position of influence and power to encourage Government Front Benchers to deliver what she was elected to deliver. There will always be areas of agreement on both sides of the House, and there will occasionally be areas of discord where I cannot always agree with my Front Bench team, but there is an opportunity to deliver what the Labour party promised.

**Gareth Snell:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for being so generous and gracious with his time. He rightly points out that his new clauses 1 and 2 are not Labour party manifesto commitments, so he will understand why they could cause the Bill to become unstuck when the Salisbury convention is applied at the other end, as the Minister will confirm later. Has he used his position of power and influence to confirm that Conservative Members in the upper House, with their plurality and majority in most votes, will support new clauses 3 and 4, so that the Bill can still make its passage and deliver the one thing on which we have consensus?

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Gentleman flatters me by suggesting that I have any power. Once, as Chief Whip, I could have had a gentle nudge on the tiller to make things happen, but sadly the only army I can now bring to bear is me. I will happily do what I can on these important new clauses, and I will walk side-by-side with the Paymaster General, through the Lobby to deliver for his party on its manifesto commitment, but I am afraid that is the only commitment I can make, because I would not wish to over-promise.

**John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab):** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way in his entertaining speech. He makes several references to our manifesto, but I would like to make some references to the Conservative party's manifesto—

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Judith Cummins):**

Order. I hope the hon. Member's intervention is on the House of Lords and within the scope of the Bill.

**John Slinger:** It is related to references to reform of the House of Lords. There are no references to reform of the House of Lords in the Conservative party's manifesto. There is one reference to peers but not to peers in the other place, and there are a few references to the constitution but not to our unwritten constitution. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House why he is now so fascinated by these measures?

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for making a point, and I hope that his Whips have noted the support that he was trying to offer. I bring his attention to 2012, when there was an attempt at a major body of reform of the House of Lords. That was something that I was going to vote for; I wanted to see that reform in 2012 as I wish to see that reform in 2024. This may shock him and start to undermine his faith that he joined a party with radical traditions or a wish to deliver reform or change: it was the Labour party—his party—that voted that attempt down and made sure that it could not proceed.

**Phil Brickell (Bolton West) (Lab):** The right hon. Member mentioned the 2012 Bill. Will he enlighten us as to how his party voted on that?

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I am more than happy to do so. More Conservative Members voted in favour of that legislation, and it collapsed not through lack of support on Conservative Benches or Liberal Democrat Benches but because Her Majesty's official Opposition at that time were going to vote against it, which meant that the numbers were not going to stack up. The decision by the

Labour party and its leadership to collapse that piece of legislation meant that a significant body of reform did not happen.

I turn to the Labour party manifesto. Perhaps the hon. Member for Bolton West (Phil Brickell) has had a glance at this, but possibly not. It says on page 108 that Labour would introduce

“legislation to remove the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords. Labour will also introduce a mandatory retirement age. At the end of the Parliament in which a member reaches 80 years of age, they will be required to retire from the House of Lords.”

The subsequent paragraph says:

“Labour will ensure all peers meet the high standards the public expect of them, and...will introduce a new participation requirement as well as strengthening the circumstances in which disgraced members can be removed.”

Those are perfectly sound points of policy, which the party stood on at the last general election, but now it chooses to ignore them.

**Josh Fenton-Glynn (Calder Valley) (Lab) rose—**

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I appreciate that Labour Members wish to earn brownie points, and I will let another earn his brownie points and edge that little bit closer to the allure of a junior parliamentary private secretaryship.

**Josh Fenton-Glynn:** Will the right hon. Member remind me how long a parliamentary term is and therefore how long we have to implement our manifesto?

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means:** Order. I remind Members that they should be in for the duration of the debate, or make an effort to be in for a considerable duration, before making interventions.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** Thank you for your firm chairmanship of this debate, Madam Chairman. The hon. Member made a strong and powerful intervention, which I hope is noted down. I can see him being the Parliamentary Private Secretary for the junior Minister in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs very soon. I am not sure if my commendation and support helps him in his endeavours, but I hope that it does. Of course, the hon. Member makes a thoughtful and interesting point. The Government do have time to introduce further legislation, but the reality is that pressure on time in this place is one of the greatest pressures—time is the most precious thing. I certainly would not engage in any form of political betting—I hope that can be recorded in *Hansard*—but if, perhaps in a previous age, I were a betting man, I might have offered this wager to the Paymaster General. I would wager a whole £5 that the Paymaster General will not be in a situation of getting any more legislation on Lords reform. I will give way to the Paymaster General, who is going to refute that.

**The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds):** I certainly would not enter into a wager. I would have hoped that the Conservative party would have learned its lesson on that.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I had hoped that the Paymaster General would have given a categorical assurance that there would be further legislation and that in the next



King's Speech a retirement age in the House of Lords will be introduced as part of that legislation, along with a minimum participation level, but he stayed silent. He made a little quip. I will give him another opportunity to do so, although he will probably stay in his place, which is of course his right.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I do not know where the naive assumption or belief on the Labour Benches that there will be further Lords reform comes from. There will not be any more. I was here during the '90s when Labour attempted to bring in Lords reform and gave up immediately, with no intention of ever bringing that back. This is it—this is all we are going to get—and unless we make this a good Bill, this is all we will get in this Parliament.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for making an incredibly powerful point. He is absolutely right. He is a veteran of these arguments and knows how it will go because we have seen it before. This is the moment. There is not going to be another one—this is it.

I turn to new clauses 1 and 2, which are the most important of the ones that I have tabled. It is fundamentally unfair that we still have a situation where a bloc of clerics have a right and a say over our legislation—over how my constituents live. I cannot see how in today's world that can be justified. We have not seen arguments come forward as to why these 26 bishops should be defended.

**Sir John Hayes** *rose—*

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I will give way in a moment.

As an Anglican, I cannot see why I have a right to greater representation than my children, who are Catholics. I am often told, "The bishops have been there since the Reformation." Well, lots of things were happening around the Reformation that I am not that keen to see happening today. I appreciate that the Paymaster General may have a different view on that and may want to revive some of those age-old traditions, but I do not. This is an opportunity not to jeopardise the Bill but to improve it. I recognise that the proposal was not in the Labour party manifesto, but I ask Members across the House to consider whether, in all conscience, they should vote for this anomaly to continue to exist. From my perspective, this is an issue of conscience, and of what we think and feel is right.

Those 26 bishops do not come from every component part of the United Kingdom—they do not come from Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, but only from England. The composition of those bishops is probably not reflective of today's world. I feel it is fundamentally wrong that, because of the statute of 1847, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of York, the Bishop of London, the Bishop of Durham and the Bishop of Winchester have a right to legislate on my constituents. I believe that they have an absolute right to influence the course of public debate, but from the pulpit, not in Parliament.

**Sir John Hayes:** My right hon. Friend allows me, on that basis, to give him a short lecture on the character of conservatism. He needs to understand that the collective wisdom of ages, vested in great institutions like the monarchy—which, by the way, is hereditary—the Church,

this Parliament and the small institutions that Burke called the "little platoons", transmitted in age-old form is always more important than the fads and fashions of any one generation at any point in time. If he understood that, he would understand why he is a Conservative.

3.30 pm

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I always have felt that my right hon. Friend was all the collective historical, accumulated wisdom that we could ever possibly want. I have always believed that the greatest strength of conservatism can be the ability to reform and to have a radical approach to change our country and the world in the shape that we wish it to be.

**Dr Murrison:** I am very much warming to what my right hon. Friend has to say. He rightly speaks of the Reformation, but will he recall that, broadly speaking, there were two reformations in this country? There was the English Reformation and the Scottish Reformation. We never have any discussion about the place of the other established Church, the Scottish Church, in our constitutional arrangements. That seems to be a quirk of history. I am not for one moment suggesting that Moderator of the Church of Scotland should sit in the other place, but it underscores and highlights the issue that my right hon. Friend has raised about the position of the English bishops.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. The position of the Lords Spiritual throws up more questions than it answers, and that is why I deeply urge those on the Treasury Bench to look at my amendment and to ask whether they can make their legislation better. Can they be the Government that I think they wish to be, in order to deliver that change?

**Freddie van Mierlo:** I certainly share much of the right hon. Gentleman's zeal on the removal of the Bishops from the Lords. Does he share my concerns about the privileged speaking and seating positions that they have in the Lords?

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I do, and if we have the opportunity to divide on my amendment, I am looking forward to the hon. Gentleman joining me in the Lobby. We can sort that problem out with this piece of legislation by voting to get rid of them, and therefore there will be no privileged seating arrangements, and a little bit more space for the wife of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), the husband of the hon. Member for Lewisham West and East Dulwich (Ellie Reeves) and all other peers on the Government Benches, as that is where I think they sit.

I can go through all the arguments on the presence of Bishops in Parliament. Only one other sovereign country has clerics in its parliamentary body, which is Iran. I do not think that is necessarily the best model for us to base ourselves on. This piece of legislation gives us the opportunity to have a more reflective parliamentary body. Across Europe, many countries have a strong faith, where religion plays an incredibly important part in national debate and national discourse. But none of those countries, whether France, Germany, Italy, Spain or Portugal, feel the need to have that assured clerical block of Bishops in their legislature.

[Sir Gavin Williamson]

Less than 2% of the British population attend Anglican services on a Sunday. By taking this action to remove the bishops, we recognise that Britain is a changed country. Britain is very different today from how it was in 1999. If we look forward to when Lords reform legislation next comes forward, probably in another 20 years, Britain will be changed again. Let us use this opportunity to ensure the upper House is more reflective of our nation.

The reality is that the Lords Spiritual do not take part in many Divisions—14%. If the Labour party introduces participation requirements, it would probably mean the exclusion of a number of bishops. Data has shown that the support for having bishops in the House of Lords is incredibly low. Indeed, even in the Anglican Church support for having bishops in the House of Lords is incredibly low. Some 60% of priests back reform to the bishop's Bench. Going back to the 2012 legislation, there were proposals to shrink the bishop's Bench from its current 26 to 12. Yet the Labour party has shied away from all attempts to do even the most modest reform.

There are no credible examples of where it is reasonable to have bishops legislating on our constituents. The only argument from the Labour party seems to be that this is a simple Bill. Well, this is a simple amendment. It is not right that so many of our constituents who do not have an Anglican faith are legislated on by Anglican bishops. We have to make these changes and we have to seize the opportunity, because this will be the last and only opportunity to make them while this Government are in power.

**Phil Brickell** (Bolton West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Madam Chair.

I would like to speak in support of the Bill, which I believe is long overdue. I thank the Minister for her contribution and welcome in particular her warm words on the importance of the Bill as a clear manifesto commitment to reform how the other place functions as “an immediate modernisation”. Since the groundbreaking House of Lords Act 1999 was passed by a Labour Government, there has been no substantive reform to the hereditaries in the other place despite an obvious public appetite to do so. Indeed, a study conducted by University College London's constitution unit found that only 6% of respondents supported the current system.

Before having the enormous privilege of representing the people of Bolton West, I spent over a decade tackling bribery and corruption. Time and again, I have seen how trust is developed only when those responsible for decision making are truly held accountable. I will focus on the word accountability, which is gravely lacking with the remaining hereditaries. Over the course of my working career, it has become clear that the UK has an important role to play on the global stage as a world leader on political integrity, but this country's reputation as a well-governed and, frankly, clean jurisdiction has been degraded over recent years. Countries that previously welcomed our counsel with open arms now look on it with scorn. That is why this long-overdue reform matters to me and why I passionately support the Government on the Bill.

I am sure there are some hereditary peers who undertake hard work and I have no doubt that many have a genuine commitment to public service, but the concept of hereditary peerages, hereditary privilege and being able to legislate for life merely by dint of birth belongs in the same breath as second jobs, lobbying scandals and the revolving door. It is an anachronism that needs to go. Contrary to the protestations from Conservative Members, the Bill is not about spite. Rather, it is about improving trust and accountability in our politics. The public expect high standards from our legislature, but the simple fact is that too many hereditary peers do not play a proper role in our democracy. We made that point in the Labour manifesto earlier this year, which Opposition Members will no doubt note resulted in a resounding mandate across the country to deliver change.

**Sir John Hayes:** The facts do not bear out what the hon. Gentleman has said. If he looks at the record, he will see that hereditary peers tend, proportionally, to speak more often in debates, they tend to be more involved in tabling amendments, and more of them tend to be Whips. They are more active, in proportional terms, than the appointees—who also, by the way, lack democratic legitimacy.

**Phil Brickell:** I thank the right hon. Member for his contribution, but he will note that I did not mention activity or participation in the other House. I mentioned democracy and democratic accountability, which hereditary peers do not have.

**Nick Timothy:** Neither do life peers.

**Phil Brickell:** We will come on to life peers shortly.

This is an important change that was in our manifesto. As you will recognise, Madam Chair, it is important because we need equality of representation, which is vital if we are to retain confidence in the way in which both this House and the other place operate. It is 66 years since women were allowed to sit in the other place, but there are currently no women among the hereditary peers there, and I for one am embarrassed by that. It is a disgrace. As a member from the north-west, I should add that it has not escaped my attention, or that of my constituents, that individuals from my part of this great nation are under-represented in the other place—especially, again, among the hereditary peers.

According to the Electoral Reform Society, 35% of hereditary peers live in London and the south-east. I do not accept that a hereditary peer who is the son of a duke, an earl, a viscount or a marquess is any better prepared to scrutinise legislation than the daughter of a plumber or the son of a nurse.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Gentleman is making an incredibly powerful speech, and one of great merit. Does he believe it is right for English bishops, and only English bishops, to be able to vote on Scottish affairs and rule the roost over Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland? I think that that point is very much akin to his own argument.

**Phil Brickell:** I admire the right hon. Member's penchant for House of Lords reform, but I will come to these points later, if I may.

The consequences of not acting are no less than existential when it comes to trust in our politics, in this place and in the other House. Trust in politics is at an all-time low, which is a legacy of 14 years of cronyism and corruption from the party opposite. Indeed, polling conducted by the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition earlier this year—*[Interruption.]* I think that if the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) listens to what I have to say, he will reflect on it. Two thirds of respondents—two thirds—felt the UK was getting more corrupt, and in 2023 only 12% of respondents told the Office for National Statistics that they trusted political parties. It all adds up. Turnout in July was 60%, the second lowest in a UK election since 1885. At a time when autocratic hostile states seek to undermine us at every turn, democratic engagement has rarely been so important.

I believe that that this Bill is a small but important step towards restoring that trust, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister promised we would do during the election campaign. The Committee will also note what I very much hope are the impending appointments of an ethics and integrity commissioner, an anti-corruption champion and a covid corruption commissioner. Those are all vital measures, alongside the Bill, to improve standards and increase accountability. I urge the Government to confirm those appointments as soon as possible. They are further steps towards showing the country that it is vital to regain trust in politics as a means of improving lives for all.

**Mr Andrew Snowden** (Fylde) (Con): The point about trust in politics is valid, and the hon. Member's statistics showing a deterioration in that trust over the last couple of decades are probably something for all of us in this Chamber to reflect on, notably the politicians who are newest to the House. I am not sure how hereditary peers, who have been serving for decades, since the time when trust in politics was far higher, are to blame for the modern lack of trust. That is more for those in this House to consider, especially newer Members, rather than people who have given lifelong and diligent service in the other place.

**Phil Brickell:** I thank the hon. Member for his contribution. Hereditary peers are there by dint of birth, not by dint of their service or contribution to public life. He talks about decades of service, which may accrue over a period of time, but that is merely by dint of birth. We will shortly come to appointments to the other place, which touches on the point about accountability and trust.

I want to talk about the various amendments tabled by the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson). As colleagues have said, it is a great shame that he did not discover that he had such a penchant for reform and modernisation during his 14 years as a Member of the governing party.

3.45 pm

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I point out to the hon. Gentleman that I voted for House of Lords reform in 2012. I hope that he will take the opportunity to withdraw his comment, given that in 2012 his own Front Benchers voted against reform or indicated that they would do so.

**Phil Brickell:** Unless I am mistaken, the previous debate on this Bill was the first time that the right hon. Member mentioned House of Lords reform in this place.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) and the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge have correctly noted that our manifesto included many of the amendments that the Conservative party is attempting to push through today. I look forward to working with our Front Benchers on further modernising commitments that were enshrined in our manifesto, which I can assure Conservative Members I have read. Those commitments include changes to the appointments process to improve the national and regional balance of the second Chamber, a mandatory retirement age, a

“long-term commitment to replace the House of Lords with an alternative second Chamber that is more representative of the regions and nations”,

and a participation requirement. However, I am sure that Conservative Members agree that anything as knotty, unwieldy and fundamental as constitutional reform will inevitably have to be incremental. Doing too much too soon may cause damage.

I note that the Conservative party took that logic to its extreme over the last 14 years by bringing forward no substantive reform whatsoever. There was no mention of Lords modernisation in the Conservative party manifesto, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (John Slinger) mentioned. The meagre changes made under previous Conservative Administrations comprised nothing more than tinkering around the edges at a time when the other place needed to be urgently dragged into the 21st century.

I will not support the amendments. If Members present are genuinely committed to modernising how our democracy works, I look forward to constructive engagement with the Government and the Opposition throughout the course of this Parliament. I commend the actions taken so far by the Government and will support further measures over time to modernise how the other place works. A mature democracy such as ours—centred around the mother of Parliaments, no less—simply cannot continue with an unelected, hereditary upper House.

We heard earlier from the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar, who talked about, in his words, gerrymandering. Let us talk about gerrymandering. Let me recall one statistic that is worth reminding the House about: for every one and a half days that former Conservative Prime Minister Liz Truss was in power, she created a life peer—a total of 32 during the course of her 49-day premiership. Much like the hereditary peers, those new legislators will have a seat in the House of Lords for life. How can that be right? Indeed, it is clear to me that the House of Lords Appointments Commission does not present a particularly high bar for appointments. Once the immediate first step is completed, a number of ambitious steps must be taken to deliver genuine, lasting reform of the way we do politics in this country.

In summary, this Bill will help to wrench our political system kicking and screaming into the 21st century. The Conservatives, including the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge, sat on their hands for the last 14 years. We have been in government for four months, and we are already delivering. I look forward to voting for the Bill tonight.



**Pete Wishart** (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I rise to speak in support of new clauses 9 to 14, which stand in my name, and all the associated amendments, but I will also support any amendment that would reduce the size of the House of Lords and limit its authority in our legislature, as long as it remains a wholly democratic institution.

I am quite a simple soul. I am just someone who intrinsically believes that if you represent the people, you should be voted for by the people. I believe that if you are to legislate, it requires consent through some sort of electoral mandate from a group of people who vote for you to go into a legislature to represent them and who allow you to make the laws of the land. That is a simple belief and I think it is generally supported by the majority of the British people. Certainly the latest opinion polls on the House of Lords show that only about one in seven people in the UK think that the House of Lords in its current condition is worth supporting. A vast majority want a fully elected House of Lords, and that is what Labour promised. That is what they said they would deliver. That is what they commissioned Gordon Brown to do, and he came back with a report that said he would do it. And, of course, it has not happened.

I am touched by Labour Members' naive faith that there will be more than this Bill. It is quite touching that they actually believe that a succession of pieces of legislation is going to come through that will incrementally deal with all the issues of the House of Lords. I am sorry to break to it to them, but that is not going to happen.

**Richard Baker** (Glenrothes and Mid Fife) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman's party has long talks about constitutional change in this country, but it is our party that delivered devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as a Mayor for London and the London Assembly. His party has only talked about it. Is that not the reality of our party delivering on constitutional change?

**Pete Wishart**: Yes, of course we are delighted that we have the Scottish Parliament. I congratulate and thank the Labour Government for delivering that, and they were right, but they have never delivered anything when it comes to the House of Lords except the reforms of 1999. That is the only thing that they have brought forward, other than this pathetic, minuscule Bill that does something that should have been done centuries ago. We are supposed to congratulate them and thank them for getting rid of the most ridiculous class of parliamentarians anywhere in the world: the hereditary peers of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is absurd. Well done for finally getting rid of the barons, the dukes, the earls and all the other assorted aristocrats! That should have been done centuries ago.

The commitment that I am waiting for from Labour is the commitment that it gave over a century ago. Do Labour Members know what that was? They do not know what it was, so I will tell them. A Labour party commitment from over 100 years ago—I cannot remember the exact year—said that it would abolish the House of Lords. That is a historic commitment by the Labour party that it has not even come close to realising, but it is now—thank you, Labour party!—getting rid of the earls, the dukes, the barons and the graces, so I suppose we have to be thankful for that.

**Sir Gavin Williamson**: I would be interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's assessment of how that radical reform from 100 years ago is going. I appreciate that he may not have studied the Labour manifesto—many Labour Members have not done so either—but it states that Labour aims to make a

“second chamber that is more representative of the regions and nations.”

I wonder whether he could share his thoughts on how that is going, and whether he thinks that Mrs Gray will be able to contribute to that in a significant manner.

**Pete Wishart**: Let's just say that the progress has not been all that was anticipated or all that we hoped for. We could say that progress has been practically non-existent. We also had the crushing news today that our British envoy to Scotland will no longer be going there to represent this Parliament as part of her duties in the nations and regions. I can tell the House that the nation of Scotland is almost inconsolable about the fact that our envoy will no longer be going to Scotland. We were planning the street parties and practising the haka, just to make sure that she would be properly welcomed to our northern territories, but she is no longer going to be there.

**Torcuil Crichton** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): Although the hon. Gentleman wants to get rid of the hereditaries, his party seems to want to create a hereditary system by allowing the right hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn) to stand for the Scottish Parliament.

**Pete Wishart**: I gently break it to the hon. Gentleman that no SNP Member will ever end up in an undemocratic outrage like that place down the corridor. I do not know how many Scottish Labour Members will be in Parliament for 20 or 30 years, but about 15 of the last generation of Scottish Labour Members are now in the House of Lords. This conveyor belt that rewards a distinguished career in the House of Commons with a place in the House of Lords is one of the things I want to address with my amendments.

I had hoped to table an amendment to try to realise Labour's historical ambition to abolish the House of Lords. Thanks to the good work of the Clerks, I knew that I was highly unlikely to secure such an amendment, and that is probably right, so I thought I would be creative and try to abolish its membership. I therefore drafted a series of amendments to try to get rid of all the distinct groups and classes of Members of the House of Lords. Again, I thought I would be singularly unsuccessful in that mission and endeavour, but I have three amendments on the amendment paper.

Those amendments are crackers, believe me, but I look forward to speaking about them. They would abolish the prime ministerial donors, appointees and cronies who fill the other place, and they would abolish the idea that former Members of Parliament can assume they will get a place in the House of Lords. I am really pleased with myself.

**Melanie Ward**: It is a pity to interrupt the hon. Gentleman when he is in such a state of excitement about his work, but it is difficult to take a lecture from him on delivery when this Labour Government have delivered so much in just a few short days. He may want

to talk to his colleagues in the Scottish Government about their delivery on, for example, the state of the health service in Scotland.

What is the hon. Gentleman's stance on the multiple occasions in recent years when senior figures in his party have approached friendly peers to table amendments to legislation on their behalf? It seems that those senior figures are quite happy to use the other place when it suits them.

**Pete Wishart:** There is a point of principle behind our position on the House of Lords, and it is a simple word: democracy. We refuse to have anybody in the House of Lords because we believe that people should have an electoral mandate—democratic backing from the people of this country—to serve in the legislature. That is something on which the hon. Lady and I will never agree. I believe she is quite happy and satisfied that unelected peers continue to inhabit the other place.

My party is hopeful that the House of Lords might sometimes challenge Governments, and perhaps make them think again, but it always backs down. Any attempt to get the House of Lords to agree to any sort of principle is a waste of time.

**Gareth Snell:** The hon. Gentleman is clearly very pleased with himself and his amendments. The only seat as secure as a seat in the House of Lords is a seat at the top of a regional list for proportional representation. He has tabled a well-meaning amendment to prohibit any Member who has served in this Parliament or the last from seeking a seat in the House of Lords. Would he apply that to his own party, so that any Member who has served in this Parliament or the last is not eligible to seek nomination or election to the Scottish Parliament?

**Pete Wishart:** I say to the hon. Gentleman, ever so gently, that he should leave bypassing devolution to his friends from Scottish Labour, because they are just a little bit better at it than him. It is their job to constantly speak about the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government. To be fair to them, they have done a fantastic job—they barely even mention the UK Government. Every single contribution they make is about the Scottish Government, so maybe just leave it to them, shall we?

4 pm

I was hoping to bring forward an important amendment that was discussed quite widely in the press yesterday. I do not know whether the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson) knows this, but Members of the House of Lords do not pay a penny of tax—not one penny of tax—on the £346 they get just for turning up. They are among the wealthiest people in this nation, but not one penny of tax is paid on that money, so I tried to bring forward an amendment to put an end to that.

I cannot believe the surprise and astonishment among my constituents, and probably among a number of constituents across the United Kingdom, when that was made apparent. How on earth can it possibly be the case that Members of the House of Lords do not pay any tax on the allowance that they get just for turning up? That is something we have to address. Of things on

the great long list that will never be realised in the course of this Parliament, how about looking at that, dear Labour Government?

The amendment that I am most pleased to have got on to the amendment paper is the one about donors. The donors are people who have a place in our legislature—people who can design, comment and reflect on the laws of this country—whose only seeming and apparent ability is to give large sums of money to one of the three main UK establishment parties. We have heard a lot about trust from Members of those parties and about what the public feel about politicians in the political institutions, but how about solving this one? How about taking money out of the legislature? How about saying that if people give money to one of the three big political parties, they are therefore naturally debarred from taking a place in the legislature?

My sensible amendment would deal with that at a stroke: no more cash for honours and no more lists of Tory treasurers being naturally given a place in the House of Lords. My amendment says that if someone has given more than £11,800 to one of the three establishment parties, they are not entitled to a place in the House of Lords. If they have given more than £11,800 in the past to one of the three main UK establishment parties, they naturally give up their place.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Pete Wishart:** What is wrong with that? Maybe the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) will tell me, but first I give way to the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Johanna Baxter).

**Johanna Baxter** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Is the reason the hon. Gentleman's amendment refers only to the first three UK establishment parties so that it does not affect his own party, now that it has fallen to being the fourth largest party in this place?

**Pete Wishart:** We do not put people in the House of Lords. If people want to give us a million pounds, they can—please, if anyone is watching on TV, we could do with a million pounds. Sorry to disappoint anybody thinking about doing that, because we cannot give them a place in the House of Lords. I will give way one last time to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central, who I have given way to once already.

**Gareth Snell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. I agree with him about the necessity for probity, ethics and transparency in politics, and I also enjoy his righteous speeches in this place. Obviously, he is a moral guiding compass for us all, so will he now make a clear and unambiguous declaration that not a single person who has ever donated to the Scottish National party or served as a Scottish National party Member of Parliament has ever been given a position in a publicly funded quango, or a publicly funded seat on a board, or been in receipt of any publicly funded donation? Obviously, I want to ensure that we aspire to the bar that the hon. Gentleman sets.

**Pete Wishart:** What I can say categorically to the hon. Gentleman is that there is nobody who has given one single penny to the Scottish National party—*[Interruption.]*

[Pete Wishart]

Again, I appeal to people watching, if they want to give us money, please do so, but one thing we can never do—we never have and never will—is, in return, offer a place in our legislature or the ability to govern in this country. We do not do that, we cannot do that and we will never, ever do that.

Let me point to the scale of the difficulty of the problem when it comes to the donors. Some 68 out of 284 nominations from political parties between 2013 and 2023 were for political donors who had handed over £58 million to one of the three main parties. Over the course of that decade, some 12 of them gave £1 million. Now that might sound familiar to some Labour Members—£1 million is what people used to give to the Labour party under Tony Blair in the early 2000s to get a place in the House of Lords. Come on! Where is inflation when it comes to this? We would expect it to cost £1.5 million to get a place in the House of Lords now, but the going rate is seemingly still about £1 million.

Cash for honours was a disaster for Labour. It was absolutely awful. We saw the spectacle of a sitting Prime Minister being interviewed by the police about the donations that were being given to the Labour party. Those donations were interpreted as inducements to secure a place in the House of Lords. The Prime Minister was interviewed under caution and two of his personal staff were arrested. After that experience, we would be right to expect some sort of clarity in their thinking to take place. They could have decided never to get into that type of territory again—that they would do everything possible to ensure that money was taken out of politics, so that there would never be a whiff of suspicion that such a thing would happen again. But not a bit of it. Donors still go into the House of Lords, money still goes into the political party, and the public want it stopped.

**Sir John Hayes:** I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I intervened merely to say this: many people might assume that he is being foolish for raising issues of financial shenanigans, mismanagement, concealing money, bribes and so on, but I think that he is just being brave. Just as a matter of record, I want it to be known by the whole House that this man is not a fool; he is a very courageous man.

**Pete Wishart:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that. I will never again chastise him for quoting Proust in the House of Commons. I am sorry that I did that to him last time around.

That covers the donors. The other amendment that I managed to get included—again, this was a surprise to me—is one related to cronies. It would deny the Prime Minister the power to appoint people to the House of Lords. The Prime Minister has a prerogative that is almost unknown to any other western industrial leader—that he is exclusively responsible for appointing so many people to one part of our legislature. I think that something like 30% to 40% of the total membership of the House of Lords has now been appointed by a Prime Minister—by one man. That would make a tinpot dictator in a banana republic blush. He would want those powers in his hands immediately, but we have them in the United Kingdom. We allow a Prime Minister to determine—on his own—so many people in our

legislature. That must come to an end. Of course, the temptation for the Prime Minister is to appoint his friends, to reward those who have been denied a place, to compensate people for losing their positions, to encourage people to take a role, but mainly it is to make sure that the donors are rewarded.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I think we can all pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his genius in crafting amendments; he has been very innovative. If we saw the House of Lords Appointments Commission being put on a statutory and independent footing, that would go a considerable way towards dealing with that concern. Is that something that his party might consider supporting?

**Pete Wishart:** If that comes up for a vote this evening, we would support it. That is one way forward. It certainly would deal with some of the more egregious power that the Prime Minister has. I think that people across this country forget that our Prime Minister has this power—that he has this prerogative to singlehandedly design our legislature. The more that people learn about some of these issues the better. The one in seven who currently support these arrangements will fall to one in 70, because the place is an absurd embarrassment—by the way that it does business, by the way that it is allowed to set its membership and by the way that it presents itself to the world.

We have an opportunity this evening to improve, deal with and get some sort of solution to what this country does on a democratic basis, but the Government are not grabbing it—they are not even prepared to kick out the bloody bishops, for goodness' sake. How on earth, in 2024, can we be in situation where we have bishops legislating in a modern, advanced, industrial democracy? It is beyond a joke.

We are removing the hereditaries, and those on the Government Front Bench are right: there is no great objection to the hereditaries being removed. I do not even sense much of a defence from some of our crustiest, oldest colleagues, who are sitting next to me; they half-heartedly feel that they have to do it for their pals, but they are not sincere and they do not really mean it. They know that time is up for the hereditaries, and quite rightly so—it is absurd that they are still a feature of our democracy in 2024.

After this, the bishops are going to stand out like a sore thumb in a cassock. They will be the ones on the frontline when it comes to the ridicule. I have a little suggestion for my friends, the clerics down the corridor: how about sticking to their ministries? It is not as if they are without a whole range of issues just now. Would they not be better deployed dealing with some of the things that we have seen in the news over the course of the past few days, instead of concerning themselves with attempts to run our country? We live in a multi-faith and no-faith complex democracy, where so few people actually attend their Church.

This historic remnant from medieval times—that we have to have bishops in the House of Lords—is totally absurd. I will be supporting the new clauses on this subject in the name of the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge. In fact, they are only in his name because he beat me to the Table Office when I was trying to remove the class of bishops through the many amendments that I tabled.



The last amendments that I managed to table are a bit more trivial, but they address something that I think we still have to consider: the idea that former Members of Parliament should automatically expect a place in the House of Lords. We all know what it is like, don't we? Towards the end of a Parliament, we all ask each other—well, no one asks me—“Are you going to get a place in the House of Lords, then, for standing down?”, and some say, “Ooh, I think so, I think so.”

There is always that tap on the shoulder for the parliamentarian who may be in the autumn of his or her career: “We'd like you to do the right thing, colleague. Would you mind thinking about standing down? We've got a new youthful, more energetic colleague, who would be a bit more helpful to the Prime Minister. We'll make sure you're all right; there's a place in the House of Lords waiting for you.” How about ending that? It is a feature that the public particularly loathe and despair of, and it is just not right.

If colleagues want to continue to have a place in our legislature, they should stand for election. That is what most parliamentarians across the world do. Do not expect a place in the House of Lords. I have tabled new clause 13, which would deal with the issue. It states quite clearly that no one should be given a place in the House of Lords if they have served as a Member of Parliament in the current or last Parliament. I think that is fair and I encourage the Government to think about it as the Bill goes forward.

I will not be supporting the amendments tabled by those on the Conservative Front Bench. I do not suppose that they would expect me to do so. I do not even understand them, and I do not think that they really understand them either. The Opposition seem to be encouraging the Government to move quicker when it comes to House of Lords reform, and at the same time they are telling the Government that they are going too far. I will let the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), who is on the Front Bench, explain exactly what they are trying to achieve, because I am having real difficulty following.

I will support the Liberals Democrats' amendments, as I think they make a reasonable stab, but I say ever so gently to my Liberal colleagues that they have more places in the House of Lords per capita than any other political party in this place, so if they are serious about developing the House of Lords, why do they not just stop appointing people? That might have an impact—because all this mealy-mouthed, silly reform is not doing anything.

I will finish on this point: this is our only chance. There will not be any more House of Lords reform, regardless of what the Government say, and I know that they have said something to their Back Benchers to encourage them to come along today and tell us that there is further reform to come. There will not be further reform. All of us have seen this before. There are colleagues on the Conservative Benches who have seen this, been there and got the T-shirt—and that T-shirt says, “No more Lords reform in this Parliament.” That is what happens.

**Mr Swards:** I am very grateful to the hon. Member for giving way, although perhaps less so now that I realise I have put myself in his sights. Looking back to the 1999 law, it is tempting to be jaded—especially for Members who were here then—and to think no more

reform is coming. Does he accept, however, that many Labour Members, including almost all those present today, are brand-new and cannot be compared with that 1999 cohort? We are prepared to make further reforms in this Parliament—after all, the public voted for change, and we are here to deliver it.

4.15 pm

**Pete Wishart:** I will hold the hon. Gentleman to his word and hope that he is successful in ensuring that it is heard by his Front Benchers. I will also say to him—and I do not mean this with any great disrespect—that I have never seen a more malleable set of Back Benchers than the new Labour Members. They do everything that they are bid—the way they read out the crib sheets from the Whips is absolutely magnificent. I have not seen a great deal of rebellion from the Labour Back Benchers, but maybe he will show the way and ensure that something happens.

I suspect that this will be our last opportunity to consider the matter in this Parliament, because it will get punted into the waiting long grass. The person I feel most sorry for is Gordon Brown. I think he actually felt that he was going to be listened to this time, and that Labour was sincere about taking forward his agenda. After the Scottish independence referendum, we were promised almost-federalism, but instead our Parliament is getting attacked day by day, Government by Government, Back Benchers by Back Benchers. Let us see if we can get back to that almost-federalism. Let us see if we can get a degree of ambition from this Government. It might be—I certainly hope so—that their Back Benchers will hold them to account, and in us they will have willing allies in achieving that.

This is an absolute mouse of a Bill, but it could be made better by voting for and passing my amendments. I encourage the House to do so.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Caroline Nokes):** If there is nobody else from the Government Benches, I call—

**Richard Baker rose—**

**The Second Deputy Chairman:** —Richard Baker.

**Richard Baker:** It has been a long afternoon, Madam Chair. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship.

May I say how much I enjoyed, as I always do, the witty and skilful speech of the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart)? He has perhaps fired an early starting gun on his own campaign for election to an elected second Chamber, given that the tap on shoulder will not come for him—although his party will have to do somewhat better if he is to stand a good chance, given that he is here on his own. He spoke about donations for peerages. We can only wonder what the SNP would do with a £1 million donation, but perhaps Police Scotland know by now, given their investigations into such matters.

We have also spoken about the delivery of constitutional reform. The point that I made to the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire was that Labour has been delivering on constitutional reform. I served in Holyrood for three terms: for all the talk of the Scottish National

[Richard Baker]

party about reform, that Chamber is in great need of constitutional reform, but nothing has happened at all on that, while in this place, we are bringing forward a significant and important piece of constitutional reform within our first five months in government.

I absolutely agree that we want a faster pace of constitutional reform in this Parliament, but let us be clear about the proposal before us. In 1997, we set out—as an initial self-contained reform that was not dependent on further reform—that the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords would be ended by statute. That is what we are here to deliver this evening. Of course, it is long overdue, as the Minister said, and that is why we have introduced the legislation so early in this Government. It is also important that this reform is a stand-alone one, so we can progress it with the utmost urgency. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) is absolutely right that by taking this Bill forward as a stand-alone reform, we give it the best chance of progressing quickly, which is what we need it to do.

**Matt Rodda** (Reading Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent point. Returning to the substance of today's debate, surely there should be agreement across the House that this reform is very long overdue, as my hon. Friend is explaining clearly and succinctly to colleagues. I hope that people will be mindful of that and ignore some of the more outlandish suggestions made by the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart).

**Richard Baker:** This is a fundamental issue of principle. It is important that we in this House recognise that the presence of the hereditary principle within our second Chamber is outdated and indefensible. As other Members on the Government Benches have rightly pointed out, the UK is one of only two countries that still has a hereditary element in its legislature. It is not before time that we are considering this legislation.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Gentleman is making an important point about how difficult it is to defend the hereditary principle for legislators, but how does he go about defending the principle of English bishops being legislators in Glenrothes and Mid Fife?

**Richard Baker:** We do actually have a former moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in the House of Lords. I very much enjoyed the right hon. Gentleman's speech—his points were made very passionately and with great conviction—but his party was in government as a majority Government for many years, and it did nothing on that issue.

**Gareth Snell:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point: not only were the Conservatives a majority Government in this place, they had a plurality in the other place, so they were unfettered. Does my hon. Friend accept that, while the argument of the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson) may be well-meaning, bolting a non-manifesto commitment on to a manifesto commitment risks derailing a Bill that has already been all but agreed under the Salisbury convention at the Dispatch Box by

the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), and therefore risks losing all forms of reform that we are offering?

**Richard Baker:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point—I could not agree more. It risks derailing the Bill and the potential to make urgent progress on this particular issue, which it is so important that we as a House deal with this evening.

As other Members have said—I want to make this point very clearly—this reform is about principle, not about personalities. In my own career before taking up my seat in this House, I received the support and assistance of hereditary Members of the House of Lords in many campaigns on a whole range of matters of public policy, and I valued that support. Since my election, I have had the opportunity to speak with hereditary peers who have brought significant experience to the House of Lords, who have been diligent and committed, and who have greatly valued their role in the House. Nevertheless, it is clearly the case that in advance of further reforms, membership of the House of Lords should be based on experience and expertise, not birthright. The fact that there are still no female hereditary peers is another example of how that approach to membership of the House of Lords cannot align with what I believe should be the shared goal of making the House more inclusive and representative of wider society.

Earlier in the debate, we heard some contributions suggesting that passing this Bill would somehow jeopardise the work of the House of Lords or reduce its effectiveness. There will still be over 700 peers left, so I do not think we are in danger of a shortage of peers in this Parliament. I believe that this reform must be taken forward now, and having recently joined the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, I look forward to further deliberation on reform of our second chamber.

Turning again to the speech made by the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire, I was pleased to hear him laud Gordon Brown—that has not always been the case in speeches he has made. Gordon Brown's leadership of the Commission on the UK's Future, established by the Labour party in opposition, was a vital contribution to the debate on how we take forward the constitutional arrangements for government in our country. The commission's report absolutely needs to be an active document in this Parliament, discussed in this Chamber and I hope by the Select Committee that I have just joined, when we look forward to the future of our constitutional arrangements. The report is right to set out the proposal for a council of nations and regions. It shows also the necessity for reform in regard to hereditary peers, and why those wider reforms of the House of Lords will be important in relation to public confidence in our institutions of government.

The report highlighted research showing that 71% of people in the UK back overhauling the House of Lords. That support cuts across all parties, nations and regions: nearly half the British public think that the Lords does not work well. Support for the current composition of the second Chamber was reported by the commission at just 12%. I believe my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Phil Brickell) has recorded even lower levels in other research. It just shows why this reform is desperately required if we are to attain confidence in our second Chamber.

Analysis shows that a majority of Members of the House of Lords are based in London and the south-east. If we want to increase confidence in this Parliament, in Westminster, that issue must be addressed, along with further devolution to other parts of the United Kingdom and the nations of the United Kingdom. A second Chamber whose membership is far more reflective of all the nations and regions of the UK can only help generate greater confidence in our legislature in every part of the country.

**Sir John Hayes:** Interestingly, the hon. Gentleman cites the Gordon Brown study, which one of Gordon Brown's allies told me had just gone too far and therefore was not acceptable to the Labour Front Bench. But on the issue of representation in the Lords from farther away and from less-advantaged people, to achieve the sort of balance that he describes you would have to salary the Lords, would you not? It is very hard to provide for a second home or accommodation in London on £300 a day.

**Richard Baker:** There are many ways to achieve the balanced representation that I have spoken about. The right hon. Gentleman has shown that he is passionate on these issues too. I hope that he would participate in further debates, which will go much more broadly into the issue of reform of the second Chamber. I am sure that we will have opportunities to have such debates and discussion over the next five years.

Regrettably, we must also reflect on why confidence in the second Chamber is so low. Why have people lost faith in the second Chamber? I have to say that it is because of the actions of the previous Government, which so traduced and blighted the reputation of the second House that this reform—and others—is desperately needed. Public confidence is crucial. Too often, despite the best efforts of the Speaker, the Members of this House and of the other House, and the parliamentary authorities, our constituents feel detached and remote from their Parliament as a whole. I want my constituents in Glenrothes and Mid Fife, and all those we represent, to have confidence in this Parliament and our democratic structures as effective and connected to them and their communities. I am sure that we all share that ambition.

Of course there is much further to go, but I very much welcome the fact that we are finally addressing and concluding the issue of hereditary peers as Members of the House of Lords. It is an important step in the journey of much-needed reform of our second Chamber.

4.30 pm

**Sir Ashley Fox:** The Labour party promised immediate reform of the House of Lords in its manifesto and set out several steps that it would take. However, the Government have introduced just one of those steps—the step that is most politically convenient for them. Is it a coincidence that their proposals would remove 84 hereditaries who do not take the Labour Whip? They seem reluctant to take the other steps. Very few Government Members seem to want the 26 bishops to stay, but perhaps their remaining is convenient because when the bishops turn up, they vote with the Labour party more often than not.

I object to the Bill because I have a genuine fear that there is no second stage. The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart) is right: it will be this

Bill and nothing else for the rest of the Parliament. Labour Members will wait in vain for the second stage. That is what happened when the Blair Government tried to reform the House of Lords. They ensured that the 92 hereditaries remained as a permanent reminder of the need for proper reform. Now the Government are removing the hereditaries, but not making clear any time scale or further proposals.

I therefore tabled amendment 24 and new clause 19. I want to pause commencement of the Bill unless and until the Government introduced legislative proposals for second-stage reform. Amendment 25, which my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) tabled, goes one better than amendment 24, so I am happy not to press my amendment and to vote instead for his. It provides a guarantee that proper reform will be introduced and an opportunity to reflect on the type of upper House we want.

I believe that we should have a smaller upper House, which should be wholly or largely appointed. It should not act as a rival to this place. Liberal Democrats who desire an elected second Chamber do not understand what they are letting themselves in for. Let us consider the United States, where the two chambers are sometimes commanded by different parties and very little can happen. A country with an executive presidential system can get away with that, but a parliamentary democracy could not function with a Government with a majority in this Chamber permanently blocked by an elected upper House.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson) has tabled several amendments that help enact the Labour party's manifesto commitments: a retirement age, participation rates and other features that would improve the upper House.

I will vote for amendment 25, which I commend to the Cttee.

**Sir John Hayes:** Last time we debated this issue, I talked about legitimacy, continuity and dignity, and nothing I have heard today refutes the arguments I made then. Of course it is true that this House's authority is drawn from the democratic legitimacy that enables each of us to speak for our constituents. We are chosen by them and answerable to them. However, that is not the only form of legitimacy.

When the Liberal Democrat spokesman offered her views on the subject, I was minded to ask, "Where do you stand on the Head of State?" Our sovereign is chosen by birth, not election. A Head of State is critical—at the apex of our constitution. As I pointed out on Second Reading, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, for whom I have great regard, as he knows, was appointed by the monarch, as I was when I became a Minister.

**Phil Brickell** *rose*—

**Sir John Hayes:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is edging towards the edge of his seat. I gave his speech four out of 10: two for energy, one for enthusiasm, and one for content.

**Phil Brickell:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a clear distinction between having a monarch, who is a constitutional sovereign and who does not



[Phil Brickell]

withhold Royal Assent through the legislative process, as opposed to hereditary peers, who are legislating in the other place on a daily basis?

**Sir John Hayes:** I will try to be helpful to the hon. Gentleman because he is a new Member. We all learn something every day here, and when a Member has been here for 27 years, unless we are entirely stupid we learn a great deal, so I have picked up one or two things. The critical frailty in his argument is the difference between authority and influence. Of course it is true that the King grants Royal Assent to the Bills that we pass and so they become Acts, but the very business of him granting Royal Assent reinforces his authority, and the fact that he has a personal audience with the Prime Minister on a weekly basis, which is more than the hon. Gentleman ever will and more than I do, suggests that his influence over our affairs is considerably greater than that of most of the people elected here. It is quite wrong to suggest that the monarch does not exercise political influence and thereby political authority.

I also spoke about continuity. The importance in our constitutional settlement of the continuation of the role of the House of Lords is that it provides a degree of continuity. Members have talked about what is time-honoured and cast that aside as though it does not matter. What is time-honoured counts because it has been honed by generations of people, not merely decided upon by one group of people at one point in time.

I heard another speech which criticised birthright. If I stood here and said it was the birthright of every Briton that habeas corpus prevails, or if I said it was the birthright of every subject of this kingdom that they can speak and think and act freely, everyone would feel that it was entirely right and proper for me to make those pronouncements, yet birthright has been criticised in this Chamber as if it was nothing.

**Patricia Ferguson** (Glasgow West) (Lab): The point is that the birthrights the right hon. Gentleman describes are available to all of us, whereas the birthrights we are talking about are restricted to very few people, some of whom have inherited them from a point that is literally in the history books and is so far back, and the contribution is so archaic now, that it really means nothing. We have to be realistic about this, and that is why we are looking at the hereditary peers first.

**Sir John Hayes:** Some of the things which we inherit by birth are indeed universal—universal in the sense that all Britons enjoy them. They are not of course universal in the sense that those across the world enjoy them; they would love to enjoy many of the freedoms that we had earned over time due to those who came before us. As the hon. Lady said, these things go right back. The evolution of our constitutional settlement is rooted in history and shaped over time—it evolves.

And it is right that the House of Lords evolves too, so I am not against Lords reforms per se. There is a case, for example, for saying that attendance matters in the House of Lords. We do not have an amendment to this effect, but it would be perfectly reasonable to agree that those appointed to the House of Lords as life peers who never attend or attend very rarely give up their right to

do so. That would seem to me to be a perfectly reasonable and measured reform of the House of Lords, and it would cut the numbers dramatically, because although we are frequently told the House of Lords has many hundreds of Members, those who regularly vote in Divisions tend to be drawn from the same group on both sides of that Chamber.

There are sensible reforms that could be made to the House of Lords, but this reform delivers neither in terms of legitimacy, for it makes the House of Lords no more democratic, nor in terms of efficacy, because it makes the House of Lords no more effective. One is tempted therefore to assume that it is prejudice dressed with spite that lies behind this proposal, and I find that hard to believe given the high opinion that I have of the two Ministers sitting on the Front Bench.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Sir John Hayes:** Many of my newer parliamentary opponents—I would never say enemies, of course—wish to intervene. I shall take them in order, with the Member on the right first.

**John Slinger:** The right hon. Gentleman was keen to score my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Phil Brickell). He gave him four out of 10, and I think he was rather unfair.

**Alex Burghart:** What would you give him?

**John Slinger:** Significantly higher, let us put it that way—eight or nine, I would say. If I may, I suggest that I would give Opposition Members between seven and 10 out of 10 for being patronising.

**Sir John Hayes:** I did not mean to patronise the hon. Member for Bolton West (Phil Brickell). I was being paternal or avuncular, rather than patronising, in how I dealt with him. It is a known fact, proven by events, that I have tended to encourage new Members to this House, perhaps to a greater degree than many other senior Members, and that includes Members from across the House. One of the things that one learns here—I spoke about the learning curve we all face—is that the relationships that pervade across this House are as important as the relationships we form on our own Benches.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): I have been here a little while—seven years—and the right hon. Member has never encouraged me, although he has scolded me once or twice. He has talked about democracy and democratic reforms on several occasions in his speech. Democracy emanates from Athens and the Greek republic. That is the origin of demos, and what does that mean? It means the common people. We are talking exactly about giving common people the right to sit, not the uncommon people of the hereditary peerage. That is the point we are talking about. Demos means universal rights for everyone, not the select few.

**Sir John Hayes:** Ms Nokes, you will not allow me to go into immense detail about Athenian democracy, although I did study ancient philosophy. The hon. Gentleman will know that Athenian democracy was very far from the democratic principles that we hold dear. Only citizens had the vote in Athens, and the assembly there was a very partial affair, and certainly it would satisfy neither you, Ms Nokes, nor other Members.

I will return to the subject in hand for a few moments before I give way to the hon. Member for Telford (Shaun Davies). Having made the case that the Bill does not afford greater legitimacy or efficacy, I want to speak about the authority of this place, the authority of the constitution, and the authority of Government. The authority of this place, as the hon. Member for Bolton West and others have argued, essentially derives from the fact that we are elected, but not just from that. It also derives in part from the balance in the relationship between this House and the other place.

Bicameral systems that pitch democratic chambers one against another are often less successful than the model that has evolved in this country. Although the upper House sometimes chastises this House—it certainly scrutinises us—and although it might clash occasionally with this House in its role as a reforming Chamber, in the end it defers to the elected House. A bicameral system borne of two Houses of Parliament, one of which is elected and one which is not, seems to me to be more desirable for that very reason: we do not have competing democratic legitimacies between the House of Commons and the House of Lords. That is why I disagree with the amendments in the name of some of my right hon. and hon. Friends and with the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart).

**Shaun Davies** (Telford) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman is being generous with taking interventions. I will boil it right down: this Government were elected on a mandate to remove the hereditary peers from the House of Lords, not to set up a wholly elected House and the concerns he is talking about right now. Does he support the Government's mandate and legitimacy to remove those hereditary peers?

**Sir John Hayes:** The Government's mandate was for a more widespread reform of the House of Lords. I will not go into it again, but the manifesto of the victorious party at the general election, which now forms the Government, suggested a whole range of measures to reform the House of Lords. I do not really approve of any of those measures.

4.45 pm

Neither do I believe in an elected second Chamber, as I have made clear. I take the straightforward view that the system at the moment, for the most part, works pretty well. We could make reforms—it would seem perfectly reasonable to look at how peers are appointed and we could look at the number of peers in the upper House, as I mentioned—but I do not really buy those reforms. As far as mandates are concerned, the Government certainly have a mandate to bring that package forward, but the official Opposition have a role in both countering that and ultimately opposing it. That is the nature of our parliamentary system. My goodness, if we voted for everything that the Labour Government brought forward from their manifesto, there would be no point in having an official Opposition of any kind.

**Patricia Ferguson** *rose*—

**Sir John Hayes:** I will give way one more time to the hon. Lady and give her a second bite of the cherry.

**Patricia Ferguson:** I am grateful to the right hon. Member for taking the intervention. I struggle to understand what the Conservative party's line is on the Bill. It would appear that he disagrees with a number of his colleagues. At the end of the day, how will Conservative Members vote?

**Sir John Hayes:** That is a matter for those on the Front Bench. I see members of the Conservative Whips Office in their place and I see my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) sitting behind the Dispatch Box. These days, I am merely a highly regarded, distinguished and senior Back Bencher. *[Laughter.]* The days when I had any say in how the Conservative Opposition—or in previous times the Conservative Government—chose to vote in Divisions are gone, but they are not gone forever; this is only a sojourn on the Back Benches. I want to make that perfectly clear.

Let me return to my principal theme, which is that of authority. The authority of this House is partly born of its relationship with the other House. Were the other House to become elected, its authority would by definition grow and our authority by comparison diminish, so I am strongly opposed to an elected second Chamber. While I accept the principled argument of the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire and others, it is not for me. There is also the matter of the authority of our constitution. Our constitutional settlement, which we have rehearsed briefly in the debate, is dependent on that relationship, but also—I think it is fair to say—on reforms of this kind being measured.

It might surprise Members to hear that last night, I was looking at a short book written by Hilaire Belloc and Chesterton. That book, which is available from the Library of the House, rehearsed the arguments that prevailed at the time of the debate on the Parliament Act—it was then the Parliament Bill—in the House of Commons. It might surprise right hon. and hon. Members to learn, as I learned last night, that when Asquith introduced those changes—when the House of Lords rejected Lloyd George's Budget and it became necessary to curb the powers of that House—rather than rushing to legislate, he set up a conference between both sides of the House to determine a compromise. Belloc, as Members will remember, was elected as a Liberal MP. He parodied that process and said that what came out of it was no better than what went into it. None the less, it was an attempt, at least, to reach a settlement in a dignified way on how we might reform the second Chamber. *[Interruption.]* It did take two elections. It took the 1906 election, as the Paymaster General will know, when the Liberals triumphed. I wonder whether he wants to intervene on me to sharpen up the history.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** That particular constitutional convention did not produce a consensus. It took two general elections in 1910—one in January and one in December.

**Sir John Hayes:** That is precisely right. In the first general election, there was an assumption that the Government would proceed, but the constitutional conference did not produce an outcome that brought about a reform that both sides could agree on. A further general election followed, and the right hon. Gentleman rehearses exactly what that short book describes. The point is that even Asquith at that time, who was determined

[Sir John Hayes]

to reform the House of Lords, felt that ideally that reform should be based on some kind of consensus, or at least a conversation about how that reform might happen and what shape it might take. That is important, because the authority of our constitution to some degree depends on its dignity.

Finally, I want to talk about the authority of Government. We have talked about mandates. It was long ago that the term “elective dictatorship” was first used. The nature of the relationship that I described earlier between Government and Opposition and between different sides of the Chamber is important to counter the risk of a Government with a very large majority ignoring counter-arguments and becoming—I hesitate to say corrupted—altered, changed or distorted by the scale of the majority. Frankly, in this Parliament, the Labour party will be able to legislate as it chooses at every turn. As experienced Members of the House know, including those on the Treasury Bench, Governments are better when they need to compromise, reach agreements and consider amendments.

When I was a Minister, many times in Bill Committees in particular, the shadow Minister would table an amendment. I would routinely and systematically have the argument and make sure that the amendment was voted down, but I would often go back to my civil servants and say, “I think that was rather a good argument. Why aren’t we doing it? I think he or she was right. We ought to alter the Bill.” I would engage with the shadow Minister privately and look at ways in which we could improve the legislation through that kind of scrutiny. Good Ministers and good shadow Ministers always worked in that way, as I did with the now Prime Minister when he shadowed me as Security Minister.

Governments need to understand that to alter their position through that kind of exchange and consideration improves the exercise of government and adds to, rather than subtracts from, the Government’s authority. Good Governments behave in a way that, rather than taking advantage of their power, mitigates it by the choices that they make.

**Josh Fenton-Glynn:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the need to govern responsibly and reasonably, whatever one’s majority. While I was sitting here, I was interested in his record of following through on that strong belief, so I googled his name and “Prorogation”, and I did not see any results. Will the right hon. Gentleman perhaps reflect on any points when he thinks recent Governments might have abused their power?

**Sir John Hayes:** When I was a shadow Minister for many years, I found that some of the Labour Ministers I shadowed did the job I just described very well, and some did not. When I became a Minister, I saw that some Conservative Ministers engaged in the kind of process I have described, and some did not. There has always been variability in the way that power has been exercised across political parties. I invite the hon. Gentleman to speak to any of the people who shadowed me when I was a Minister to see if they would validate how I described the way I acted in those days. The authority of Parliament, the authority of our constitution and the authority of Government are all at stake as we consider these matters.

I return to where I started in terms of efficacy. The last time we considered these matters, Members will remember that I quoted Proust. It was a bit too rich a diet for the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire. He is not a Proustian. I think it stretched the canon of his reading matter beyond breaking point. Today, I am going to test him a little more and refer to G. K. Chesterton, who I think might be more within his scope. [Interruption.] From a sedentary position, he is acknowledging that. Chesterton said:

“To have a right to do a thing is not at all the same as to be right in doing it.”

It is certainly true that, based on their mandate, the Government have the right to bring this legislation, but I am not sure that they are right in doing it, measured against my tests of dignity, legitimacy, continuity and authority. For as Chesterton also said, before you take a fence down, you consider why it was put up in the first place. The balance that exists at the moment, both within the House of Lords, and between the House of Lords and this House, is precious. It works. It ain’t broke and we don’t need to fix it.

Before I finish, let me say this to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar. We must vote against the Bill on Third Reading, because whether we are in favour of more reform—as some of my colleagues are—or no reform, the Bill does not meet the standards we would expect of good legislation. It is therefore vital that the official Opposition make their position crystal clear by opposing this undesirable and unnecessary legislation.

**Brian Leishman** (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): For the record, when we talk about more reform, it is with a lower case “r”.

For many people, the other place in its current format embodies what Britain really should not be: it is undemocratic, it is unelected and—to touch on this only very lightly—it has had its fair share of controversial appointments. There is a suggestion of nepotism here and a dash of financial scandal there, not to mention a sprinkling of oligarchy. Therefore, it represents what a classist society of haves and have-nots can produce. As we know, some Members are there on a hereditary basis, and some are there on the whim and wishes of political leaders who, of course, have their own political motives for having them in position. It is also clear that the different regions that make up the United Kingdom do not have fair representation. The other place does not just have a geographical imbalance, but a gender one—none of which I care for.

I believe that there should be an upper Chamber. In Scotland, we have seen some ill-thought-out political policy that has been financially costly. An upper Chamber would likely have prevented that with the benefit of added scrutiny.

Like British society, the other place needs transformational change. What the Government propose is only a step in the right direction to what I, as a Labour party member, will continue to campaign for from within the party, which is ultimately to change the other place into an elected Chamber where class and privilege are not the entry requirements, but where talent and ability are what get you there.



**Sir Edward Leigh:** It is an honour to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), such a well-loved, distinguished and senior Member—even if he has only served 27 years in this House.

I have sat through the whole debate and I did not intend to speak, but I just want to reply to a few comments. By its very nature, the debate has been confrontational—that is what we do in this place. We tend to concentrate on what divides us rather than on what unites us, and I want to say something about what might unite us.

First of all, on the ideas that divide us, we are debating whether to abolish the hereditaries. The Labour party says that it is in its manifesto and therefore it can do what it wants. We say that that is gerrymandering, that the bulk of these people are hardworking and that by nature they are Conservatives, so this is an excuse to get rid of a large number of Conservative peers. The Government will carry on and do it anyway. That is clearly very controversial.

The next proposal, it seems, is to abolish the bishops. I heard what was said by my right hon. Friend the Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson), but there are all sorts of objections to doing that, not least because this is an established Church. Do we really want to attack a faith community? It is part of our history. Are the bishops really doing much harm in the House of Lords? Incidentally, because of our canon law, the Catholic bishops do not want to be Members of the House of Lords anyway, although they are apparently quite willing to support distinguished laymen to help the Catholic cause there—but we all know that. I do not think that we will ever reach an agreement on abolishing the bishops in the House of Lords.

5 pm

We have had the debate about age, and again we cannot agree. As I said earlier, there are many people up there who make a tremendous contribution in their 80s. The Prime Minister has appointed to the Lords a distinguished former Foreign Secretary and a former Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, both of whom are 80, and he presumably did that not thinking they would have to retire immediately. So there is no consensus on age, and there is also no consensus on whether the other House should be elected. We have had this debate for 120 years. Some people, for instance in the Liberal party, say that it would be ridiculous to have an appointed Parliament, and that the only proper way of doing this is to have elected people in the Lords, and then we remind them that that would just lead to gridlock. This is a parliamentary democracy, not a presidential system.

So there is no consensus on any of those issues. However—and this is the point that I really want to make—there is consensus on one issue, namely that the House of Lords is too large. It has, I believe, 805 Members, which makes it the second largest Chamber in the world, after the supreme parliament of the People's Republic of China. In view of that consensus, we should perhaps reduce its size, and there is surely a simple way of doing that.

Given that, apparently, 150 members of the House of Lords are not particularly interested in turning up very often, or even at all in some instances, why do we not simply ask all the different groups—hereditaries, bishops

and life peers—and all the different parties to reduce their membership by a similar percentage, so that there can be no accusation of gerrymandering, and reduce the size of the House of Lords to about 600 Members? That could be done very simply, given that so many people are quite happy to have a peerage but do not want to turn up. It could be done by election, but those groups themselves could decide rather than the Government, and there would be no question of gerrymandering. They know who works hard, and they know who turns up. There would probably be no need for an election.

Through that simple device, we could reduce the size of the House of Lords to about 600. We could do it immediately, and we could ensure that all the people who should not be there, who were appointed for the wrong reasons, would leave the place. We could do that very simply and easily. We could do it by consensus, and we could also beef up the House of Lords Appointments Commission. At present it can reject someone on grounds of propriety, but it cannot do so on grounds of suitability. Beefing up its powers would ensure that only the very best people were appointed to the House of Lords, those with experience who could make a proper contribution. Let me add, just to please my friend the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart), that there is no question of appointing donors and cronies to the other place.

Those two simple reforms could solve the problem. We have heard about constitutional conferences in the past. May I suggest to the Paymaster General, whom I respect greatly, that it might not be a bad idea for the political leaderships of all our parties to sit down together and organise such reform to reduce the size of the House of Lords to about 600? Do we want to appoint people for life? Why do we not just appoint them for 15 years, so that when they have done those 15 years they retire at the next general election? All those ideas are very moderate and sensible, and if we could secure consensus on them, we could reduce the size of the House of Lords, get rid of the bad apples, and achieve what we want to achieve.

**Sir Julian Lewis:** Does the Father of the House agree that inevitably, given the nature of the Bill, we have been talking more about the process by which people become Members of the House of Lords than about the activity that it carries out? In particular, although not everyone in the House of Lords is an expert, a large number of them are: people who have reached the top of their respective professions, whether those professions be academia, the law, the arts or the judiciary.

Can the Father of the House cast his mind back to 1984, when he and I, having both fought the 1983 general election—he stood in Gainsborough and Horncastle, which is why he was in the House; and I stood in Swansea West, which is why I was not—co-operated on trying to have postal ballots for trade union elections? Does he remember that he introduced a Bill that got nowhere in this House, because of the strong whipping system of elected Members, but when we took it to the House of Lords we were able to persuade people on the arguments because of the light whipping? The amendment went through, and when the Bill came back to the Commons the then Government brought in their own measures to meet the point. Does he agree that, apart from creating gridlock, an elected second Chamber

[Sir Julian Lewis]

would not have the possibility of introducing fresh ideas that, once introduced, may be accepted by a Government in this place, but which would never get off the starting blocks if they were introduced in this place initially?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** That is a very good point. I remember that rebellion very well—it was the start of my many rebellions. I suggest to Labour Members that they should not rebel if they want get on in this place. We had a rebellion and finally won on that issue, and my right hon. Friend makes a very good point about how we won the argument. That underlines how important it is to have a second Chamber that is not composed of elected politicians. I really do not see the point of electing politicians to a second Chamber, because it would just be like this place: full of people who want to become Ministers and who are completely subordinate to the Whips.

What is the point of having an elected second Chamber? The whole point of a second Chamber is that it should be independent-minded, and the Lords are independent-minded. They regularly defeat the Government, and they actually have better debates than we do. The House of Lords is full of people who have tremendous experience in the professions, business and charities. I just do not see the point of getting rid of them lock, stock and barrel, but there is a perfectly good consensual argument that the number should be reduced. There are some people in the Lords whom we should remove either because they have not been appointed in an entirely right way or because they do not turn up.

**Sir John Hayes:** Further to the point made by my right hon. Friend, Bagehot spoke about this issue. He said that the distinguishing feature of the House of Lords is that its Members' views are emphatically their own views. In his terms, they are not subject to social bribe, by which he meant that they are not answerable to constituents in the way we are, so they can make judgments entirely free of that pressure. That is a virtue of the current arrangements and, frankly, a virtue of the hereditary peerage too.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** I think we can all agree that the other place, for all that it is seemingly undemocratic, works quite well. The Lords actually listen to debates, and they vote according to their conscience. They regularly defeat the Government, and they improve Bills again and again. If it works, why change it?

Will the Paymaster General please think about the idea that I have suggested? We could get some sort of compromise by which all parties in the House of Lords are reduced by the same amount. We could reduce the Lords to around 600 Members, give more power to the House of Lords Appointments Commission and, in future, keep the number at about 600.

**Dr Murrison:** I am very much attracted to the argument laid out by the Father of the House. He is right to say that consensus in these sorts of matters is nigh on impossible, as poor Jack Straw found out in 2007. The Father of the House is also right to aim for a reductionist strategy in trying to decide what we can do to improve

the situation. That will get a majority consensus in this House, difficult though census most certainly is in these matters.

This debate has been characterised by some levity, which is okay—it is positive. It probably reflects the fact that most of our constituents are not usually seized by constitutional matters, which is not to say that such matters are not important, because plainly they are. The attendance here today is not what one might expect for a matter of this importance. That probably reflects the fact that when we are all knocking on doors a few months ago, this kind of thing really was not No. 1 among people's concerns, but it remains important nevertheless.

I confess that I have been on something of a journey since 2007, at which time I was persuaded that the upper House ought to be elected. I am not any more, because I have seen in the workings of this place how it is possible for this place ultimately to be challenged by a subordinate secondary Chamber that is itself elected. Try as I might, I cannot work out how it is possible to avoid that kind of situation. This is the primary part of our legislature, and that must remain the case. We must be unchallenged, but we need checks and balances, which is precisely what the upper House aims to provide.

Many have spoken today about who we might remove from the upper House. I have no objection in principle to the things that the Government are trying to do, but I am persuaded that matters of this sort should be part of a wider package, which is why I will be supporting the Opposition amendment today. However, my view is that we have probably got this round the wrong way, which is why I very much support the amendments being brought forward by my right hon. Friend the Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson) in relation to the bishops.

I remember when I was pontificating in another country—a majority Muslim country that was a nascent democracy—on democracy. At the end of my spiel, a lady put up her hand and, to her great credit, said, “I have listened very carefully to what you have said, but with the greatest of respect, who are you to come here and lecture us, given that you have within your legislature people who are there by dint of hereditary right and people who are there because they are part of a particular religious persuasion?”

We have heard some quotes today, including from G. K. Chesterton. I am not sure whether I can match that, but I think I probably can. Robert Burns said:

“O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us

To see oursels as ithers see us!”

I like that. He is saying that it is important to note how we appear to other people, other countries and other legislatures, and it seems to me that that lady, all those years ago, had the measure of it. We may not think we are a theocracy in the same way as Iran is, or that we retain the hereditary principle in the same way as Lesotho or Swaziland do, but we are and we do. We need to remedy that, because appearances matter and that lady was absolutely right. That is why I support my right hon. Friend's amendment, and I hope that the Government will reflect on that.

I also agree with the assertion of the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart) that this is it, and that it is no good hoping for another Bill. That Bill

is not going to come. If it does, there is no guarantee that it will not end up in the same place as poor Jack Straw's measures ended up in 2007. Given the difficulty with consensus, I suspect that that is exactly where such a measure would land. So this is it.

I do not particularly want to see our legislature populated by people who are there because they are representative of one particular faith community in this country. I am an Anglican, just like my right hon. Friend the Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge. I am a practising Anglican and I value the views of bishops—of course I do—but it is simply not right to have them being politicians in dog collars generally propagating a left liberal world view. I would much rather that they were in their dioceses engaged in the cure of souls. That is where I, as an Anglican, want to see them.

I will certainly support my Front Bench's measured amendments this evening. I very much hope that the Government have been listening carefully to what has been said. These grave, serious matters need to be debated in a careful and measured way. I see virtue not in ploughing ahead with the Bill as an emergency but in incorporating it into a wider set of proposals at a later stage, although hopefully not too late, so that we can consider these things in the round. I hope we will be able to see those proposals before too long. I live in hope.

The Labour party has had 14 years to consider all of this. My view is that this Bill will be it. That is disappointing and a missed opportunity.

5.15 pm

**Sir Julian Lewis:** It was not my original intention to speak but, given the nature of the debate, and in view of the signal I have received that I might be given a little latitude to go slightly wider than the narrow terms of the Bill, I will make a single point to elaborate slightly on the intervention I made upon the Father of the House a few minutes ago.

A lot has been said about how the public are deemed to regard the status of the upper House. I am not sure on what basis such sweeping statements have been made, although I can understand that when, from time to time, someone manifestly unfit or inappropriate to be ennobled is ennobled, it may cause a degree of public concern and disillusionment.

New Members on both sides of the Committee, but particularly on the Government side, should avail themselves of the opportunities to understand more closely what the House of Lords can do that the House of Commons cannot. In the first instance, peers can bring their expertise to bear. That is not to say that all peers are experts—they are not—but a lot of them are, because they have reached the top of their profession. They are not necessarily any brighter, more intelligent or more cultured than Members of this House, but as we chose to divert ourselves from whatever escalator we could have been on, in order to become full-time politicians, we do not reach the giddy heights of those in other professions, who are then able to bring their expertise to bear on the legislative process by being taken into the upper House.

**Josh Fenton-Glynn:** I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman is not a doctor, but could he explain the biological process by which someone inherits expertise?

**Sir Julian Lewis:** I am not aware that anything I have said this afternoon has been in favour of retaining the hereditaries. It has not. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to my earlier interventions, he would have known that is the case. That is why I said I am going somewhat wider than this Bill, which focuses solely on the hereditaries.

The suggestion that the upper House stands in low repute is ill-conceived, and I urge the hon. Gentleman and other new Members to take advantage of the seminars that Labour and Liberal Democrat Members and I try to organise to enable new Members from all parties to be brought into contact with leading Members of the upper House, to see what they do. That would be a good use of his and other Members' time.

**Sir John Hayes:** My right hon. Friend is making an important point about the subtlety of the relationship between the two Houses. I spoke earlier about the relationship between the Government and the Opposition. In an unwritten constitution, political culture prevails, and that political culture is informed by that subtlety and by those relationships. My right hon. Friend described an occasion when legislation emanated from an origin in the other place, but very often legislation is improved and perfected through that connection. That should not be lost as we rush headlong into a piecemeal reform of the House of Lords.

**Sir Julian Lewis:** The elements that make up the House of Lords consist of different groups of people: some have got there by accident of birth and are now going to leave; some have got there as the result of political horse-trading of some sort, and perhaps should not have been put there in the first place; but a great many have got there, as I said earlier, by having reached the heights of their various professions and having proved themselves to be outstanding intellectuals who can bring a level of specialisation to the scrutiny of legislation. Even if we in this House were on exactly their same level of accumulated knowledge, we cannot bring that same level of scrutiny because of the demands we face on our time and in looking after our constituents, which inevitably works to the cost of the amount of attention we could give purely to focusing on improving legislation.

I wish to place on record that the reason why I became an ardent advocate of an unelected second Chamber—and why I would rather have no second Chamber at all than two elected Chambers—is precisely that it is impossible to whip such a Chamber to prevent people with good ideas from persuading peers of the virtue of those ideas. Members of an unelected second Chamber are able to have at least a sporting chance of amending legislation in good ways that would not get beyond first base in this House, because the elected Members, for the most part, almost all the time, obey the whipping.

Before I was an MP, when I was a political activist, I and my colleagues managed to get four pieces of legislation into law. Since I have been an MP, I have got only one, on the privacy of Members' home addresses, on to the statute book, because, exceptionally, that was a free vote. How many free votes happen in this House? Hardly any. The equivalent of free votes in the upper House happen all the time.

We required postal ballots for trade union elections, which was incorporated into the Trade Union Act 1984 and the Employment Act 1988. We outlawed political



[Sir Julian Lewis]

indoctrination in schools, which was incorporated into the Education Act 1986 and carried forward in the Education Act 1996. We prohibited local councils from publishing material that

“promotes or opposes a point of view on a question of political controversy which is identifiable as the view of one political party and not of another”,

which was incorporated into section 27 of the Local Government Act 1988. Finally, we more strictly defined the concept of “due impartiality” in the coverage of politically contentious issues on television and radio, which was incorporated into the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Every one of those measures was got through the House of Lords first, and then either adopted in the House of Commons directly or brought forward by the Government in their alternative proposals. We do away with the expertise of the House of Lords at our peril. All we will be left with are machine politicians, whether they are in one elected House or two elected Houses, and that is to the detriment of our democracy, not to its enhancement.

**Iqbal Mohamed** (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): Thank you for calling me to speak, Madam Chair. I am honoured to serve under your chairmanship.

Before I begin my prepared remarks, I wish to commend and pay tribute to right hon. and hon. Members across the House for their skills of oratory and persuasion and their education and ability to entertain. It has been an absolute privilege to hear Members with such experience speak, so well-informed are they on such topics.

I also wish to speak to new Labour Members who, like me, are finding their feet and learning the ways of the world in this place. I am pleased to hear that they are passionate about pushing and challenging their party to implement the laws and changes that the constituents and the country demand. but I remind them of the consequences of that. Rebellion, as I have seen in this short time, is rewarded with sanction or suspension, so it is better to get as much as possible into this Bill now than to hope that they may ever get a chance to do so again.

The House has been made aware that faith in political parties and institutions is at a low ebb—perhaps the lowest in my lifetime. We have been told that only 12% of the British public say that they trust politicians; political parties are the least trusted of any UK public institution, and trust in Parliament is on the decline. Any measure that helps to rebuild that trust is to be supported, which is why I support this Government Bill to remove hereditary peers. The anachronistic nature of hereditary peerage contributes to the sense not only that the House of Lords is out of touch, but that all our political institutions are out of touch. It feeds a disconnect between the people and their systems of governance and reinforces a belief that politics is the preserve of another elite, the political elite, that lives in its own bubble in Westminster.

Given this urgency to rebuild faith in politics and the need for radical change to that end, it is disappointing that the Government have chosen to be so timid in their ambition. I understand that further changes could be introduced further down the road. Indeed, hon. Members have said that they will try to push for more changes.

For instance, perhaps they could remove the over-80s from the Lords, or retire the 26 bishops who are automatically given a seat.

The Lords themselves have raised the idea of removing those Members who rarely, if ever, attend. But even these tame reforms appear to be too much for this Government at this stage. We need much bolder action.

**Phil Brickell:** I thank the hon. Member for giving way. Does he accept that this is the first immediate measure of modernisation of the other House and that there are a number of other commitments that are enshrined in the manifesto of this Government, which will be seen to in due course in this Parliament?

**Iqbal Mohamed:** I thank the hon. Member for his intervention. I agree that the Bill is a positive step, but it is the smallest of the steps that could have been taken by this Government. As we all know in this place, the promise of jam tomorrow is just a promise and hardly ever materialises. We need much bolder action now. It is bad enough that we are alone in Europe in having a fully unelected second Chamber. It is frankly ridiculous that, with more than 800 Members, it is so large. I will put that into some perspective: the US Senate has 100 elected members, who serve a six-year term, and a third of the membership is elected every two years; the Canadian Senate has 105 members and a mandatory retirement age of 75; and the French Senate has 348 elected members, who serve six-year terms, half of whom are up for election every three years.

The fact that our second Chamber has been allowed to balloon out of all proportion looks more sinister when we consider that last year Lords appointees donated over £50 million to political parties. When it looks like our political institutions are up for grabs to the highest bidder, with jobs for life, is it any wonder that people see it as another private members' club?

5.30 pm

I welcome the amendments that examine alternative models to the House of Lords. It is not difficult to imagine how we can improve on it: there should be no place for big party donors in any second Chamber; it should have a fixed membership; the public should decide who has the right to populate it and be able to hold the members accountable; and it should genuinely reflect the length and breadth of our country, unlike the current House of Lords, which is dominated by peers from the south and south-east.

**Sir John Hayes:** The hon. Gentleman seems to be making a case for an elected second Chamber. Does he imagine that that Chamber would be elected at the same time as this one, in which case it would be a duplicate because the electorate are very unlikely to vote in different ways on the same day, or is he suggesting that it would be elected at a different time, in which case the Chamber that was elected most recently would surely claim greater legitimacy and therefore greater authority?

**Iqbal Mohamed:** The right hon. Member makes a very important point. I, as a new Member of Parliament, am not educated or informed enough to answer it immediately, and I would defer to the House to define how that process would work.

**Dr Murrison:** I am listening with the greatest of respect and interest to the hon. Member. Does he think that there would be virtue and merit in having a unicameral system, a bit like the plan B suggested by my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis), rather than having a competing elected upper House—because this is the primary Chamber in our system?

**Iqbal Mohamed:** Again, I will confess to my lack of knowledge on the detail around the alternative proposed by the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis). I would defer to the House to select an appropriate working model that best represented the people of our country.

**Stephen Gethins** (Arbroath and Broughty Ferry) (SNP): The hon. Member makes a powerful point about listening and having the best system. However, does he agree that having all the power located in one Chamber and not having a division of powers—as exists in other countries—is an idea with merit, which should be looked at? The principle of sovereignty, of course, differs between English law and Scots law, and therefore we need to have a good and proper look at our governance mechanisms.

**Iqbal Mohamed:** That is a very important point. I agree that representation across the four nations is key, and that the balance between the two Houses and how they work together is also very important.

We have seen what happens when people feel alienated from their political system: they can gravitate to those with divisive answers. Unaddressed political grievances combined with a lack of faith in political institutions can be a toxic combination. Reforming the House of Lords so that it is fit and proper is not the sole solution to that problem, but is a key part of the solution. We in this House, as elected officials, have a duty to do the right thing at the right time in the right way to deliver the right outcome for our constituents and our country, and the right thing is to adopt the sensible and democratic amendments that have been tabled, and the right time to do that is now.

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I call the Minister.

**Ellie Reeves:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am grateful to right hon. and hon. Members for taking the time to debate these issues in Committee, and I have listened to their contributions with interest. I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), as well as to other Labour Members, for providing a powerful voice in support of this important legislation.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney), who demonstrated on Second Reading that there is strong cross-party support for this first step in reforming the upper Chamber. I am also grateful to the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson), who has taken a surprising interest in these issues, and to the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart). I stress that we are grateful to all peers, including hereditary peers, who have committed themselves to valuable public service. I reiterate that there is no block to hereditary peers coming back as life peers if their party wishes to nominate them.

What has become clear during the course of this debate is that the Conservatives do not have a coherent position on House of Lords reform. It is not clear whether the Opposition Front Benchers want to retain hereditary peers; it is not clear whether they want faster and further reform; and it is not clear whether they agree with the amendments tabled by the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge. But what is clear is that they cannot agree among themselves about the Bill—more division and chaos.

**Stephen Gethins:** The Minister will be aware that it has been over 100 years since Keir Hardie committed to abolishing the House of Lords so, to be clear, will we have to wait another 100 years for the Labour party to get around to it?

**Ellie Reeves:** We have taken an immediate first step, as set out in our manifesto, to remove hereditary peers from the House of Lords. The hon. Member will know well that there were a number of other commitments in our manifesto, and we are considering the best way to implement them. It is right that we take the time to do that properly.

I will address the amendments. New clause 20, tabled by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), seeks to provide a description of the purpose of the Bill. The Government cannot accept his new clause. His explanatory statement says:

“This new clause describes the purpose of the Bill.”

For his benefit, I am happy to clarify the purpose of the Bill, which should be self-evident to anyone who has taken the time to read it. The Bill is designed to remove the outdated and indefensible right for hereditary peers to sit and vote in the upper Chamber. In 2024, no place in our legislature should be reserved for individuals who are born into certain families. I add that his new clause fails to take into account the presence of the Law Lords. Several such peers sit in the other place, and make a valuable contribution to its proceedings, as Members of the Lords Temporal under the Appellate Jurisdiction Act 1876. His new clause therefore falls at the first hurdle, and I respectfully ask him not to press it to a Division.

Amendment 25, also tabled by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar, seeks to delay the Bill's implementation. Delaying its implementation goes against the Government's manifesto commitments. We were clear that we would implement immediate reform to the second Chamber by removing the outdated and indefensible right for hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords. The Government set out in our manifesto a number of other commitments to reforming the other place, and it is right that we take the time to consider how best to implement them. I therefore ask the hon. Member not to press the new clause to a Division.

Amendments 8 and 9, and new clause 7, which were tabled by the hon. Member for Richmond Park, seek to impose a statutory duty on the Government to take forward proposals to secure a democratic mandate for the House of Lords via the introduction of democratically elected Members. Although the Government agree with the hon. Member that the second Chamber needs reforming, we cannot accept this amendment. This is a focused Bill that delivers the Government's manifesto commitment to bring about an immediate reform by removing the right of the remaining hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords.

[*Ellie Reeves*]

The Government have committed to more fundamental reform through the establishment of an alternative second Chamber that is more representative of the regions and nations of the UK. The Government will consult on proposals in order to provide the public with an opportunity to give their views on how to ensure this alternative Chamber best serves them. Details of the process will be set out in due course, and the House will no doubt take a close interest in that process as it is taken forward. It is right that we take time to consider how best to implement the other manifesto commitments, including our commitment to consult on an alternative second chamber, engaging with parliamentarians and the public where appropriate over the course of this Parliament. With that in mind, I ask the hon. Member to not press her amendments to a Division.

I now turn to new clause 8, tabled by the hon. Member for Richmond Park, and new clauses 9, 10 and 14, tabled by the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire, regarding the role of the House of Lords Appointments Commission in advising the Prime Minister on appointments to the other place. I thank the hon. Members for their interest in reform of the House of Lords' appointment process. I think we are all in agreement that it is vital that peers meet the high standard that the public expect of them, for the good functioning and reputation of the second Chamber and of Parliament more broadly.

Constitutionally, it is for the Prime Minister—accountable to Parliament and the electorate—to make recommendations to the sovereign on new peers. As part of its role, the House of Lords Appointments Commission advises the Prime Minister on the propriety of nominations to the House. In that role, HOLAC considers whether a person is in good standing in the community in general and with the public regulatory authorities in particular, and whether the past conduct of that person would not reasonably be regarded as bringing the House of Lords into disrepute. The Prime Minister of course respects and values the commission's advice, and will place great weight on it when making decisions on peerage recommendations. The hon. Members will be pleased to know that the Government's manifesto committed to improving the appointments process to ensure the quality of new appointments, and to seek to improve the national and regional balance of the second Chamber so that it better reflects the country it serves. The Government are actively considering how this can be achieved.

New clause 14, tabled by the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire, would remove the Prime Minister's role in advising the sovereign on new appointments and hand it completely to the House of Lords Appointments Commission. That would be a significant change to the commission's role, one that would require very careful consideration. This, however, is a focused Bill that delivers the Government's manifesto commitment to bring about an immediate reform by removing the right of the remaining hereditary peers to sit and vote in the other place. I therefore respectfully request that the hon. Members not press their new clauses to a Division.

New clauses 11 and 12, tabled by the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire, relate to Members or prospective Members of the other place who have made registered political loans or donations of over £11,180 since 2001.

The Government believe that the second Chamber is enriched by Members who bring diverse experience in support of the House of Lords' core functions of scrutinising legislation and holding the Government of the day to account. The House of Lords Appointments Commission is responsible for vetting all candidates for propriety, and considers party donations as part of that vetting. I therefore respectfully ask the hon. Member not to press his new clause to a Division.

Amendment 15 and new clause 13, tabled by the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire, would prevent individuals who were Members of the House of Commons in the current or previous Parliament or in the previous five years from being appointed as, or remaining as, Members of the House of Lords. I should declare an interest: my husband, until recently the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead, is now a Member of the other place and is also a Government Whip. This is recorded in the list of Ministers' interests that was published last week.

I thank the hon. Member for tabling those amendments; however, the Government cannot accept them. As I said, the Government are supportive of the inclusion of individuals from all backgrounds, and believe that the other place is enriched by Members who bring diverse experience. That of course includes former Members of this place. Former Members can bring valuable insights to the other place, particularly with their experience of the scrutiny of legislation. Denying such eligibility for a specific time period would be unnecessary and prevent valuable contributions being made. I therefore ask the hon. Member not to press his amendments.

5.45 pm

Amendments 1 and 2 and new clauses 1 and 2, tabled by the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge, relate to the Lords Spiritual. New clause 1 seeks to remove the Lords Spiritual from the House of Lords, and new clause 2 and amendments 1 and 2 are consequential to the substantive clause. While I thank the right hon. Member for tabling the new clause and note the number of signatures attached to it, the Government cannot accept it. This is a focused Bill that delivers on a manifesto commitment to bring about immediate reform.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ellie Reeves:** The Bill has the simple objective of removing the remaining 92 spaces reserved for hereditary peers in the House of Lords, thereby completing the process started in 1999.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ellie Reeves:** I was very generous with my time in my opening remarks and we have had a full debate.

Of course, the Government have committed to wider reforms to the other place, including establishing an alternative second Chamber that is more representative of the regions and nations of the UK. The Government will consult on proposals to seek the input of the British public on how politics can best serve them. However, as I have set out, this Bill is not the vehicle for considering wider changes. I therefore respectfully request that the right hon. Member does not press the amendments.



Amendments 3 and 7 and new clause 3, which were also tabled by the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge, would introduce a retirement age of 80 for Members of the other place. Amendment 4 and new clause 4, which were also tabled by the right hon. Member, seek to impose a participation requirement on all Members of the House of Lords.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ellie Reeves:** The introduction of a retirement age or a participation requirement is not the purpose of the Bill. The right hon. Member, along with other Members of the House, will be aware that the Government included a commitment in their manifesto to introduce a mandatory retirement age, whereby at the end of the Parliament in which a Member reaches 80 years of age, they will be required to retire from the House of Lords. I am sure he is also fully aware that the Labour manifesto included a commitment to introduce a participation requirement for peers. The House of Lords plays an important role in scrutinising legislation and holding the Government of the day to account, and the Government recognise the valuable contribution of many peers. It is important that all Members participate in support of those core functions.

**Sir Gavin Williamson** *rose*—

**Ellie Reeves:** I give way.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. What is being proposed in these clauses is very much in the spirit of the Labour manifesto. I appreciate the fact that the Government are going to whip their party hard in order to defeat their own manifesto and any potential changes, but will she engage with me and other colleagues to discuss how she could implement these changes as part of the Bill in the other House, because there is an appetite for them and it is disappointing, especially on the Lords Spiritual, that they are going to impose a three-line Whip on an issue of conscience?

**Ellie Reeves:** It is good to see the right hon. Member's enthusiasm for reform of the House of Lords; it is a shame that he has only found it now that he is in opposition, not over the past 14 years when his party was in government and could have done something about it. This is an immediate first step, as was set out in our manifesto. We have been clear that we will consult about the implementation of the other measures set out in our manifesto and we will do just that.

We have heard a range of views today on the Government's other manifesto commitments, including exactly how a participation requirement might work. The debate has shown why it is exactly the right thing that the Government take time to consider how best to implement the other commitments, while starting with the immediate reform that the Bill will deliver.

In conclusion, the amendments tabled by Opposition Members are not appropriate for the Bill, which deals with one principal issue—the need to remove the outdated and indefensible right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords. That is our objective and we are focused on delivering it. The Government intend to deliver the other manifesto commitments to bring about a smaller and more active second Chamber. We are also

committed to replacing the other place with an alternative second Chamber that is more representative of the regions and nations. As I said, we will consult on proposals and seek the input of the British public on how politics can best serve them.

Reform of the House of Lords is long overdue and essential. The Government are committed to delivering those reforms, and passing this vital legislation is the first step on that journey. In that spirit, I commend the Bill to the Committee.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 1 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 2 and 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 4

### EXTENT AND COMMENCEMENT

*Amendment proposed:* 25, page 2, line 16, leave out from “force” to end of line 17 and insert

“only when the House of Commons has agreed a resolution which—

- (a) endorses the conclusions of the report a joint committee appointed for the purpose specified in subsection (3A), and
- (b) determines accordingly that this Act shall come into force at the end of the Session of Parliament in which this resolution is passed.

(3A) The purpose of the joint committee of the House of Commons and the House of Lords referred to in subsection (3) is to consider and report upon the Government's stated plans for reform of the House of Lords, including—

- (a) the removal of the right of excepted hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords,
- (b) the introduction of a mandatory retirement age for members of the House of Lords,
- (c) a new participation threshold to enable continuing membership of the House of Lords,
- (d) changes to the circumstances in which disgraced members of the House of Lords can be removed, and
- (e) changes to the process of appointment of members of the House of Lords.”—(*Alex Burghart.*)

*This amendment provides that the Bill would only come into effect after the report of a joint committee on wider reforms of the composition of the House of Lords has been approved by a resolution of the House of Commons.*

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The Committee divided:* Ayes 98, Noes 376.

**Division No. 38]**

**[5.50 pm]**

### AYES

Allister, Jim  
Andrew, rh Stuart  
Argar, rh Edward  
Bacon, Gareth  
Baldwin, Dame Harriett  
Barclay, rh Steve  
Bedford, Mr Peter  
Bhatti, Saqib  
Blackman, Bob  
Bool, Sarah  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, rh Dame Karen  
Brandreth, Aphra  
Braverman, rh Suella  
Burghart, Alex  
Campbell, Mr Gregory

Carlidge, James  
Chope, Sir Christopher  
Cleverly, rh Mr James  
Cocking, Lewis  
Cooper, John  
Costa, Alberto  
Coutinho, rh Claire  
Cross, Harriet  
Davies, Gareth  
Davies, Mims  
Davis, rh David  
Dewhirst, Charlie  
Dinenage, Dame Caroline  
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver  
Easton, Alex  
Evans, Dr Luke

Fox, Sir Ashley  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Freeman, George  
French, Mr Louie  
Fuller, Richard  
Gale, rh Sir Roger  
Garnier, Mark  
Glen, rh John  
Grant, Helen  
Griffiths, Alison  
Harris, Rebecca  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Holden, rh Mr Richard  
Holmes, Paul  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
Hunt, rh Jeremy  
Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
Jenrick, rh Robert  
Johnson, Dr Caroline  
Jopp, Lincoln  
Kearns, Alicia  
Kruger, Danny  
Lam, Katie  
Lamont, John  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Lockhart, Carla  
Lowe, Rupert  
Mak, Alan  
Malthouse, rh Kit  
Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
Moore, Robbie  
Morrissey, Joy  
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew

Obese-Jecty, Ben  
O'Brien, Neil  
Paul, Rebecca  
Philp, rh Chris  
Pritchard, rh Mark  
Raja, Shivani  
Rankin, Jack  
Reed, David  
Robertson, Joe  
Robinson, rh Gavin  
Rosindell, Andrew  
Shannon, Jim  
Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
Smith, Greg  
Smith, rh Sir Julian  
Smith, Rebecca  
Snowden, Mr Andrew  
Stafford, Gregory  
Stephenson, Blake  
Swann, Robin  
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
Thomas, Bradley  
Timothy, Nick  
Trott, rh Laura  
Tugendhat, rh Tom  
Vickers, Martin  
Vickers, Matt  
Whately, Helen  
Wild, James  
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
Wood, Mike

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Jerome Mayhew and**  
**David Simmonds**

### NOES

Abbott, Jack  
Adam, Shockat  
Ahmed, Dr Zubir  
Akehurst, Luke  
Alaba, Mr Bayo  
Aldridge, Dan  
Alexander, Mr Douglas  
Alexander, Heidi  
Al-Hassan, Sadik  
Ali, Rushanara  
Ali, Tahir  
Anderson, Callum  
Anderson, Fleur  
Antoniazzi, Tonia  
Arthur, Dr Scott  
Asser, James  
Athwal, Jas  
Atkinson, Lewis  
Bailey, Mr Calvin  
Bailey, Olivia  
Baines, David  
Baker, Alex  
Baker, Richard  
Ballinger, Alex  
Bance, Antonia  
Barker, Paula  
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex  
Baxter, Johanna  
Beales, Danny  
Beavers, Lorraine  
Begum, Apsana  
Bell, Torsten  
Berry, Siân  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Billington, Ms Polly

Blackman, Kirsty  
Blake, Olivia  
Blake, Rachel  
Bloore, Chris  
Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote*  
*cast by Chris Elmore*)  
Bonavia, Kevin  
Botterill, Jade  
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena  
Brash, Mr Jonathan  
Brickell, Phil  
Buckley, Julia  
Burgon, Richard  
Burke, Maureen  
Burton-Sampson, David  
Butler, Dawn  
Byrne, Ian  
Byrne, rh Liam  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Caliskan, Nesil  
Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
Campbell, Irene  
Campbell, Juliet  
Campbell-Savours, Markus  
Carling, Sam  
Carns, Al  
Champion, Sarah  
Charalambous, Bambos  
Charters, Mr Luke  
Chowns, Ellie  
Clark, Feryal  
Coleman, Ben  
Collier, Jacob  
Collins, Tom  
Conlon, Liam

Coombes, Sarah  
Cooper, Andrew  
Cooper, Dr Beccy  
Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
Costigan, Deirdre  
Cox, Pam  
Coyle, Neil  
Craft, Jen  
Creagh, Mary  
Crichton, Torcuil  
Curtis, Chris  
Daby, Janet  
Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
Darlington, Emily  
Davies, Ann  
Davies, Paul  
Davies, Shaun  
Davies-Jones, Alex  
De Cordova, Marsha  
Dean, Josh  
Dearden, Kate  
Denyer, Carla  
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
Dickson, Jim  
Dixon, Anna  
Dixon, Samantha  
Dodds, rh Anneliese  
Dollimore, Helena  
Doogan, Dave  
Doughty, Stephen  
Downie, Graeme  
Duffield, Rosie  
Duncan-Jordan, Neil  
Eagle, Dame Angela  
Eagle, rh Maria  
Eastwood, Colum  
Eccles, Cat  
Edwards, Lauren  
Edwards, Sarah  
Efford, Clive  
Egan, Damien  
Ellis, Maya  
Elmore, Chris  
Entwistle, Kirith  
Eshalomi, Florence  
Esterson, Bill  
Evans, Chris  
Fahnbulleh, Miatta  
Farnsworth, Linsey  
Fenton-Glynn, Josh  
Ferguson, Mark  
Ferguson, Patricia  
Fleet, Natalie  
Flynn, rh Stephen  
Foody, Emma  
Fookes, Catherine  
Foster, Mr Paul  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Francis, Daniel  
Frith, Mr James  
Furniss, Gill  
Gardner, Dr Allison  
Gelder, Anna  
Gemmell, Alan  
German, Gill  
Gethins, Stephen  
Gilbert, Tracy  
Gill, Preet Kaur  
Gittins, Becky  
Glindon, Mary  
Goldsborough, Ben

Gosling, Jodie  
Gould, Georgia  
Grady, John  
Greenwood, Lilian  
Griffith, Dame Nia  
Hack, Amanda  
Haigh, rh Louise  
Hall, Sarah  
Hamilton, Fabian  
Hamilton, Paulette  
Hanna, Claire  
Hardy, Emma  
Harris, Carolyn  
Hatton, Lloyd  
Hayes, Helen  
Hayes, Tom  
Hazelgrove, Claire  
Hillier, Dame Meg  
Hinchliff, Chris  
Hinder, Jonathan  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hopkins, Rachel  
Hughes, Claire  
Hume, Alison  
Huq, Dr Rupa  
Hurley, Patrick  
Hussain, Imran  
Ingham, Leigh  
Irons, Natasha  
Jameson, Sally  
Jarvis, Dan  
Jermey, Terry  
Jogee, Adam  
Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
Johnson, Kim  
Jones, rh Darren  
Jones, Gerald  
Jones, Louise  
Jones, Ruth  
Josan, Gurinder Singh  
Joseph, Sojan  
Juss, Warinder  
Kane, Chris  
Kaur, Satvir  
Kendall, rh Liz  
Khan, Ayoub  
Khan, Naushabah  
Kinnock, Stephen  
Kirkham, Jayne  
Kitchen, Gen  
Kumar, Sonia  
Kumaran, Uma  
Kyle, rh Peter  
Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
Lake, Ben  
Lamb, Peter  
Law, Chris  
Law, Noah  
Leadbeater, Kim  
Leadbitter, Graham  
Leishman, Brian  
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
Lewin, Andrew  
Lewis, Clive  
Lightwood, Simon  
Logan, Seamus  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
MacAlister, Josh  
Macdonald, Alice  
MacNae, Andy

Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, rh Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mayer, Alex  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McCluskey, Martin  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McDougall, Blair  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McFadden, rh Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McIntyre, Alex  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McKenna, Kevin  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Medi, Llinos  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 Minns, Ms Julie  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Mohamed, Iqbal  
 Moon, Perran  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Mullane, Margaret  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, Chris  
 Murray, James  
 Murray, Katrina  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Nash, Pamela  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Norris, Dan  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Pakes, Andrew  
 Patrick, Matthew  
 Payne, Michael  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Jon (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillipson, rh Bridget

Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Powell, Joe  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Race, Steve  
 Ramsay, Adrian  
 Rand, Mr Connor  
 Ranger, Andrew  
 Rayner, rh Angela  
 Reader, Mike  
 Reed, rh Steve  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reid, Joani  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rigby, Lucy  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Russell, Mrs Sarah  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sackman, Sarah  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Scrogg, Michelle  
 Sowards, Mr Mark  
 Simons, Josh  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, David  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevens, rh Jo  
 Stevenson, Kenneth  
 Stone, Will  
 Strathern, Alistair  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
 Swallow, Peter  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison  
 Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thomas, Fred  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tufnell, Henry  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Karl  
 Turner, Laurence

Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vince, Chris  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Chris  
 Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Webb, Chris  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 Western, Andrew  
 Western, Matt  
 Wheeler, Michael

Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Williams, David  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrighting, Rosie  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Yemm, Steve  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**

Anna Turley and  
 Anna McMorrin

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Clauses 4 and 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

**New Clause 1****EXCLUSION OF BISHOPS**

“(1) No-one shall be a member of the House of Lords by virtue of being a bishop or Archbishop of the Church of England.

(2) No bishop or Archbishop of the Church of England is entitled to receive, in that capacity, a writ of summons to attend, or sit and vote in, the House of Lords.

(3) Nothing in this section prevents a person who is, or has been, a bishop or Archbishop of the Church of England from receiving, and exercising the entitlements under, a peerage for life in accordance with section 1 of the Life Peerages Act 1958.

(4) Nothing in this section prevents a person who is, or has been, a bishop or Archbishop of the Church of England from being permitted to enter the House of Lords for the purpose only of leading prayers in accordance with arrangements made by that House.”—(*Sir Gavin Williamson.*)

*This new clause provides that bishops of the Church of England will no longer be entitled to membership of the House of Lords.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

*Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.*

*The Committee divided: Ayes 41, Noes 378.*

**Division No. 39]****[6.5 pm****AYES**

Adam, Shokat  
 Allister, Jim  
 Barclay, rh Steve  
 Bedford, Mr Peter  
 Berry, Siân  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackman, Kirsty  
 Chowns, Ellie  
 Cocking, Lewis  
 Cooper, John  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Cross, Harriet  
 Davies, Ann  
 Davis, rh David  
 Denyer, Carla  
 Doogan, Dave  
 Eastwood, Colum  
 Flynn, rh Stephen  
 Fox, Sir Ashley  
 Gethins, Stephen  
 Gordon, Tom  
 Hanna, Claire  
 Khan, Ayoub

Lake, Ben  
 Lamont, John  
 Law, Chris  
 Leadbitter, Graham  
 Logan, Seamus  
 Medi, Llinos  
 van Mierlo, Freddie  
 Mohamed, Iqbal  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Obese-Jecty, Ben  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Paul, Rebecca  
 Ramsay, Adrian  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Snowden, Mr Andrew  
 Stephenson, Blake  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wishart, Pete

**Tellers for the Ayes:**

Simon Hoare and  
 Nick Timothy



## NOES

Abbott, Jack  
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir  
 Akehurst, Luke  
 Alaba, Mr Bayo  
 Aldridge, Dan  
 Alexander, Mr Douglas  
 Alexander, Heidi  
 Al-Hassan, Sadik  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Ali, Tahir  
 Anderson, Callum  
 Anderson, Fleur  
 Antoniazzi, Tonia  
 Arthur, Dr Scott  
 Asser, James  
 Athwal, Jas  
 Atkinson, Lewis  
 Bailey, Mr Calvin  
 Bailey, Olivia  
 Baines, David  
 Baker, Alex  
 Baker, Richard  
 Ballinger, Alex  
 Bance, Antonia  
 Barker, Paula  
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex  
 Baxter, Johanna  
 Beales, Danny  
 Beavers, Lorraine  
 Begum, Apsana  
 Bell, Torsten  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Billington, Ms Polly  
 Blake, Olivia  
 Blake, Rachel  
 Bloore, Chris  
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote*  
*cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Bonavia, Kevin  
 Botterill, Jade  
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena  
 Brash, Mr Jonathan  
 Brickell, Phil  
 Buckley, Julia  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Burke, Maureen  
 Burton-Sampson, David  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, Ian  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Caliskan, Nesil  
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Campbell, Irene  
 Campbell, Juliet  
 Campbell-Savours, Markus  
 Carling, Sam  
 Carns, Al  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Charters, Mr Luke  
 Chope, Sir Christopher  
 Clark, Feryal  
 Cleverly, rh Mr James  
 Coleman, Ben  
 Collier, Jacob  
 Collins, Tom  
 Conlon, Liam  
 Coombes, Sarah  
 Cooper, Andrew  
 Cooper, Dr Beccy  
 Costigan, Deirdre  
 Cox, Pam  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Craft, Jen  
 Crichton, Torcuil  
 Curtis, Chris  
 Daby, Janet  
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
 Darlington, Emily  
 Davies, Paul  
 Davies, Shaun  
 Davies-Jones, Alex  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 Dean, Josh  
 Dearden, Kate  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dickson, Jim  
 Dixon, Anna  
 Dodds, rh Anneliese  
 Dollimore, Helena  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Downie, Graeme  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eagle, rh Maria  
 Easton, Alex  
 Eccles, Cat  
 Edwards, Lauren  
 Edwards, Sarah  
 Efford, Clive  
 Egan, Damien  
 Ellis, Maya  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Entwistle, Kirith  
 Eshalomi, Florence  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta  
 Farage, Nigel  
 Farnsworth, Linsey  
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh  
 Ferguson, Mark  
 Ferguson, Patricia  
 Fleet, Natalie  
 Foody, Emma  
 Fookes, Catherine  
 Foster, Mr Paul  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Francis, Daniel  
 Freeman, George  
 Frith, Mr James  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Gardner, Dr Allison  
 Gelderd, Anna  
 Gemmell, Alan  
 German, Gill  
 Gilbert, Tracy  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Gittins, Becky  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Goldsborough, Ben  
 Gosling, Jodie  
 Gould, Georgia  
 Grady, John  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Griffith, Dame Nia  
 Griffiths, Alison  
 Hack, Amanda

Haigh, rh Louise  
 Hall, Sarah  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Paulette  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hatton, Lloyd  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Hayes, Tom  
 Hazelgrove, Claire  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hinchliff, Chris  
 Hinder, Jonathan  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hughes, Claire  
 Hume, Alison  
 Hunt, rh Jeremy  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hurley, Patrick  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Ingham, Leigh  
 Irons, Natasha  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jermy, Terry  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, rh Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Josan, Gurinder Singh  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kaur, Satvir  
 Kendall, rh Liz  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kitchen, Gen  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kumaran, Uma  
 Kyle, rh Peter  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Leishman, Brian  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Lockhart, Carla  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 MacAlister, Josh  
 Macdonald, Alice  
 MacNae, Andy  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, rh Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mayer, Alex  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McCarthy, Kerry

McCluskey, Martin  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McDougall, Blair  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McFadden, rh Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McIntyre, Alex  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McKenna, Kevin  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty (*Proxy vote*  
*cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 Minns, Ms Julie  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Moon, Perran  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Mullane, Margaret  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, Chris  
 Murray, James  
 Murray, Katrina  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Nash, Pamela  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Pakes, Andrew  
 Patrick, Matthew  
 Payne, Michael  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Jon (*Proxy vote cast*  
*by Chris Elmore*)  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, rh Bridget  
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Powell, Joe  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Pritchard, rh Mark  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Race, Steve  
 Rand, Mr Connor  
 Ranger, Andrew  
 Rankin, Jack  
 Rayner, rh Angela  
 Reader, Mike  
 Reed, David

Reed, rh Steve	Taylor, Alison
Reeves, Ellie	Taylor, David
Reid, Joani	Taylor, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma	Thomas, Fred
Reynolds, rh Jonathan	Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Rhodes, Martin	Thompson, Adam
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell	Tidball, Dr Marie
Richards, Jake	Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny	Toale, Jessica
Rigby, Lucy	Tomlinson, Dan
Robertson, Dave	Trickett, Jon
Robinson, rh Gavin	Tufnell, Henry
Roca, Tim	Tugendhat, rh Tom
Rodda, Matt	Turmaine, Matt
Rosindell, Andrew	Turner, Karl
Rushworth, Sam	Turner, Laurence
Russell, Mrs Sarah	Twigg, Derek
Rutland, Tom	Twist, Liz
Ryan, Oliver	Uppal, Harpreet
Sackman, Sarah	Vaughan, Tony
Sandher, Dr Jeevun	Vickers, Martin
Scrogham, Michelle	Vince, Chris
Sewards, Mr Mark	Wakeford, Christian
Shannon, Jim	Walker, Imogen
Simons, Josh	Ward, Chris
Slaughter, Andy	Ward, Melanie
Slinger, John	Waugh, Paul
Smith, Cat	Webb, Chris
Smith, David	Welsh, Michelle
Smith, Jeff	Western, Andrew
Smith, Nick	Western, Matt
Smith, Rebecca	Wheeler, Michael
Smyth, Karin	Whitby, John
Snell, Gareth	White, Jo
Sobel, Alex	White, Katie
Stafford, Gregory	Williams, David
Stainbank, Euan	Witherden, Steve
Stevens, rh Jo	Woodcock, Sean
Stevenson, Kenneth	Woodcock, Sean
Stone, Will	Wrighting, Rosie
Strathern, Alistair	Yang, Yuan
Strickland, Alan	Yasin, Mohammad
Sullivan, Dr Lauren	Yemm, Steve
Swallow, Peter	Zeichner, Daniel
Swann, Robin	
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond	<b>Tellers for the Noes:</b>
Tami, rh Mark	Anna Turley and
Tapp, Mike	Anna McMorrin

*Question accordingly negated.*

### New Clause 7

#### DUTY TO TAKE FORWARD PROPOSALS FOR DEMOCRATIC MANDATE FOR HOUSE OF LORDS

“(1) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to take forward proposals to secure a democratic mandate for the House of Lords.

(2) In pursuance of the duty under subsection (1), the Secretary of State must carry out the steps set out in subsections (3), (5), (6) and (7).

(3) Within twelve months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before each House of Parliament a consultation paper on methods for introducing directly elected members in the House of Lords.

(4) After laying the consultation paper under subsection (3), the Secretary of State must seek the views on the matters covered by that paper of—

- (a) each party and group in the House of Lords,

- (b) each political party represented in the House of Commons,
- (c) the Scottish Government,
- (d) the Welsh Government,
- (e) the Northern Ireland Executive,
- (f) local authorities in the United Kingdom,
- (g) representative organisations for local authorities in the United Kingdom, and
- (h) such other persons and bodies as the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

(5) Within sixteen months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before each House of Parliament a report on responses to the consultation.

(6) Within eighteen months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before each House of Parliament a draft Bill containing legislative proposals on each of the matters mentioned in subsection (3).”—(Sarah Olney.)

*This new clause imposes a duty on Ministers to take forward proposals to secure a democratic mandate for the House of Lords through introduction of directly elected members.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

*Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.*

*The Committee divided: Ayes 93, Noes 355.*

**Division No. 40]**

**[6.19 pm**

#### AYES

Adam, Shockat	Harding, Monica
Amos, Mr Gideon	Heylings, Pippa
Aquarone, Steff	Hobhouse, Wera
Babarinde, Josh	Jardine, Christine
Bennett, Alison	Jarvis, Liz
Berry, Siân	Jones, Clive
Blackman, Kirsty	Khan, Ayoub
Brewer, Alex	Kohler, Mr Paul
Brown-Fuller, Jess	Lake, Ben
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Law, Chris
Cane, Charlotte	Leadbitter, Graham
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Lockhart, Carla
Chadwick, David	Logan, Seamus
Chamberlain, Wendy	MacDonald, Mr Angus
Chambers, Dr Danny	Maguire, Ben
Chowns, Ellie	Maguire, Helen
Coghlan, Chris	Martin, Mike
Collins, Victoria	Mathew, Brian
Cooper, Daisy	Maynard, Charlie
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Medi, Llinos
Darling, Steve	van Mierlo, Freddie
Davey, rh Ed	Miller, Calum
Davies, Ann	Milne, John
Dean, Bobby	Mohamed, Iqbal
Denyer, Carla	Moran, Layla
Doogan, Dave	Morello, Edward
Dyke, Sarah	Morgan, Helen
Eastwood, Colum	Morrison, Mr Tom
Farage, Nigel	Murray, Susan
Farron, Tim	O'Hara, Brendan
Flynn, rh Stephen	Olney, Sarah
Foord, Richard	Perteghella, Manuela
Forster, Mr Will	Pinkerton, Dr Al
Franklin, Zöe	Ramsay, Adrian
George, Andrew	Robinson, rh Gavin
Gethins, Stephen	Roome, Ian
Gibson, Sarah	Sabine, Anna
Gilmour, Rachel	Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Glover, Olly	Shannon, Jim
Goldman, Marie	Slade, Vikki
Gordon, Tom	Smart, Lisa
Green, Sarah	Sollom, Ian
Hanna, Claire	Stone, Jamie

Taylor, Luke  
Thomas, Cameron  
Voaden, Caroline  
Wilkinson, Max  
Wishart, Pete

Wrigley, Martin  
Young, Claire  
**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Mr Lee Dillon and**  
**Tessa Munt**

**NOES**

Abbott, Jack  
Ahmed, Dr Zubir  
Akehurst, Luke  
Alaba, Mr Bayo  
Aldridge, Dan  
Alexander, Mr Douglas  
Alexander, Heidi  
Al-Hassan, Sadik  
Ali, Rushanara  
Ali, Tahir  
Allister, Jim  
Anderson, Callum  
Anderson, Fleur  
Antoniazzi, Tonia  
Arthur, Dr Scott  
Asser, James  
Athwal, Jas  
Atkinson, Lewis  
Bailey, Mr Calvin  
Bailey, Olivia  
Baines, David  
Baker, Alex  
Baker, Richard  
Ballinger, Alex  
Bance, Antonia  
Barker, Paula  
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex  
Baxter, Johanna  
Beales, Danny  
Beavers, Lorraine  
Begum, Apsana  
Bell, Torsten  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Billington, Ms Polly  
Blake, Olivia  
Blake, Rachel  
Bloore, Chris  
Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote*  
*cast by Chris Elmore*)  
Bonavia, Kevin  
Botterill, Jade  
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena  
Brash, Mr Jonathan  
Brickell, Phil  
Buckley, Julia  
Burgon, Richard  
Burke, Maureen  
Burton-Sampson, David  
Butler, Dawn  
Byrne, Ian  
Byrne, rh Liam  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Caliskan, Nesil  
Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
Campbell, Irene  
Campbell, Juliet  
Campbell-Savours, Markus  
Carling, Sam  
Carns, Al  
Champion, Sarah  
Charalambous, Bambos  
Charters, Mr Luke  
Clark, Feryal  
Coleman, Ben

Collier, Jacob  
Collins, Tom  
Conlon, Liam  
Coombes, Sarah  
Cooper, Andrew  
Cooper, Dr Beccy  
Costigan, Deirdre  
Cox, Pam  
Coyle, Neil  
Craft, Jen  
Crichton, Torcuil  
Curtis, Chris  
Daby, Janet  
Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
Darlington, Emily  
Davies, Paul  
Davies, Shaun  
Davies-Jones, Alex  
De Cordova, Marsha  
Dean, Josh  
Dearden, Kate  
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
Dickson, Jim  
Dixon, Anna  
Dixon, Samantha  
Dodds, rh Anneliese  
Dollimore, Helena  
Doughty, Stephen  
Downie, Graeme  
Duffield, Rosie  
Duncan-Jordan, Neil  
Eagle, Dame Angela  
Eagle, rh Maria  
Easton, Alex  
Eccles, Cat  
Edwards, Lauren  
Edwards, Sarah  
Efford, Clive  
Egan, Damien  
Ellis, Maya  
Elmore, Chris  
Entwistle, Kirith  
Eshalomi, Florence  
Esterson, Bill  
Evans, Chris  
Fahnbulleh, Miatta  
Farnsworth, Linsey  
Fenton-Glynn, Josh  
Ferguson, Mark  
Ferguson, Patricia  
Fleet, Natalie  
Foody, Emma  
Fookes, Catherine  
Foster, Mr Paul  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Francis, Daniel  
Frith, Mr James  
Furniss, Gill  
Gardner, Dr Allison  
Gelder, Anna  
Gemmell, Alan  
German, Gill  
Gilbert, Tracy  
Gill, Preet Kaur

Gittins, Becky  
Glendon, Mary  
Goldsborough, Ben  
Gosling, Jodie  
Gould, Georgia  
Grady, John  
Greenwood, Lilian  
Griffith, Dame Nia  
Hack, Amanda  
Haigh, rh Louise  
Hall, Sarah  
Hamilton, Fabian  
Hamilton, Paulette  
Hardy, Emma  
Harris, Carolyn  
Hatton, Lloyd  
Hayes, Helen  
Hayes, Tom  
Hazelgrove, Claire  
Hillier, Dame Meg  
Hinchliff, Chris  
Hinder, Jonathan  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hopkins, Rachel  
Hughes, Claire  
Hume, Alison  
Huq, Dr Rupa  
Hurley, Patrick  
Hussain, Imran  
Ingham, Leigh  
Irons, Natasha  
Jameson, Sally  
Jarvis, Dan  
Jermey, Terry  
Jogee, Adam  
Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
Johnson, Kim  
Jones, rh Darren  
Jones, Gerald  
Jones, Louise  
Jones, Ruth  
Josan, Gurinder Singh  
Joseph, Sojan  
Juss, Warinder  
Kane, Chris  
Kaur, Satvir  
Kendall, rh Liz  
Khan, Naushabah  
Kinnock, Stephen  
Kirkham, Jayne  
Kitchen, Gen  
Kumar, Sonia  
Kumaran, Uma  
Kyle, rh Peter  
Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
Lamb, Peter  
Law, Noah  
Leadbeater, Kim  
Leishman, Brian  
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
Lewin, Andrew  
Lewis, Clive  
Lightwood, Simon  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
MacAlister, Josh  
Macdonald, Alice  
MacNae, Andy  
Madders, Justin  
Mahmood, rh Shabana  
Malhotra, Seema  
Martin, Amanda  
Maskell, Rachael

Mather, Keir  
Mayer, Alex  
McAllister, Douglas  
McCarthy, Kerry  
McCluskey, Martin  
McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
McDonald, Andy  
McDonald, Chris  
McDonnell, rh John  
McDougall, Blair  
McEvoy, Lola  
McFadden, rh Pat  
McGovern, Alison  
McIntyre, Alex  
McKee, Gordon  
McKenna, Kevin  
McKinnell, Catherine  
McMahon, Jim  
McNally, Frank  
McNeill, Kirsty (*Proxy vote*  
*cast by Chris Elmore*)  
Midgley, Anneliese  
Minns, Ms Julie  
Mishra, Navendu  
Mohamed, Abtisam  
Moon, Perran  
Morden, Jessica  
Morgan, Stephen  
Morris, Grahame  
Morris, Joe  
Mullane, Margaret  
Murphy, Luke  
Murray, Chris  
Murray, James  
Murray, Katrina  
Myer, Luke  
Naish, James  
Naismith, Connor  
Narayan, Kanishka  
Nash, Pamela  
Newbury, Josh  
Niblett, Samantha  
Nichols, Charlotte  
Norris, Alex  
Norris, Dan  
Onn, Melanie  
Onwurah, Chi  
Osamor, Kate  
Osborne, Kate  
Osborne, Tristan  
Owen, Sarah  
Paffey, Darren  
Pakes, Andrew  
Patrick, Matthew  
Payne, Michael  
Pearce, Jon (*Proxy vote cast*  
*by Chris Elmore*)  
Pennycook, Matthew  
Perkins, Mr Toby  
Phillips, Jess  
Phillipson, rh Bridget  
Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
Pitcher, Lee  
Platt, Jo  
Powell, Joe  
Poynton, Gregor  
Prinsley, Peter  
Quigley, Mr Richard  
Race, Steve  
Rand, Mr Connor  
Ranger, Andrew  
Rayner, rh Angela



Reader, Mike  
 Reed, rh Steve  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reid, Joani  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rigby, Lucy  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Russell, Mrs Sarah  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sackman, Sarah  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Scrogham, Michelle  
 Sewards, Mr Mark  
 Simons, Josh  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, David  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevens, rh Jo  
 Stevenson, Kenneth  
 Stone, Will  
 Strathern, Alistair  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
 Swallow, Peter  
 Swann, Robin  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison

Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thomas, Fred  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tuftnell, Henry  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Karl  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vince, Chris  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Chris  
 Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Webb, Chris  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 Western, Andrew  
 Western, Matt  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Williams, David  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrighting, Rosie  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Yemm, Steve  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**

Anna Turley and  
 Anna McMorrin

*Question accordingly negated.*

**New Clause 20****PURPOSE OF THIS ACT**

“Whereas it has not been expedient at present for the Government to bring forward legislation to reform the House of Lords, the purpose of this Act is to provide that the Lords Temporal are peers appointed under section 1 of the Life Peerages Act 1958 on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.”—(*Alex Burghart.*)

*This new clause describes the purpose of the Bill.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

*Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.*

*The Committee divided: Ayes 98, Noes 375.*

**Division No. 41]****[6.34 pm]****AYES**

Allister, Jim  
 Andrew, rh Stuart  
 Argar, rh Edward  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett  
 Bedford, Mr Peter  
 Bhatti, Saqib  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Bool, Sarah  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Brandreth, Aphra  
 Braverman, rh Suella  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Chope, Sir Christopher

Cleverly, rh Mr James  
 Cocking, Lewis  
 Cooper, John  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Coutinho, rh Claire  
 Cross, Harriet  
 Davies, Gareth  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davis, rh David  
 Dewhurst, Charlie  
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline  
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver  
 Easton, Alex  
 Evans, Dr Luke  
 Farage, Nigel  
 Fox, Sir Ashley  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Freeman, George  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Glen, rh John  
 Grant, Helen  
 Griffiths, Alison  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Holden, rh Mr Richard  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hunt, rh Jeremy  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Jopp, Lincoln  
 Kearns, Alicia  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Lam, Katie  
 Lamont, John  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Lockhart, Carla

Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, rh Kit  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Obese-Jecty, Ben  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Paul, Rebecca  
 Philp, rh Chris  
 Pritchard, rh Mark  
 Raja, Shivani  
 Rankin, Jack  
 Reed, David  
 Robertson, Joe  
 Robinson, rh Gavin  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Shannan, Jim  
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, rh Sir Julian  
 Smith, Rebecca  
 Snowden, Mr Andrew  
 Spencer, Patrick  
 Stafford, Gregory  
 Stephenson, Blake  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Swann, Robin  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Thomas, Bradley  
 Timothy, Nick  
 Trott, rh Laura  
 Tugendhat, rh Tom  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wild, James  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wood, Mike

**Tellers for the Ayes:**

Jerome Mayhew and  
 David Simmonds

**NOES**

Abbott, Jack  
 Adam, Shockat  
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir  
 Akehurst, Luke  
 Alaba, Mr Bayo  
 Aldridge, Dan  
 Alexander, Mr Douglas  
 Alexander, Heidi  
 Al-Hassan, Sadik  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Ali, Tahir  
 Anderson, Callum  
 Anderson, Fleur  
 Antoniazzi, Tonia  
 Arthur, Dr Scott  
 Asser, James  
 Athwal, Jas  
 Atkinson, Lewis  
 Bailey, Mr Calvin  
 Bailey, Olivia  
 Baines, David  
 Baker, Alex  
 Baker, Richard  
 Ballinger, Alex  
 Bance, Antonia  
 Barker, Paula  
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex  
 Baxter, Johanna  
 Beales, Danny  
 Beavers, Lorraine  
 Begum, Apsana  
 Bell, Torsten  
 Berry, Siân  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Billington, Ms Polly  
 Blackman, Kirsty  
 Blake, Olivia  
 Blake, Rachel  
 Bloore, Chris  
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Bonavia, Kevin  
 Botterill, Jade  
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena  
 Brash, Mr Jonathan  
 Brickell, Phil  
 Buckley, Julia  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Burke, Maureen  
 Burton-Sampson, David  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, Ian

Byrne, rh Liam  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Caliskan, Nesil  
Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
Campbell, Irene  
Campbell, Juliet  
Campbell-Savours, Markus  
Carling, Sam  
Carns, Al  
Champion, Sarah  
Charalambous, Bambos  
Charters, Mr Luke  
Chowns, Ellie  
Clark, Feryal  
Coleman, Ben  
Collier, Jacob  
Collins, Tom  
Conlon, Liam  
Coombes, Sarah  
Cooper, Andrew  
Cooper, Dr Beccy  
Costigan, Deirdre  
Cox, Pam  
Coyle, Neil  
Craft, Jen  
Crichton, Torcuil  
Curtis, Chris  
Daby, Janet  
Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
Darlington, Emily  
Davies, Ann  
Davies, Paul  
Davies, Shaun  
Davies-Jones, Alex  
De Cordova, Marsha  
Dean, Josh  
Dearden, Kate  
Denyer, Carla  
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
Dickson, Jim  
Dixon, Anna  
Dixon, Samantha  
Dodds, rh Anneliese  
Dollimore, Helena  
Doogan, Dave  
Doughty, Stephen  
Downie, Graeme  
Duffield, Rosie  
Duncan-Jordan, Neil  
Eagle, Dame Angela  
Eagle, rh Maria  
Eastwood, Colum  
Eccles, Cat  
Edwards, Lauren  
Edwards, Sarah  
Efford, Clive  
Egan, Damien  
Ellis, Maya  
Elmore, Chris  
Entwistle, Kirith  
Eshalomi, Florence  
Esterson, Bill  
Evans, Chris  
Fahnbulleh, Miatta  
Farnsworth, Linsey  
Fenton-Glynn, Josh  
Ferguson, Mark  
Ferguson, Patricia  
Fleet, Natalie  
Flynn, rh Stephen  
Foody, Emma  
Fookes, Catherine  
Foster, Mr Paul  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Francis, Daniel  
Frith, Mr James  
Furniss, Gill  
Gardner, Dr Allison  
Gelder, Anna  
Gemmell, Alan  
German, Gill  
Gethins, Stephen  
Gilbert, Tracy  
Gill, Preet Kaur  
Gittins, Becky  
Glindon, Mary  
Goldsborough, Ben  
Gosling, Jodie  
Gould, Georgia  
Grady, John  
Greenwood, Lilian  
Griffith, Dame Nia  
Hack, Amanda  
Haigh, rh Louise  
Hall, Sarah  
Hamilton, Fabian  
Hamilton, Paulette  
Hanna, Claire  
Hardy, Emma  
Harris, Carolyn  
Hatton, Lloyd  
Hayes, Helen  
Hayes, Tom  
Hazelgrove, Claire  
Hillier, Dame Meg  
Hinchliff, Chris  
Hinder, Jonathan  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hopkins, Rachel  
Hughes, Claire  
Hume, Alison  
Huq, Dr Rupa  
Hurley, Patrick  
Hussain, Imran  
Ingham, Leigh  
Irons, Natasha  
Jameson, Sally  
Jarvis, Dan  
Jermy, Terry  
Jogee, Adam  
Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
Johnson, Kim  
Jones, rh Darren  
Jones, Gerald  
Jones, Louise  
Jones, Ruth  
Josan, Gurinder Singh  
Joseph, Sojan  
Juss, Warinder  
Kane, Chris  
Kaur, Satvir  
Kendall, rh Liz  
Khan, Ayoub  
Khan, Naushabah  
Kinnock, Stephen  
Kirkham, Jayne  
Kitchen, Gen  
Kumar, Sonia  
Kumaran, Uma  
Kyle, rh Peter  
Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
Lake, Ben  
Lamb, Peter  
Law, Chris

Law, Noah  
Leadbeater, Kim  
Leadbitter, Graham  
Leishman, Brian  
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
Lewin, Andrew  
Lewis, Clive  
Lightwood, Simon  
Logan, Seamus  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
MacAlister, Josh  
Macdonald, Alice  
MacNae, Andy  
Madders, Justin  
Mahmood, rh Shabana  
Malhotra, Seema  
Martin, Amanda  
Maskell, Rachael  
Mather, Keir  
Mayer, Alex  
McAllister, Douglas  
McCarthy, Kerry  
McCluskey, Martin  
McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
McDonald, Andy  
McDonald, Chris  
McDonnell, rh John  
McDougall, Blair  
McEvoy, Lola  
McFadden, rh Pat  
McGovern, Alison  
McIntyre, Alex  
McKee, Gordon  
McKenna, Kevin  
McKinnell, Catherine  
McMahon, Jim  
McNally, Frank  
McNeill, Kirsty (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
Medi, Llinos  
Midgley, Anneliese  
Minns, Ms Julie  
Mishra, Navendu  
Mohamed, Abtisam  
Mohamed, Iqbal  
Moon, Perran  
Morden, Jessica  
Morgan, Stephen  
Morris, Grahame  
Morris, Joe  
Mullane, Margaret  
Murphy, Luke  
Murray, Chris  
Murray, James  
Murray, Katrina  
Myer, Luke  
Naish, James  
Naismith, Connor  
Narayan, Kanishka  
Nash, Pamela  
Newbury, Josh  
Niblett, Samantha  
Nichols, Charlotte  
Norris, Alex  
Norris, Dan  
O'Hara, Brendan  
Onn, Melanie  
Onwurah, Chi  
Opher, Dr Simon  
Osamor, Kate  
Osborne, Kate  
Osborne, Tristan

Owen, Sarah  
Paffey, Darren  
Pakes, Andrew  
Patrick, Matthew  
Payne, Michael  
Pearce, Jon (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
Pennycook, Matthew  
Perkins, Mr Toby  
Phillips, Jess  
Phillipson, rh Bridget  
Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
Pitcher, Lee  
Platt, Jo  
Powell, Joe  
Poynton, Gregor  
Prinsley, Peter  
Quigley, Mr Richard  
Race, Steve  
Ramsay, Adrian  
Rand, Mr Connor  
Ranger, Andrew  
Rayner, rh Angela  
Reader, Mike  
Reed, rh Steve  
Reeves, Ellie  
Reid, Joani  
Reynolds, Emma  
Reynolds, rh Jonathan  
Rhodes, Martin  
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
Richards, Jake  
Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
Rigby, Lucy  
Robertson, Dave  
Roca, Tim  
Rodda, Matt  
Rushworth, Sam  
Russell, Mrs Sarah  
Rutland, Tom  
Ryan, Oliver  
Sackman, Sarah  
Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
Scrogham, Michelle  
Sewards, Mr Mark  
Shanks, Michael  
Simons, Josh  
Slaughter, Andy  
Slinger, John  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, David  
Smith, Jeff  
Smith, Nick  
Smyth, Karin  
Snell, Gareth  
Sobel, Alex  
Stainbank, Euan  
Stevens, rh Jo  
Stevenson, Kenneth  
Stone, Will  
Strathern, Alistair  
Strickland, Alan  
Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
Swallow, Peter  
Tami, rh Mark  
Tapp, Mike  
Taylor, Alison  
Taylor, David  
Taylor, Rachel  
Thomas, Fred  
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick

Thompson, Adam  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tufnell, Henry  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Karl  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vince, Chris  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Chris  
 Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul

Webb, Chris  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 Western, Andrew  
 Western, Matt  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Williams, David  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrighting, Rosie  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Yemm, Steve  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**

Anna Turley and  
 Anna McMorris

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.*

*Bill reported, without amendment.*

*Third Reading*

*King's consent signified.*

6.47 pm

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank right hon. and hon. Members from both sides of the House for their scrutiny of the Bill throughout its passage. I am grateful to all those who contributed in Committee, as well as those who contributed to the lively debate on Second Reading last month. I also thank you and your colleagues for their chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I thank Members on both sides of the House for their contributions, including my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) and for Leeds South West and Morley (Mr Sowards), the right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson), my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Phil Brickell), the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart), my hon. Friends the Members for Glenrothes and Mid Fife (Richard Baker) and for Alloa and Grangemouth (Brian Leishman), the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Sir Ashley Fox), the right hon. Members for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) and for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis), and the hon. Member for Dewsbury and Batley (Iqbal Mohamed).

This Bill is a matter of principle. It has been introduced to address an outdated and indefensible feature of our legislature, rather than as a criticism of any contribution made by individual Members. The Government have listened to the debates in this House with interest and I look forward to following the Bill's passage in the other place, where I am sure there will be further thoughtful contributions. I thank my officials and the whole team who have worked on the Bill.

This House will send to the other place a Bill that fulfils a manifesto commitment, and our manifesto was very clear:

"The next Labour government will...bring about an immediate modernisation, by introducing legislation to remove the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords."

That is precisely what the Bill does. It has a clear and simple purpose, a single focus, and it completes a process that started a quarter of a century ago. It sends a powerful message to people growing up in my constituency—in Blaenavon, Pontypool and Cwmbran—and beyond, right across the country: "You do not need to be born into certain families to make our laws."

On Third Reading of the Parliament Bill—that landmark reform of the House of Lords—on 15 May 1911, the then Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, said:

"I repeat, as I began, that our first duty, in view of the electoral and Parliamentary history of this measure, is to place this Bill on the Statute Book. It is stamped, if ever a measure was stamped, with the authority and approval of the electorate of the United Kingdom."—[*Official Report*, 15 May 1911; Vol. 25, c. 1699.]

In that spirit, I commend this Bill to the House.

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

6.51 pm

**Alex Burghart:** I echo the words of the Paymaster General in thanking everyone who has spoken this afternoon. It has been a good natured and interesting debate.

I want to echo some words of my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) in praise of the House of Lords. When I first came to this place, I bumped into Lord Young of Cookham, who I had known a few years previously, and I said, "How are you getting on in the upper House as a Minister?" He said, "It's rather harder there than it is down your end." When I asked him what he meant, he said, "Well, you see, when I stood up as a Minister in the House of Commons, I normally felt that, with the support of my officials, I was probably the best informed person in the room. But when you get to the Lords, you face five former Secretaries of State, three former heads of the civil service and people with expertise from across the sector, and what you find there is real scrutiny."

I love this place and I do not wish to take anything away from it, but I do not wish to see it replicated; one of us is enough. That is why, despite the fact that the Opposition disagree with many of the things that the Labour Government are doing, we have been pleased to see that they have edged away from their long-standing commitment to an elected upper House. An elected upper House would replicate this place unnecessarily. It would inevitably get in the way of the primacy of the Commons and make the passage of law harder. It was very significant that, on 5 March, Lord Mandelson made an intervention with the Lord Speaker—on his very popular podcast—and said that the proposals of the former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, for constitutional reform had

"barely been put in the oven...let alone...baked."

I am very pleased that the Labour Government have taken that on board.

That said, the Bill in its present form cannot have the support of the Opposition. The Labour party has reneged on the solemn promise it made in 1998 not to get rid of the remaining hereditary peers until it brought forward a comprehensive plan for a reformed upper House. Many Government Members have said that the hereditary peers sit in the House of Lords by duty of right; well,



[Alex Burghart]

that is not entirely right. The reason the remaining hereditary peers are in the House of Lords is that the Labour Government put them there. That was the agreement that was reached in 1998.

The remaining hereditary peers—who already sit in the Lords and scrutinise, night after night, the legislation introduced by this House—should not be treated in this way. Had the Government respected their position and made provision for them in a reformed Chamber, it would be very hard—not impossible, but very hard—to oppose this legislation. However, as it is, the Government are seeking to remove established scrutineers in order to replace them with Labour appointees, and we cannot support that.

The Minister's argument that the Conservatives can nominate replacements is obviously not entirely genuine. Although we can put people forward, we cannot guarantee that they will go into the upper House. The Government could make that commitment tonight, but they have not done so. They have said nothing about the 33 Cross-Bench hereditary peers who will be removed by the legislation. Labour has broken its promise from 1998, and it has broken its promise to bring forward all its reforms immediately. The Conservative party will not support it.

6.55 pm

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): I will endeavour to be brief. I think that the Bill is to be welcomed. It is many things, but it is not, I fear, what the Government have tried to dress it up as. It is the fulfilment of a manifesto commitment, but one that was made, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) made clear, back in 1997. Blair blinked because my friend Robert Salisbury did what all Cecils have done since their appointment by Queen Elizabeth: he did a bit of deal-making and they found a solution.

If you are very quiet and listen, Madam Deputy Speaker, you can hear the voices of Labour radicals of the past muttering to themselves, "Is that it? Is that what all the intervening years since 1997 and the 14 years of Labour navel-gazing in opposition, as it contemplated its radical programme for government, have produced—removing 92 people who would have been removed in any event had Blair not blinked? No democratisation at all of the House of Lords? What a wasted opportunity." What a wasted period of opposition that was—something I hope and know that our Front Benchers will not replicate. This timid church mouse of a Bill says, "We will take away some people who we would have taken away more than a quarter of a century ago."

The Paymaster General, who I always consider to be one of the stars of the Treasury Bench and who is a good friend, told us that the principal motivation behind the Bill is for young constituents of Torfaen to say, "Ah, a glass ceiling has been removed," as if they have sat there thinking, "You know, I would love to get involved in public life, if it wasn't for this roadblock to my advancement"—namely, the 92 hereditary peers. With the greatest of respect to those on Treasury Bench, I think that a greater percentage of the right hon. Gentleman's constituents—and constituents of all Labour Members—are probably asking themselves when the Labour party will crash the glass ceiling of having either a person of colour or a woman lead it.

6.58 pm

**Pete Wishart:** I, too, congratulate the Paymaster General and his ministerial team on getting the Bill through Parliament at such pace and so early in the parliamentary calendar, as he has said on several occasions. I really hope that this will not be it. As the Conservatives have said, this really is a timid pipsqueak of a Bill.

The Paymaster General quoted Herbert Asquith's words about the House of Lords, but could he not have quoted Keir Hardie, who pledged over 100 years ago to abolish it? Could he not have quoted Gordon Brown, who said only a few months ago that Labour would bring forward a new democratically elected second Chamber to represent the nations and regions of the whole of the United Kingdom?

Instead, what we have is the low-hanging fruit of the hereditary peers. Is it not remarkable that it has taken until 2024 to remove the earls, the barons, the dukes—all the assorted aristocrats—and we are to give Labour great credit for doing so? This should have happened several centuries ago, not in 2024.

I hope that Labour Back Benchers are not going to be disappointed, because we have heard several contributions, on Second Reading and today in Committee, suggesting that further reform is going to be coming; that these are the first stages of a whole package of reforms that will come before this House. I have to say that we have heard it all before from successive Governments, particularly Labour ones. We were promised a succession of reforms to the House of Lords, only for nothing to be delivered, so what we need to hear from Government Front Benchers is when those further reforms are going to come. We need a clear road map for their ambitions when it comes to the House of Lords, and that has to start with ensuring that that circus down the corridor is properly reformed and that we get to a position where it will be a democratically elected House.

Well done to the Government on getting this Bill through. I really hope that Labour Back Benchers have not been sold a pup and that they will get the further reform that has been promised to them, but what we really need to hear from the Government now is about solid progress on proper reform of the House of Lords.

*Question put.* That the Bill be now read the Third time.

*The House divided:* Ayes 435, Noes 73.

Division No. 42]

[7 pm

## AYES

Abbott, Jack	Asser, James
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Athwal, Jas
Akehurst, Luke	Atkinson, Lewis
Alaba, Mr Bayo	Babarinde, Josh
Aldridge, Dan	Bailey, Mr Calvin
Alexander, Mr Douglas	Bailey, Olivia
Alexander, Heidi	Baines, David
Al-Hassan, Sadik	Baker, Alex
Ali, Rushanara	Baker, Richard
Ali, Tahir	Ballinger, Alex
Allister, Jim	Bance, Antonia
Amos, Mr Gideon	Barker, Paula
Anderson, Callum	Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Baxter, Johanna
Aquarone, Steff	Beales, Danny
Arthur, Dr Scott	Beavers, Lorraine

Begum, Apsana  
 Bell, Torsten  
 Bennett, Alison  
 Berry, Siân  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Billington, Ms Polly  
 Blackman, Kirsty  
 Blake, Olivia  
 Blake, Rachel  
 Bloore, Chris  
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote*  
*cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Bonavia, Kevin  
 Botterill, Jade  
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena  
 Brash, Mr Jonathan  
 Brewer, Alex  
 Brickell, Phil  
 Brown-Fuller, Jess  
 Buckley, Julia  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Burke, Maureen  
 Burton-Sampson, David  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, Ian  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Caliskan, Nesil  
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
 Campbell, Irene  
 Campbell, Juliet  
 Campbell-Savours, Markus  
 Cane, Charlotte  
 Carling, Sam  
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
 Carns, Al  
 Chadwick, David  
 Chamberlain, Wendy  
 Chambers, Dr Danny  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Charters, Mr Luke  
 Chowns, Ellie  
 Clark, Feryal  
 Coghlan, Chris  
 Coleman, Ben  
 Collier, Jacob  
 Collins, Tom  
 Collins, Victoria  
 Conlon, Liam  
 Coombes, Sarah  
 Cooper, Andrew  
 Cooper, Dr Beccy  
 Cooper, Daisy  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Costigan, Deirdre  
 Cox, Pam  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Craft, Jen  
 Crichton, Torcuil  
 Curtis, Chris  
 Daby, Janet  
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
 Darling, Steve  
 Darlington, Emily  
 Davey, rh Ed  
 Davies, Ann  
 Davies, Paul  
 Davies, Shaun  
 Davies-Jones, Alex  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 Dean, Bobby

Dean, Josh  
 Dearden, Kate  
 Denyer, Carla  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dickson, Jim  
 Dillon, Mr Lee  
 Dixon, Anna  
 Dixon, Samantha  
 Dodds, rh Anneliese  
 Dollimore, Helena  
 Doogan, Dave  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Downie, Graeme  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil  
 Dyke, Sarah  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eagle, rh Maria  
 Easton, Alex  
 Eastwood, Colum  
 Eccles, Cat  
 Edwards, Lauren  
 Edwards, Sarah  
 Efford, Clive  
 Egan, Damien  
 Ellis, Maya  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Entwistle, Kirith  
 Eshalomi, Florence  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta  
 Farnsworth, Linsey  
 Farron, Tim  
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh  
 Ferguson, Mark  
 Ferguson, Patricia  
 Fleet, Natalie  
 Flynn, rh Stephen  
 Foody, Emma  
 Fookes, Catherine  
 Foord, Richard  
 Forster, Mr Will  
 Foster, Mr Paul  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Francis, Daniel  
 Franklin, Zöe  
 Frith, Mr James  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gardner, Dr Allison  
 Gelderd, Anna  
 Gemmell, Alan  
 George, Andrew  
 German, Gill  
 Gethins, Stephen  
 Gibson, Sarah  
 Gilbert, Tracy  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Gilmour, Rachel  
 Gittins, Becky  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Glover, Olly  
 Goldman, Marie  
 Goldsborough, Ben  
 Gordon, Tom  
 Gosling, Jodie  
 Gould, Georgia  
 Grady, John  
 Green, Sarah  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Hack, Amanda  
 Haigh, rh Louise

Hall, Sarah  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanna, Claire  
 Harding, Monica  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hatton, Lloyd  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayes, Tom  
 Hazelgrove, Claire  
 Heylings, Pippa  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hinchliff, Chris  
 Hinder, Jonathan  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hughes, Claire  
 Hume, Alison  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hurley, Patrick  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Ingham, Leigh  
 Irons, Natasha  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Jarvis, Liz  
 Jermy, Terry  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Clive  
 Jones, rh Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Josan, Gurinder Singh  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kaur, Satvir  
 Kendall, rh Liz  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kitchen, Gen  
 Kohler, Mr Paul  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kumaran, Uma  
 Kyle, rh Peter  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Law, Chris  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Leadbitter, Graham  
 Leishman, Brian  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Logan, Seamus  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 MacAlister, Josh  
 Macdonald, Alice  
 MacDonald, Mr Angus  
 MacNae, Andy  
 Madders, Justin  
 Maguire, Ben  
 Maguire, Helen  
 Mahmood, rh Shabana

Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Martin, Mike  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mathew, Brian  
 Mayer, Alex  
 Maynard, Charlie  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McCluskey, Martin  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McDougall, Blair  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McFadden, rh Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McIntyre, Alex  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McKenna, Kevin  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahon, Jim  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty (*Proxy vote*  
*cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Medi, Llinos  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 van Mierlo, Freddie  
 Miller, Calum  
 Milne, John  
 Minns, Ms Julie  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Mohamed, Iqbal  
 Moon, Perran  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Helen  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Morrison, Mr Tom  
 Mullane, Margaret  
 Munt, Tessa  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, Chris  
 Murray, James  
 Murray, Katrina  
 Murray, Susan  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Nash, Pamela  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Norris, Dan  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Pakes, Andrew  
 Patrick, Matthew  
 Payne, Michael

Pearce, Jon (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Perteghella, Manuela  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, rh Bridget  
 Pinkerton, Dr Al  
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Powell, Joe  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Race, Steve  
 Ramsay, Adrian  
 Rand, Mr Connor  
 Ranger, Andrew  
 Rayner, rh Angela  
 Reader, Mike  
 Reed, rh Steve  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reid, Joani  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rigby, Lucy  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Roome, Ian  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Russell, Mrs Sarah  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sabine, Anna  
 Sackman, Sarah  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Scrogham, Michelle  
 Sowards, Mr Mark  
 Shanks, Michael  
 Simons, Josh  
 Slade, Vikki  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smart, Lisa  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, David  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Sollom, Ian  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevens, rh Jo  
 Stevenson, Kenneth

Stone, Jamie  
 Stone, Will  
 Strathern, Alistair  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
 Swallow, Peter  
 Swann, Robin  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison  
 Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Luke  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thomas, Cameron  
 Thomas, Fred  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tufnell, Henry  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Karl  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vince, Chris  
 Voaden, Caroline  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Chris  
 Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Webb, Chris  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 Western, Andrew  
 Western, Matt  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Wilkinson, Max  
 Williams, David  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrighting, Rosie  
 Wrigley, Martin  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Yemm, Steve  
 Young, Claire  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
 Anna Turley and  
 Anna McMorris

**NOES**

Argar, rh Edward  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Bedford, Mr Peter  
 Bhatti, Saqib  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Bool, Sarah  
 Bowie, Andrew

Brandreth, Aphra  
 Braverman, rh Suella  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Chope, Sir Christopher  
 Cleverly, rh Mr James  
 Cocking, Lewis

Cooper, John  
 Cross, Harriet  
 Davies, Gareth  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davis, rh David  
 Dewhurst, Charlie  
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver  
 Fox, Sir Ashley  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Freeman, George  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Glen, rh John  
 Grant, Helen  
 Griffiths, Alison  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Holden, rh Mr Richard  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Jopp, Lincoln  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Lam, Katie  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Mak, Alan

Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 Obese-Jecty, Ben  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Paul, Rebecca  
 Philp, rh Chris  
 Pritchard, rh Mark  
 Raja, Shivani  
 Rankin, Jack  
 Reed, David  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Rebecca  
 Snowden, Mr Andrew  
 Spencer, Patrick  
 Stafford, Gregory  
 Stephenson, Blake  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Thomas, Bradley  
 Timothy, Nick  
 Trott, rh Laura  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wild, James  
 Wood, Mike

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Jerome Mayhew and  
 David Simmonds

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Bill read the Third time and passed.*

**Business without Debate****DELEGATED LEGISLATION**

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** With the leave of the House, I will put motions 3 to 9 together.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

**MERCHANT SHIPPING**

That the draft Merchant Shipping (General Lighthouse Authorities) (Increase of Borrowing Limit) Order 2024, which was laid before this House on 9 September, be approved.

**INCOME TAX**

That the draft Pensions (Abolition of Lifetime Allowance Charge etc) (No. 3) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 7 October, be approved.

**FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS**

That the draft Packaged Retail and Insurance-based Investment Products (Retail Disclosure) (Amendment) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 7 October, be approved.

That the draft Prudential Regulation of Credit Institutions (Meaning of CRR Rules and Recognised Exchange) (Amendment) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 7 October, be approved.

That the draft Securitisation (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 7 October, be approved.

That the draft Consumer Composite Investments (Designated Activities) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 10 October, be approved.



#### LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH

That the draft Barnsley and Sheffield (Boundary Change) Order 2024, which was laid before this House on 7 October, be approved.—(*Martin McCluskey.*)

*Question agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

That the draft Windsor Framework (Non-Commercial Movement of Pet Animals) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 10 October, be approved.—(*Martin McCluskey.*)

*The Deputy Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until tomorrow (Standing Order No. 41A).*

#### Pubs Code: Guest Beers

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

7.16 pm

**Ms Julie Minns** (Carlisle) (Lab): In 1916, during the great war, the Government introduced the famous “Carlisle experiment.” Concern about the intoxicating effects of Carlisle’s pubs on nearby munitions production resulted in the state ownership and control of the pubs and beer trade in my constituency from 1916 to 1973. How great, Members may ask, was the concern that it warranted the nationalisation of Carlisle’s pubs and breweries, including those of my own great-grandfather? A few short miles up the road from Carlisle lay His Majesty’s Factory Gretna. Regarded as the greatest munitions factory on earth in the first world war, it was where the cordite, nicknamed the devil’s porridge, was mixed. More a town than a factory, it stretched 9 miles from Mossband in my constituency to Eastriggs in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell), the same distance as between this House and Wembley stadium.

At the heart of this gargantuan site were 30,000 workers who lived in two purpose-built townships. The factory and the townships had their own independent transport network, power source and water supply system, but not pubs. For that the workers had to walk into the small town of Gretna, where the number of pubs could not cope with the demand, and so they would board the train to nearby Carlisle where pubs were so plentiful that it was said that one could swing from the door of one public house to the door of the next without touching the ground.

Thirsty at the end of a long shift and doubtless relieved to have survived another day mixing cordite, evening-shift workers would often bribe the train driver to ensure they would arrive early enough to get the drinks in before closing time. Meanwhile, in anticipation of their arrival the barman of Boustead’s bar near Carlisle station would line up 500 shots of whisky. Drunkenness ensued. With the landlords away fighting for King and country, the elderly and the widowed who were left running the pubs, along with a depleted local police force, were powerless to control the drinking. The result was a fourfold increase in alcohol-related offences in the city, high numbers of absenteeism and low levels of production at the Gretna factory. The scale of the problem was so severe that it was thought to be the major contributing factor in the shortage of shells on the frontline. Something had to be done.

The Munitions of War Act 1915 had given the newly formed Ministry of Munitions additional powers over factories and factory workers. A central control board was established with the power to control the sale and consumption of alcohol in areas, such as Carlisle, where the excessive consumption of alcohol was believed to be having an adverse impact on the war effort. With the Munitions Minister David Lloyd George already having declared drink to be the greatest deadly foe that Britain faced, Carlisle’s pubs and breweries were nationalised in June 1916. Some 138 out of 321 licensed premises were closed, with the remainder remodelled or rebuilt.

[Ms Julie Minns]

The first state management pub, the Gretna Tavern, opened just a month later in July 1916. Members might be interested to know that the very last state management pub, the Border Reiver, opened in July 1971, just four days before the Licensing (Abolition of State Management) Act was passed. For almost 60 years, all of Carlisle's public houses were completely tied to the state-run brewery in Carlisle. The beer was brewed at a reduced level of alcohol, its advertising was tightly controlled and specified by Whitehall, and the architectural design, both external and internal, was overseen by a state-appointed architect. Consumer choice, it is fair to say, was severely limited.

Following privatisation, the pubs were sold in large job lots and snapped up by the major breweries of the day, meaning that even to this day the majority of our pubs in Carlisle are owned by large pub-owning businesses where the beer supply is tied to them. Today, pub landlords continue to face restrictions on what they can buy, sell or serve, meaning that they cannot always provide what their customers demand. For the small local independent breweries—including Great Corby, the Carlisle Brewing Company, West Walls Brewing Co. and the Old Vicarage brewery in my constituency—getting their locally produced beers sold in a local pub remains a challenge.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Ms Minns:** I will give way first to my hon. Friend.

**Olivia Bailey** (Reading West and Mid Berkshire) (Lab): I, too, have brilliant independent breweries in my constituency, such as Renegade and Double-Barrelled. They make a huge contribution to our local economy and, importantly, make a great pint. Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the Government's determination to improve access to the market for independent brewers and to get great local beers into our pubs?

**Ms Minns:** I do welcome that, and I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for bringing forward this debate. I spoke to her beforehand to ascertain what she was trying to achieve. Strangford has had a resurgence of alcohol production, including the microbrewer Ards Brewing Company, just a few minutes away from me on the Carrowdore Road in Greyabbey. It is a necessity that small brewers can sell in their local pub, and I believe it was a mistake not to allow exemptions for smaller breweries. I support the calls to allow these exceptions. Does she not agree that we must do what we can to let the wonderful craft breweries have a shot in the local market?

**Ms Minns:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I have visited and spoken to brewers in my constituency, and they tell me that they just want the chance to compete on a fair basis.

**Sarah Dyke** (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): The Society of Independent Brewers shows that 75% of beer drinkers believe it important that pubs offer a range of

craft beers from small breweries, such as Glastonbury Ales and Fine Tuned Brewery in my constituency. Does the hon. Member agree that small breweries should be included in the new lower hospitality rate, so that they no longer need to pay 40 times more a pint in business rates than large breweries?

**Ms Minns:** I thank the hon. Member for that intervention. I will come later in my speech to other points that the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates is campaigning on. I will make a little more progress.

Recently in Cumbria, the Carlsberg Marston's Brewing Company closed Cumbria's principal brewery, Jennings in Cockermouth, and brought to an end 200 years of local brewing. The need to create opportunities for local breweries to sell their local beer to local drinkers in Carlisle is, therefore, more pressing than ever.

**Josh MacAlister** (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. I have two fantastic breweries in my constituency—Tractor Shed and Ennerdale Brewery—which are not that far from Carlisle, despite the state of some of the roads and rail. Would it not be fantastic if more Cumbrian breweries found a route to Cumbrian pubs for their fantastic beer?

**Ms Minns:** I agree with my hon. Friend. From March next year, pub tenants just 700 yards from my constituency will be able to open up a direct relationship with local breweries such as those that my hon. Friend referred to and have beer from small independent breweries served to their customers. The Scottish pubs code, championed by the Labour MSP for West Scotland, who brought it forward as a Member's Bill, is due to be introduced in 2025. It is similar in many respects to our own pubs code, which governs England and Wales, but for one crucial element. In regulating the relationship between tied pub landlords and tenants, it aims to promote fairness and equitable treatment within tied pub lease agreements. It also allows Scottish pub tenants to enter into a guest beer agreement whereby the tenant can sell at least one beer in any format—including cask and keg—chosen by them at a price they determine. They can change that as frequently as they wish. The beer must be of a brand where less than 5,000 hectolitres—I am reliably told that is about 875,000 pints—was produced in the previous production year. That means that it is beer from small local breweries that qualifies and not that from the larger breweries.

That will empower tenants, allowing them to respond to their customers' requests, and support small local breweries. Introducing a guest beer agreement in the rest of the UK could be worth £28 million to local breweries. It would widen consumer choice, help landlords and support small local businesses, so I am delighted that the Chancellor and Ministers have been watching developments in Scotland closely and promised in the Budget last month a consultation on ways to encourage small breweries to retain and expand their access to UK pubs. The consultation provides an opportunity to maximise consumer choice and support local businesses by enabling more guest beers. It is an important development, and it shows that the Government want local community businesses to have the opportunity to compete, grow and expand.

As we have heard, 78% of the beer sold in our pubs comes from just five global brewing companies. In comparison, our 1,700 small breweries represent only about 6% of the market. That needs to be urgently reviewed to ensure that there is a level playing field where small businesses can compete fully.

On that point, I congratulate the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates on the launch of its new “indie beer” campaign, which seeks to make it easier for beer drinkers to identify beer from independent breweries in pubs, bars and shops as demand for local beer rises across the UK. Research shows that most beer drinkers are unaware that the mass-marketed craft beer brands that we see in our pubs across the UK are in fact owned by global brewers. A good example of that from my own county is Wainwright beer. Inspired by the chronicler of our famous Cumbrian fells, the name Wainwright is synonymous with the county of Cumbria, and that leads many visitors to believe that they are sampling a locally brewed beer when they come to Cumbria; in fact, it is just one of a range of beers produced by the global beer company Carlsberg. The majority of beer consumers say that they want to buy beer from genuinely independent local breweries. I believe that SIBA’s campaign will help many more do just that.

These issues are wider than just the tenanted pub market, with small breweries facing restrictions in the leased, managed and free house pub markets as well. Perversely, many free houses are not free at all when it comes to beer. Sole supply contracts with global breweries are prevalent, restricting and determining what beers can be sold. Increasingly, these global breweries are also using proprietary equipment in pubs, which prevents a local brewery from even being able to connect their casks to the pub and offer their products to the landlord at all.

Publicans, brewers and beer consumers in my constituency hope that the Minister will be able to start the consultation process as soon as possible. I wonder whether the Minister may be able to offer some clarity on when that might commence, so that all interested parties can have the opportunity to provide their insights and experiences. It would also be appreciated if he could confirm that this will include issues experienced right across the UK, including in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Will it also look at the whole pub market, including tenanted, leased, managed and free houses? Will it include both keg and cask draught beer, which is predominately sold in our pubs?

Finally, will the Minister look closely at the Scottish guest beer agreement to see whether its provisions could be included in our own pubs code for England and Wales, perhaps as part of the statutory review of the pubs code, which I understand is due next year? Should the Minister ever find time in his busy diary, I would like to invite him to visit my constituency to meet some of my local breweries and to join me for a drink—albeit not a locally brewed one—in the Border Reiver, the last pub in Britain to have been designed, funded and built by the UK Government.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Before I call the Minister, I have been updated on the recent wedding this weekend of the hon. Member for Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West (Martin McCluskey). I congratulate

him, and I understand that his husband Ben has been waiting quite some time to see his new husband. That is some pressure for the Minister.

7.31 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Justin Madders):** May I start by extending my own congratulations? I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Ms Minns) on securing this debate and on a very engaging and well-informed speech. It took us through an interesting period in her constituency’s history. I was unaware of the nationalisation of pubs in Carlisle. If that is a suggestion that she wishes to put forward for our next manifesto, she will be aware of the policy-making processes and how to do that. Unfortunately, at this stage I cannot confirm that we have any plans to nationalise pubs—that probably will not come as a surprise to anyone.

Before I go on to address my hon. Friend’s points, I will say a little more about the industry more generally, because it plays a critical role in supporting local communities in every corner of the UK. The interest that we have had in this debate shows how important pubs are. They are not just any other local business; they are a part of our history, culture and heritage, and they are a huge employer. The wider hospitality sector employs around 2.2 million people.

**Mike Wood (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con):** The Minister is making a very important point, because whether it is the Carlisle Brewing Company in the hon. Lady’s constituency or Kinver Brewery in mine, our family breweries play an important role in providing that diversity of product and high-quality beer that is particular to our local communities. Does the Minister recognise the devastating impact of the Chancellor’s changes to business property relief in the Budget on the future of so many family breweries across the country?

**Justin Madders:** I will go on to some of the very positive things that were announced in the Budget to help breweries and small businesses in particular.

There are about 154,000 businesses in the hospitality sector, generating revenues of around £52 billion per annum. They create vibrancy in communities, support wider social objectives, provide accessible jobs, support community cohesion, and provide welcoming spaces for those who feel isolated and want to enjoy the company of others.

It is an important fact that over 80% of the beer consumed in the UK is brewed here—not in the Palace of Westminster, but in the UK—while UK brewers also export over 1 billion pints of beer annually to over 100 countries, according to the British Beer and Pub Association.

**Markus Campbell-Savours (Penrith and Solway) (Lab):** I thank the Minister for giving way, and I thank my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Ms Minns), for securing the debate. Although we might not be brewing beer in this place, we do consume some of it. In the spirit of shameless plugs that we have all participated in this evening, I would like to point out that my local brewery, the Keswick Brewing Company, is serving Keswick Gold down in the Strangers Bar. If it



[Markus Campbell-Savours]

is slightly easier than travelling up to Cumbria, I wonder if the Minister would like to join us for a pint at some point.

**Justin Madders:** I absolutely do thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. He has obviously heard that I am quite easily tempted into Strangers. It is a very important part of the facilities that the Strangers Bar offers Members the opportunity to serve guest beers. It is a great opportunity to plug great local businesses.

Small independent brewers often reflect their local area in their products, from locally sourced ingredients to their marketing, branding and style. The resurgence in brewing in the UK over the last decade has strengthened awareness among the general public of local beers, whether it is the new-style craft beers or independent breweries resurrecting well-loved local beers that had been lost in the consolidation of larger breweries.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister is quite right about the importance of local brewers. Stoke-on-Trent's own Titanic Brewery serves a wonderful pint of plum porter in Strangers now and again. It is not just about the products they sell, although if they were able to access guest beer lines they could grow their business and create more jobs; it is also about the story they tell about the history of who we are. Titanic is so-called because Captain John Smith was from Stoke-on-Trent. That is often missed in our cultural storytelling: breweries are doing a great job of exporting who we are and what we are around the country and around the world.

**Justin Madders:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. That is a really important point. It is an essential part of our culture and a real selling point for us around the world. When people come here, they want to visit a traditional English or British pub, and we have a different style in every part of the country. The point made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle about some of the larger breweries now mimicking the local brands is an interesting development, which shows that imitation is the best form of flattery.

More generally, we know there are challenges for the hospitality sector, which is still struggling to recover from the pandemic. The subsequent cost of living crisis has compounded the challenge for pubs, increasing costs and the ability of businesses to repay debts. This is an ongoing struggle. Our system of business rates is particularly unfair on high street businesses. It disincentivises investment, creates uncertainty and places an undue burden on our high streets. That is why the Government are undertaking a review of the business rates system, to ensure that all businesses are paying their fair share, recognising and addressing the fact that high street businesses, including pubs, have shouldered the majority of the burden for far too long.

In her Budget, the Chancellor announced that the Government are freezing the small businesses multiplier for 2025-26 to protect small properties from inflationary bill increases, and that retail, hospitality and leisure businesses will receive 40% relief worth up to £110,000 per business. This support package alone is worth over £2.2 billion over five years. It was also announced in the

Budget that the Government would reduce the alcohol duty on draft products. This will reduce businesses' total duty bill by up to £100 million a year and increase the duty differential between draft and non-draft products from 9.2% to 13.9%, so that a pint in the pub attracts less duty than the beer in the supermarket.

The Government will also increase the cash discount provided to small brewers and producers for non-draught products and maintain the current cash discount provided to small producers for draught products. This in effect increases the relative value of small producer relief for both draught and non-draught products. Jobs, too, lie at the heart of our plans, backed by the Employment Rights Bill, which had its Second Reading earlier this month, and local growth plans will be a cornerstone of the place-based approach. We have heard already about the importance of pubs in the local economy.

Turning more specifically to the guest beers consultation announced in the Budget, the Chancellor said that the Government will consult on ways to ensure that small brewers can retain and expand their access to UK pubs and maximise drinkers' choices, including through provisions to enable more guest beers.

At this point, let me echo the support for the work done by the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates and the Campaign for Real Ale in championing beer drinkers' choice and pursuing the case for more independently produced beer in pubs. We will work closely with both those organisations, but also with the wider hospitality sector, to identify barriers to market access for small brewers and how they might be addressed. I want to ensure that we have a clear understanding of the current position, and of what interventions may be necessary and the impact of those interventions.

We want to find the right solutions to help small brewers gain access to the market, but to do that we will need to understand all the issues and ensure that any interventions are proportionate, that they address the problems, and that they do not result in unintended consequences. For instance, we will want to develop a good understanding of the extent to which tied tenants use existing flexibilities, by, for example, buying beer from small brewers through their pub companies on payment of a tied release fee. We will want to understand whether managed and retail pub chains could or do offer local beers, to understand the scope for increasing the provision of local beers in other licensed premises such as restaurants and hotels; and to understand the barriers preventing local brewers from gaining access to more pubs, and the reasons for those barriers. There are a range of issues that we will want to consider as part of the consultation. I can respond to my hon. Friend's questions about what we would consider by saying that we are ruling nothing out at this stage, and that we intend to take a holistic view of the sector.

The next statutory review of the pubs code is due to take place next year, but it is only one part of the picture, as it applies to only about a fifth of all pubs in England and Wales. As has been mentioned, there is to be an interesting development in Scotland, whose pubs code will include a guest beer provision. That does not necessarily mean that the provision will automatically be transported to England and Wales, but it also does not mean that we would not be interested to see how it pans out—although, as it will not be introduced until March 2025 at the earliest, we will need a bit of time to

understand how it works. We will be able to consider that as part of the consultation, and we will, of course, consult formally on all the options available to us to increase small brewers' access to the market. It is important for us to get a handle on the complexities of the market before we undertake the consultation. We will work with SIBA and CAMRA and will engage with a range of stakeholders in the pubs and wider hospitality sectors before consulting on options.

In response to the questions about when this will happen, I can say that we will try to get on with it as soon as we can, but we do want to undertake that work before launching the formal consultation. We understand

the points that have been made and the good intentions behind the suggestions that we have heard, but we want to ensure that this works for the industry as a whole.

Let me end by thanking my hon. Friend for initiating her first Adjournment debate. I look forward to working with her on these issues in the coming months, and I will certainly be taking up her offer of a drink—although, owing to diary constraints, I will probably do so on premises closer to the Chamber than to her constituency.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.43 pm

*House adjourned.*





# Westminster Hall

*Tuesday 12 November 2024*

[MARTIN VICKERS *in the Chair*]

## Transport Infrastructure Projects: Elizabeth Line

9.30 am

**Matt Rodda** (Reading Central) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered future transport infrastructure projects and the Elizabeth line.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I declare an interest as a local MP who has received donations from two rail unions, ASLEF and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. Also, I am a season ticket holder and in the past was involved in the Paddington rail crash. I secured this debate to celebrate the great success of the Elizabeth line, which I travel on almost every day. I was moved by the Royal Institute of British Architects's tribute, and its award of the Stirling prize, to the Elizabeth line—nominated for its outstanding architecture.

In today's debate I hope we can discuss the importance of rail investment and the need for long-term planning. I hope to highlight the Elizabeth line as a national achievement and possibly a model for further investments around the country. I also hope the Minister will be able to provide further details of future investments in other parts of England. I am conscious that I am likely to talk a lot about Berkshire, my own county, and the nearby parts of London that it is so intimately connected with. Two years on is an excellent point at which to reflect on the Elizabeth line and its wonderful benefits to our community.

I hope Members will indulge me this morning, because I have to say my family banned me from going on about the Elizabeth line. I was told by my wife to stop talking about it. I am very lucky to live near London and can travel home to Reading every day—apologies to colleagues who are not able to get home in the evening—but I was admonished by my wife, who told me, "Stop going on about the Elizabeth line. I don't want to hear any more about it." However, she and my son and daughter all changed their tune as soon as they had benefited from it; Sarah was able to get back from a show in the west end to a cup of tea in our kitchen in Reading in 50 minutes one evening, and that stopped her ever criticising it again. Now she is as big a convert as I am to that wonderful piece of engineering.

I have my "Matt Rodda's pub quiz" section of this speech, in which I want to mention a few fun facts about the Elizabeth line. To sum up the scale of what the country has achieved, £19 billion has been invested in this piece of railway, but it has already, in just two years, generated £42 billion of benefits to the economy. There are some 700,000 journeys a day. Every day, the equivalent of the whole population of Berkshire, a reasonably large English county, travels on the line. To put it another way, 4.8 million people travel on it every week—more than half the population of London travel on that one railway line every week. It has generated 8,000 jobs and about 55,000 homes have been built

along the line. I want to mention that later in my speech, because the connection between investment in rail, the economy, jobs, housing and growth and the clustering of new industries near railway stations is a really important topic in this debate.

The Mayor of London described the line as a "game changer" for London and the surrounding area, where we have seen 8% growth year on year in passenger numbers. The best way to understand this amazing piece of railway is to ride on it and look out of the window, or to get out of the station underground and soak up what we are passing through. Getting off the mainline train at Paddington—I do not travel on the Elizabeth line all the way to Reading every day—and going on to the Elizabeth line is quite a stunning change of scene. I go into a huge box station, down two sets of escalators and into an enormous modern station, rather like being inside an airport building. It is absolutely huge, several times greater than any normal tube station, with enormous capacity built in for extra passenger numbers. Already, even on the busiest days, the line is soaking up huge numbers of people. The crowds above ground are suddenly distributed below ground and there is a train every 2.5 minutes.

I travel to Bond Street, where, wonderfully, there is a little sign that says "Trains to Reading"—something that seems completely incongruous to anybody who lives outside London. I then move swiftly on to another tube. Looking at the view coming into Reading station the other way, there is now an equally stunning sight that we would not see in many medium-sized English cities or large towns. We are starting to see a significant number of tall buildings, and all those buildings represent a rise in land values, an increase in jobs and new businesses locating near the station, creating jobs, wealth and growth through investment and infrastructure. That is driving the economy of the area and leading to significant migration into Reading from around the UK and around the world, with businesses also relocating.

I saw one example of why that relocation is taking place with my visit to the Ericsson office, in Thames Tower next to the station. This illustrates the employer's point of view, which is important. Senior managers at Ericsson explained that they moved from a business estate in Surrey to Reading because they wanted access to a much wider pool of workers. The transport connectivity meant they could get much better access to a much wider range of people with qualifications in telecoms, electronic engineering and other related skills they needed in their business by being in Reading. Staff can connect more easily to the midlands, east to London, west to Bristol and south too. I stress that rail connectivity, and the benefits it brings to employers, as an important part of this debate.

At a local level, PepsiCo, whose office is in Green Park near the M4 motorway, is moving to Reading town centre. That movement of businesses into Reading from out-of-town industrial estates could also apply to other areas where there is due to be a significant amount of rail investment—for example on the Oxford to Cambridge line or in the north of England. I hope that is the story when investment and infrastructure are brought together.

It is also worth mentioning the huge environmental benefit. We do not have much capacity in our major towns and cities to build extra roads and getting extra

[*Matt Rodda*]

road space is incredibly difficult. There are more people and more vehicles in the country, and all those vehicles on the road at the same time can cause gridlock. Rail offers the ability to generate large numbers of journeys and move huge numbers of people quickly and effectively from one place to another. That can be seen in Berkshire and west London; in fact, the section of the Elizabeth line between Reading and Hayes shows the fastest growth in passenger numbers. Interestingly, it straddles two regional boundaries, where there was previously a stopping service that was nowhere near as effective at getting people from A to B—it was not as fast or as regular—as the Elizabeth line.

**Deirdre Costigan** (Ealing Southall) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. The Elizabeth line has been a game changer for my constituency of Ealing Southall, and Southall station in particular is very well used. However, two other stations, West Ealing and Hanwell, suffer from a less frequent service than Southall, and that is in the context of increasing development, particularly in West Ealing. There are also more delays and cancellations on the line than would be expected with new rail infrastructure. Does my hon. Friend agree that not only is it important that the Elizabeth line is extended to constituencies such as his, but that the reliability and frequency of the line is improved?

**Matt Rodda:** My hon. Friend makes a good point about further enhancements and improvements to the line. I will discuss that later in my speech and I hope the Minister will also have a word to say on that.

On the wider context of the British economy and national achievements in recent years, it is fair to say that we are all proud of Great British sporting achievements, such as securing the Olympics and the performance of Team GB or our achievements in football and other major sports. I believe that the building and the growing success of the Elizabeth line are also an achievement in line with our achievements in sport or science and technology, and we ought to pay heed to that, learn from it and use it to fuel other investments, whether by learning the lessons on planning and infrastructure development or in other ways.

I also want to comment on some of the political lessons learned, on a cross-party basis: once again, it is important to focus on the crucial number of £42 billion of economic growth in just two years. That is a significant number, and we want to see more of that, not just in my region of the south-east of England, but across the country, in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the north of England.

To reflect on what went well and learn some lessons, I would like to go back a bit—you will be pleased to know, Mr Vickers, that I do not want to go right back to 1840, when the Regent's Canal company, which was very far sighted, first talked about a cross-London route, but I will go back to the 1990s to reflect, in simple outline terms, on the things we got right and the themes that come up when we talk to the people involved. For example, I spoke to the former Member for Greenwich and Woolwich, Nick Raynsford, who was a Transport Minister. The lessons seem to be that it is important that the Government have a vision, and plan and invest

for the long term. They must listen to businesses and work closely with them in deep partnership, and they must do the same with local and regional government. Both the Mayor of London and local government across the south-east were crucial to this project—the Minister may want to comment on that later.

I must thank several people, or I will never live it down. In particular, I thank MPs from Berkshire: I want to single out the former Member for Maidenhead, now Baroness May of Maidenhead, who played a very important role in this project and was an incredibly important constituency neighbour when she was in this place. I also thank Lord Sharma and other MPs from the Thames valley, including the former Labour MPs for Reading West and Slough, among others. I thank the lead members for transport on Reading Borough council, including Councillor Tony Page and Councillor John Howarth, and leaders of Reading Borough council Liz Terry, Jo Lovelock and David Sutton.

I thank the local business community, including investors from outside our immediate area who have done so much to regenerate areas near the station—for example, the team investing in Station Hill are playing a really important role—and many others, such as the two corporates that are moving into the area near the station. I would particularly like to mention Nigel Horton-Baker, who brought the business community together, and I thank the various local enterprise partnerships and chambers of commerce that cover the Thames valley.

I also highlight the importance of the business and civic community in the wider region. When the Elizabeth line was envisaged—this is a bit of a detour down a branch line, but it is very important for Berkshire—there was no guarantee that it would come to Reading. The original plan was for it to go as far west as Maidenhead, but Reading borough council built a coalition of local authorities across the three counties of Berks, Bucks and Oxon. I see that the hon. Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) is here, and I am sure he agrees; he may want to speak about the importance of local government collegiality across the Thames valley. That cross-party group of local authorities, led by all three main UK parties, wanted Reading to be the western terminus. It was so important that they agreed and worked together. I obviously have a vested interest as the MP for Reading Central, but the idea of Reading's being the western terminus made complete transport sense, as it is a major transport hub and a point at which the railway divides north and south, to the south coast and the midlands, and a key point at which it splays out westwards, to the far south-west, Wales and the midlands.

I am proud to be the MP for Reading Central, and it is wonderful to be able to commend the work that has been done locally. In the time that I have left, I have some questions for the Minister from me, our local business community and other stakeholders. I particularly want to explore the notion of further electrification. One of the benefits of the Elizabeth line is that it is fully electric, which saves huge amounts of money in the long run, although there is obviously an up-front cost. Under the previous Government, there was a reduction in the amount of electrification from what was originally planned. I have had requests for more north-south improvements in electrification in our area, between the south coast and Oxford. There has also been some interest in introducing more semi-fast services on the

Elizabeth line—in other words, trains that do not stop at every station but move more quickly between the major stations. Some people have raised further station development.

A western rail link is an important adjunct to the arguments about the Elizabeth line. The line has created a lot of connectivity and an east-west corridor between Berkshire, Essex and Kent, but people going to Heathrow have to approach London and go out again. Many colleagues from Wales and the west country—particularly south Wales, Bristol and further west—have, with me and other colleagues, lobbied for extra connectivity that would allow people to get on a train at Cardiff or Bristol and go straight to Heathrow, reducing surface transport and pollution near the airport, and freeing up local roads. It would also bring huge flexibility for commuters working at the airport, particularly residents of Slough and west London, where many airport staff live, although some live as far away as Reading.

The other point I would like the Minister to comment on—I realise it is an ongoing discussion—is the work to smooth the transition relating to the development of Old Oak Common. I am pleased the Government are committed to investing in the link between Old Oak Common and Euston; that is an important milestone and a national priority for all of us. However, in my area, and particularly to the west of London, in Wales and the west country, there is a great deal of concern about the blockading of Paddington to allow work to take place at Old Oak Common. That starts at Christmas time, and I hope the Minister can say some reassuring words about it. I know he is interested in those matters and wants that work carried out in the smoothest way possible.

It has been a pleasure to speak this morning; I am grateful for your indulgence, Mr Vickers, in allowing me to commend some of my local government colleagues and others in the business community. I hope the Minister will be able to answer some of my questions. I also thank colleagues for attending in such large numbers and from such a wide range of political parties, and I look forward to hearing everybody's speeches.

**Martin Vickers (in the Chair):** I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to be called in the debate. If Members restrict themselves to speaking for about five minutes, we should be able to accommodate everyone.

9.46 am

**Dr Al Pinkerton (Surrey Heath) (LD):** It is a pleasure, Mr Vickers, to serve under your chairmanship, and I extend my congratulations to the hon. Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda) on securing this crucial debate.

I would like to focus on two pressing issues relating to the current and future state of transport infrastructure in my constituency of Surrey Heath. First, and keeping it local, there are fragmented internal transport links between towns and villages in my infrastructurally left-behind constituency. Bus services, which are vital to some of my most vulnerable constituents, including children and the elderly, are thin on the ground and poorly scheduled. As a result, many people miss rail connections, arrive late at work or school, and struggle to make hospital appointments. Residents report having to spend more than £50 to make it on time for a 9 am hospital appointment, due to the lack of a public transport

option. For residents in villages such as Chobham, the problem is particularly acute. They lack any bus services at all. There is no direct bus route connecting railway stations in Sunningdale or Blackwater to key hubs such as Camberley or Frimley.

That lack of integrated public transport has made car dependency the norm in Surrey Heath. Over 56% of households own two or more cars, and 60% of trips under 10 km are made by private vehicles. That is not, I would contend, out of choice but out of necessity. There is simply no viable alternative. That dependency creates severe congestion on major roads such as the A322. If anyone listens to the traffic reports in the morning, they will have heard that letter and those numbers mentioned all too often.

With the national planning policy framework placing a 250% increase on new housing targets in Surrey Heath, that infrastructural challenge will only become more severe, but it is one that our current transport funding and planning mechanisms seem inadequate to address. If we want new homes, which we surely do, and if we want business and economic growth, we simply cannot react to transport deserts and congestion after the fact. We need to anticipate better, look ahead and think proactively.

That brings me to my second point, which concerns transport links between Surrey Heath and London. Frankly, in Surrey Heath we pray for something like the Elizabeth line. Camberley, the largest market town in my constituency, is hugely underutilised by commuters, despite being only 28 miles from the centre of the capital. Camberley station served just 789 passengers daily in 2022-23—not, I would argue, because of a lack of demand for a high-quality commuter service, but because the slow, fragmented service on offer forces residents to access the rail system from outside our borough altogether. It is a sad reality that, in 2024, the journey to central London from Camberley now takes one hour and 15 minutes, involving at least one change. That is longer than the same journey in the 1920s, a century ago.

Most residents, including me, find it more practical to drive many miles to rail stations outside Surrey Heath, such as Farnborough, Brookwood or Woking, to access the faster, more direct routes to the city. Surrey Heath's transport system is failing its residents, keeping children out of school, and stifling local economic growth, and it is now unable to keep up with the demands placed on it by new house building targets.

Like many other infrastructurally left-behind places in the UK, Surrey Heath urgently needs investment in fast, efficient and direct rail links to London, synchronised bus schedules and better rural transport options. Those improvements have the potential to tackle congestion, lower emissions and support sustainable development, while enhancing the environment and the quality of life for residents. Just as importantly for a Government with a focus on economic growth, improved infrastructure can act as the oil in the engine of economic growth, and I hope this Government see that as an investment worth making for our shared future prosperity. Surrey Heath businesses want and deserve access to game-changing infrastructure such as the Elizabeth line, and Surrey Heath residents would, I am certain, make for hugely vocal converts and give the hon. Member for Reading Central a run for his money.



9.51 am

**Daniel Francis** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda) for securing today's debate.

I had the pleasure of serving as the cabinet member for transport in the London borough of Bexley from 2003 to 2006. During that period, the route for what was then called Crossrail was agreed. The Queen's Speech of November 2004 confirmed that a Bill would be introduced to authorise the construction of Crossrail. Although the announcement confirmed that a southern spur would terminate at Abbey Wood rather than Ebbsfleet, people with long memories like me recall discussions at the time about terminating that spur at Canary Wharf or Custom House. I was quoted at the time, regarding the benefits for residents in Bexley, as saying:

"The most important achievement is getting Crossrail south of the river. If it had stopped at the Isle of Dogs, there would have been no benefit at all."

My council lobbied to have that section reinstated, but it was not included in the final scheme, although the safeguarding directions for the associated land were retained.

As things stand, the southern spur of the Elizabeth line terminates at Abbey Wood station where, uniquely, the ticket office is located in the London borough of Bexley while the platforms are located in the royal borough of Greenwich. Although the station is located in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Ms Oppong-Asare), it is within three quarters of a mile of my constituency of Bexleyheath and Crayford. The route has therefore brought many benefits to my constituents—particularly in the western part of the constituency—providing much faster journey times through to Canary Wharf, the City, the west end and Heathrow. It has also brought benefits for my constituents interchanging at Abbey Wood via Southeastern and Thameslink services from Slade Green. Sadly, the previous Government cut the majority of direct services from Crayford to Abbey Wood, making it difficult to interchange directly. I will continue to campaign for better services by train and bus to reach Abbey Wood from Crayford.

Passengers interchanging from Slade Green and other stations to its east have to rely on less frequent services to undertake this change. There remains a strong case to extend the Elizabeth line to Ebbsfleet in order to serve residents in the thousands of new homes built there, in order to interchange with high-speed services and hopefully, in the future, with reinstated services to mainland Europe.

The Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet corridor covers the local authorities of Bexley and Gravesham and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Jim Dickson). The corridor has the potential to build on its existing strengths and diversify its economy, but it needs to improve transport links to make that happen. Although the corridor has large areas of underutilised brownfield sites, many sites are complex and cannot be brought forward for housing by the market alone, because of viability challenges, in part caused by poor transport connections, which limit land values. Significant evidence has been assembled to show how additional housing can be delivered by transport investment making the

local area more attractive. An extension is also expected to support jobs growth due to enhanced connectivity and additional commercial floor space and through jobs to support the new population, which would support the regeneration of both Crayford and Slade Green.

The C2E Partnership was formed in 2016 as an informal group of authorities to promote an extension of the Elizabeth line beyond its planned terminus at Abbey Wood and towards Ebbsfleet. It comprises stakeholders representing local communities in the area, including the London borough of Bexley, Dartford and Gravesham borough councils, the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, Kent county council, the Greater London Authority and the Greater North Kent Partnership. The partnership has lobbied since its inception for funding to develop scheme options. It was successful in securing funding from Government for the development of a strategic outline business case, which was submitted to the previous Government in October 2021.

Despite that, there has still not been a formal response to that business case. The project continues to form a key element of the transport strategy for growth of the London borough of Bexley, being referenced in the Bexley growth strategy and the recently adopted local plan. That is echoed in the policy documents of the wider partnership, as well as regional partners, such as the Thames Estuary Growth Board and Transport for the South East.

The partnership's ask is for further resource to refine the options presented in the business case and identify a preferred scheme for development to detailed design, and the securing of appropriate powers for delivery. The case for such investment is considered to be stronger than ever, in the context of housing and economic development imperatives. I shall continue to call for this extension to be delivered in the years ahead. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

9.56 am

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda) on setting the scene and thank him for giving us an opportunity to participate. I want to give a Northern Ireland perspective on where we are. My method of getting here is to travel from London Heathrow or London City airport. Coming into Heathrow, I get the Elizabeth line or the Heathrow Express, depending on time. It is obviously important for us as commuters and for my constituents. I have to mention them because it is not about me; it is about the importance for them.

Thank you for giving me the chance to serve under your chairship, Mr Vickers. It is a pleasure to add some thoughts on how infrastructure can work better. Others have contributed on the real importance for their constituents. I may not have a piece of the Elizabeth line, or even a train line, in my constituency, but I am incredibly interested in connectivity throughout the United Kingdom. This time last week we had a debate on flight cancellations and connectivity. I want to give perspective on the importance of airline flight connections and of the Elizabeth line.

I can remember before the Elizabeth line was upgraded. To be fair, sometimes the service was not always dependable. That was a fact of life, so commuters would not take the Elizabeth line if they felt it would not arrive on time or be late setting off, whatever the reason. They would take

the Heathrow Express instead. There were occasions when it did work well. When the new Elizabeth line came in, it was much improved. It is important to put on record our thanks for that.

There are many things to boast about in London, such as the global seat of democracy at Westminster, the royal family home of Buckingham Palace, a rich history and successful city ventures. One of the many things in favour of this envy of the world is a rail and underground system that gets travellers where they want to be quickly.

I live in the countryside, where there are no bus connections, and have a diesel vehicle as my method of transport. In the city, tube trains, especially the Elizabeth line, and the Heathrow Express, are my main ways of connecting with my job, as they are for others. Does anyone need a car in London? If I lived here, no I would not, because tube trains are so handy, once someone gets into the way of it. When I first came here, I found it quite hard to fathom how tubes worked. It is no secret that I am a country boy. Before I was an MP, I think I had come to London four times in my life. Coming to the big city was almost like a holiday, in that I was somewhere different from back home.

My point is that we get used to the tube and understand how it works and its connectivity, and the Elizabeth line is part of that. Enhanced connectivity is what everyone here wants: they want people to be able to get where they need to go in a cost-effective and timely way.

Connectivity needs to go further than the London underground; it must be everywhere in the United Kingdom. I know that is not the Minister's responsibility, but it is tied to the connectivity of the Elizabeth line, the tube and the Heathrow Express, which is important to people like me and my constituents who come into Heathrow then into the city centre. Connectivity must relate to all parts of the infrastructure, because people fly in and then use the trains to get here.

I will give some examples that relate to my constituents. Last week, the planes from Northern Ireland to London were cancelled; we had an urgent question about it last Tuesday. I am not sure if British Airways has learned its lesson because, although it agreed to a meeting, on my way home on Thursday—guess what?—the plane was cancelled. It is at the stage where I phone the ladies in my office to say, "Will you check to make sure that the flight is on?"

If we do not have flights, and their connectivity with trains, we do not have a system that works. On behalf of all the tourists on planes from Belfast, Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, I say to the Minister: if the planes do not work, it does not really matter if the train works. It must be right for those who are coming for appointments, as the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Dr Pinkerton) referred to, and for disabled people, with wheelchair access on the tube.

We have so much to offer as a nation—there is so much investment from other countries—but our connectivity needs to be dependable, whether that is taking the tube between Paddington and Westminster or hopping on a flight from Belfast to London and then on to the tube. We must do better and put it all together: flying and the trains.

10.2 am

**Jim Dickson** (Dartford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Vickers, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda) on securing this important debate. We may be at different ends of the Elizabeth line, but we have a shared interest in getting the most out of it for our constituents.

My Dartford constituency is one of the fastest-growing communities in the country, with the population of the local authority increasing by 20% between 2011 and 2021, and likely by significantly more in the three years since 2021. Ebbsfleet in particular has grown by over 5,000 homes, with another 10,000 planned over the next decade. Yet the Elizabeth line stops at Abbey Wood, rather than reaching Ebbsfleet as was originally envisaged in the 2003 and 2004 consultations on Crossrail, as it was then known. When my hon. Friend settles down at Christmas for his Elizabeth line quiz, perhaps he could add a question: where was the intended final south-east station in the original Crossrail plans? The answer is, of course, Ebbsfleet. A quick look at the map shows the discrepancy, with services north of the river reaching all the way out to Shenfield but south of the river only as far as Abbey Wood.

I warmly welcome the fact that new residents are being attracted to live in Dartford thanks to the amazing development that is taking place, with many young families looking for comparably more affordable homes and often commuting into London. Despite not being a London constituency, we are dependent on transport links into the capital, which are crucial to economic growth in Dartford and across the Thames estuary, which could be an engine of growth for the new Labour Government.

Five years ago, in 2019, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government provided funding for the C2E Partnership—an informal group of interested local authorities—to undertake a comprehensive study into options for improving transport connectivity between Abbey Wood, Ebbsfleet and Gravesend, to support new housing and employment along that growth corridor. In 2021, those options were refined to just three: first, an extension of the Elizabeth line to Northfleet, Ebbsfleet and Gravesend, sharing existing tracks with National Rail services; secondly, extending the Elizabeth line to Dartford with the construction of new tracks; or thirdly, improving the frequency of National Rail services, and a new rapid bus transit service from Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet. Given the challenges with traffic that my constituency already experiences, I am somewhat sceptical about the third option, and there are significant challenges to sharing track with the existing National Rail services, making the first option difficult.

Unfortunately, since that narrowing of options in late 2021 when the business case was submitted to the last Conservative Government, we have seen little progress. The idea was revived earlier this year by Local London, a collection of nine local authorities in north-east and south-east London, which included it in research it commissioned on the region's long-term transportation needs. The London borough of Bexley and my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) are keen to see the work progress, as he so ably and articulately set out.

[Jim Dickson]

I urge the Minister and his colleagues across Government to look at how we can get on and finish the Elizabeth line as originally intended to grow the economy, boost productivity and improve lives across our region. That means extending it to Ebbsfleet, where the links with high-speed and international services would create an ideal interchange. That must be a priority when considering the future of the Elizabeth line.

10.6 am

**Clive Jones** (Wokingham) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I thank my fellow Berkshire MP, the hon. Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda), because many of the trains that pass through my constituency land in his, so it is something that we need to have regular discussions about. Our constituents want us to get this right.

Wokingham is well served with choices to get to London, and many commuters take the journey every day. To provide a brief tour, residents in Winnersh and Wokingham are slowly taken by South Western Railway through a suburban route via Waterloo to the Reading line. In the north, Twyford is on the Great Western main line into Paddington, carried by the Elizabeth line and Great Western Railway. It is a blessing that all 8.8 million Londoners are merely 33 minutes away from the many beautiful villages in Wokingham.

The Elizabeth line is a great addition to London and its route through Berkshire, helping to promote a shift from private vehicles and in turn reducing carbon emissions and particulate pollution. However, Wokingham has one of the highest levels of car dependency in England, and the quality of our railways likely explains why that is the case. Our railway services are unreliable and they do not work for passengers.

I thank the House of Commons Library for the following data. Only 66.6% of GWR services arrive on time, below the UK average of 67.5%. South Western is marginally better, on 66.8%, but still below the national average. With that perspective, I must give credit to the Elizabeth line, because 81% of its services arrive on time. In addition, 4.8% of all GWR services are cancelled—again, above the national average. That might not sound too bad on the face of it, but if I forgot my house keys 4.8% of the time, I would be locked out of my house 18 days every year.

For someone travelling on a Great Western service on Monday 28 October, 55 services were cancelled and 301 trains were late. How can we expect people to travel by train if passengers are not getting to where they need to be at the right time and for a reasonable price? As the Government begin a process of nationalising the railways, we need to seriously reflect on how we got here in the first place and how we can ensure that we are never here again, because people in Wokingham will continue to use cars if trains are not working for them.

I ask the Minister this: how do the Government intend to increase the reliability of service on the Great Western main line, and will he explain the role better infrastructure plays in that? What particular attention has been given to improving the reliability and speed of the Waterloo to Reading line? When can my constituents expect genuine change from Great British Railways? Finally, I support the proposal to build a western rail

link to Heathrow airport. Heathrow airport, the Thames Valley chamber of commerce, local MPs and many other organisations have backed the proposal, so Network Rail should get on and build it. Will the Minister confirm that the Secretary of State's infrastructure review will include considering a western link to Heathrow airport, and will the Minister for Rail meet with me to discuss the proposal?

10.11 am

**Catherine Atkinson** (Derby North) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda) for securing this key debate. I come to the debate as an interloper from the east midlands, although my constituency is not quite as far away as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) in Northern Ireland, who made some powerful points about the importance of connectivity.

My connection to the Elizabeth line is that its trains were built at Alstom in Derby. Derby has been building trains since 1840. The most recent order of 10 additional Elizabeth line trains to address capacity issues helped train building in Derby, which had been grinding to a halt because of a gap in train orders. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about the importance of rail infrastructure in the mission to drive economic growth—some hon. Members may have heard me speak about it once or twice before. This debate is an opportunity for us to highlight the importance of infrastructure in bolstering not just our local economies but, in its ripples, the broader economy; in providing jobs and opportunities for skills growth; and in improving physical and social mobility.

There is a future infrastructure project that runs right through Derby: the midland main line, which is the backbone of our rail system. I have long supported plans to continue its electrification, and I was reassured by the answer from the Minister for future of roads, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), that the project will go ahead,

“subject to business case approvals and affordability considerations.”—[*Official Report*, 10 October 2024; Vol. 754, c. 438.]

The benefits are enormous: significant decarbonisation and faster and quieter trains through one of the most densely populated lines in the country.

I was recently invited to speak at an event hosted by the High Speed Rail Group, which was launching its report, “Driving Investment in Rail Infrastructure”. The report called for rail infrastructure to be viewed as “strategic long-term investments that drive sustainable development”, and I agree. As the Institution of Civil Engineers has said, decision making needs to give weight to the benefits of infrastructure investment.

Rail infrastructure is about more than just the tracks that the trains run on. It is the rolling stock that carries the passengers or the freight. It is about the skills of the workforce who build the tunnels, wire the overhead lines and guide multi-million—often billion—pound projects from conception to the big business case review through to line energisation. It is also about the train drivers, cleaners and ticket booth operators; the impact it has on stations and the surrounding areas; and our efforts towards decarbonisation, taking cars off our roads and cleaning our air.



The decisions we take on how money is invested, which projects go ahead and how infrastructure is put in place must be taken with a long-term view because it impacts everyone. After so many years of stop and start and boom and bust, the industry is in desperate need of stability and clarity. Investors need to feel that there is support for projects, the businesses in the supply chain need to be able to anticipate work and retain skills, and workers need to know that they have jobs for the future. That forward planning builds sustainable growth and development.

Rolling stock manufacturers such as Alstom are key examples of the need for stability. As I mentioned, Alstom builds trains in Derby and is a major employer in our city, but thousands of jobs at Alstom and in its supply chain were lost because of the production gap earlier this year, which was in part due to the HS2 delays. We had a day where 1,000 years of welding experience walked out the door.

The additional Elizabeth line trains are a huge relief. Businesses such as Alstom and other manufacturers need an ongoing pipeline of work, new train orders and network upgrades to bring the growth, jobs and skills that our country so desperately needs.

10.16 am

**Ann Davies** (Caerfyrddin) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Mr Vickers. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. Today is an important opportunity to highlight how Wales is losing out when it comes to transport, infrastructure projects and funding. To be blunt, we can only dream of having a £19 billion investment in Wales. We would love that money to come across the border. The unfair Barnett formula means that Wales is missing out on billions of pounds of transport funding. The autumn Budget announced that Wales's Barnett comparability factor for transport had fallen yet again to 33.5%—it was 80.9% in 2015. That is due to HS2 and Network Rail being included in the calculations for Wales, which is eroding the funding available to us over time. That is not the case in other parts of the UK. Academics from Cardiff University note:

“At 95.6% Scotland and Northern Ireland continue to benefit from full Barnett population shares for transport funding that can be used for electrification, opening new lines, or to meet any other spending demand. This is a funding inequity that has long-term consequences yet continues to be ignored at the UK level”.

I remind hon. Members that the Barnett comparability factor for Wales is 33.5%, yet for Scotland and Northern Ireland it is 95.6%. Given that Wales receives roughly 5% of the spending that England does, the fall in our comparability factor means that we are now effectively receiving a third of a fifth of what is spent on transport in England. Does the Minister believe that is a fair way for Wales to be funded? The Government are set to renegotiate the fiscal framework with the Welsh Government. Will that include looking at improving Wales's transport comparability factor?

While the erosion of Wales's comparability factor may be new, the lack of investment is a historic problem. It is estimated that Wales has received approximately 1% to 2% of rail enhancement investment, despite the fact that the Welsh route makes up approximately 10% of the UK rail network. Professor Mark Barry of Cardiff University estimates:

“In terms of rail enhancement, in the period from 2001 through 2029...that the current constitutional arrangements have cost Wales a minimum of £3Bn in Barnett consequentials”.

Those sums could be transformational for our infrastructure in Wales. They could fund a programme of electrification and build new lines north to south, finally connecting our nation, rather than commuters having to travel hundreds of additional miles via Shrewsbury or Crewe. To add insult to injury, at the recent Budget the Chancellor announced several electrification and rail infrastructure projects across England, such as the trans-Pennine route upgrade and the Oxford-Cambridge rail, and she confirmed that High Speed 2 will end at Euston. Meanwhile, there was nothing for Wales, and no commitment of the £4 billion that we are owed for HS2.

The Welsh Labour Government have argued for the full devolution of rail; as has been noted here today, there is a strong financial case for rail infrastructure along the lines of the Scottish model, to address the broken funding for Welsh rail. What discussions have the UK Labour Government had with the Welsh Labour Government on the devolution of rail? Does the Minister agree with his Labour colleagues in Cardiff that rail should be devolved? The Government cannot continue to ignore this issue. As everyone knows, Plaid Cymru will continue to push for fair funding for our railways and the full devolution of rail for Wales. Diolch yn fawr, Cadeirydd.

10.21 am

**Sarah Edwards** (Tamworth) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mr Vickers. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda) for securing such an important debate; we have heard many important points already. My constituency may not sit on the Elizabeth line, but it forms a part of that wider rail connectivity that many of us are interested in, and it makes a huge contribution to that network as well. My constituency of Tamworth is a rail hub for that connectivity, with direct trains right across the country, but much more needs to be done to improve those connections.

There have been some recent improvements. Avanti West Coast services through Tamworth and neighbouring constituencies will see some additional services added from 15 December, as well as a phased increase of hourly services that will serve the lines between Liverpool and London, which stop at Tamworth. This week, Avanti West Coast has also launched its all-electric train fleet, which is a great move towards electrification and greatly contributes to our goal to reach net zero. I welcome those improvements, but we have to do more to widen the connections from the midlands to other regions.

Many of my constituents have raised concerns about travel between Tamworth and Birmingham, including by both bus and train. Birmingham is a key connectivity point for Tamworth residents; many use it for commuting, work and leisure, but poor services have left many of my constituents frustrated. Transport projects often have a focus on distance or reach, but it is vital that we ensure that those smaller commutes are efficient, effective and reliable. I welcome the statement made by the Secretary of State for Transport yesterday and the steps that this Government took to implement a remedial plan to deal with the cross-country services,

[Sarah Edwards]

reduce their cancellations and get services back on track. That is very important to my constituents in Tamworth.

The hon. Member for Caerfyrddin (Ann Davies) just mentioned HS2, which of course goes through my constituency. It brings huge infrastructure improvement, which has been discussed already, particularly with the Elizabeth line, through both its architecture and its contribution. However, building it has plagued my constituency with traffic problems, and as many of my constituents do not feel that they will ever travel on that line, it comes with a slightly negative tinge.

However, the HS2 growth strategy, published by the Constellation Partnership covering Cheshire and Staffordshire, included ambitions for 100,000 new homes and 120,000 new jobs, all by 2040. That is spurred by the connectivity that HS2 aimed to create. It is also predicted that £6.4 billion will be contributed to the economy, so I am very interested that the Elizabeth line has contributed £42 billion in just two years since opening. That is a positive thing to potentially be looking forward to once HS2 is complete. During its construction, HS2 is expected to deliver a £10 billion economic uplift, and that is before trains even begin to run.

The Government have started to put foundations in place to support successful transport infrastructure projects. The introduction of Great British Energy will provide this country with a stable supply of clean energy, which is important as we look to the electrification of trains and other transport modes. However, there are still barriers that we need to overcome. I welcome the Minister's thoughts on interventions that I am sure his team will be bringing forward and what contribution rail infrastructure can make to net zero.

10.25 am

**Mr Paul Kohler** (Wimbledon) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I thank the hon. Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda) for securing this important debate.

Despite some genuine issues, it is clear that the Elizabeth line has been a tremendous success. It was an engineering marvel, and one of the biggest infrastructure projects in Europe. Crossrail dug out 42 km of new tunnels in the centre of one of the biggest cities in Europe, weaving around existing underground tunnels, cable ducts, gas pipes and other utilities. The result? Economic growth and revitalised communities along the length of the line. Since opening, 60% of employment growth in Greater London has taken place within 1 km of an Elizabeth line station, as the hon. Member for Dartford (Jim Dickson) said. The line has increased the capacity of the London underground by 10%, which is why passenger numbers on the underground have bucked the national trend by recovering to post-pandemic levels. Such success shows what happens when we are ambitious and invest in rail.

It is not just in London where the impact has been felt. As we have heard, towns in Essex and Berkshire now have direct links to central London and Heathrow, promoting investment and creating new opportunities from Reading to Romford. The construction of the Elizabeth line has also increased employment across

the country. Crossrail awarded 62% of its contracts to firms outside of London, creating 55,000 new jobs, 1,000 apprenticeships and helping to keep rolling stock manufacturing in Derby, as so articulately described by the hon. Member for Derby North (Catherine Atkinson).

While the Elizabeth line shows the best of what transport infrastructure can do, it also shows some of the pitfalls. Management issues led to overspending and delays—something we have sadly become all too accustomed to with infrastructure projects in this country. In 2010, the project was forecast to cost £14.8 billion. By the end it had ballooned to £18.8 billion—clearly not in the same league as HS2, but still representing a 28% overspend. At a time when public finances are tight, it is simply not acceptable.

Like many rail projects, Crossrail showed a flexibility towards deadlines that would make even the most laid-back of my former students blush. I appreciate that rail passengers have become all too accustomed to delays, but waiting three-and-a-half years for a train is probably pushing it. As we embark on new infrastructure projects, it is vital that we understand what causes delays and cost overruns and learn lessons for the future.

In March this year, the Department for Transport and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority published their joint report into the lessons learned from Crossrail. The new Government must take heed of the recommendations to avoid another HS2. With talk of greater devolution and new public-private partnerships, the Government must take particular note of what the report says about the issues that arise from joint sponsorship of projects. Making sure that we get this right will be vital to ensuring that we build the infrastructure our country needs in years to come. The ongoing saga with HS2 has undermined public confidence in the UK's ability to successfully complete infrastructure projects. If we are to get the full benefit of development, we must rebuild public trust and show that lessons have been learned—not just in transport, but in all infrastructure projects.

With many of our current lines at maximum capacity, we desperately need investment in our rail network to encourage rail freight, improve consumer choice and push forward the transition to net zero. We also need to replace existing infrastructure that has reached the end of its useful life. The District line in my constituency of Wimbledon is notorious for breakdowns, cancellations and delays. It needs investment urgently.

The key lesson from Crossrail is that when we invest and put spades in the ground, the impact can be transformative. Disappointingly, however, that lesson does not appear to have been fully learned by the current Government, although I suspect the Minister here today agrees with what I said in the main Chamber last week: if this Government are serious about economic growth, why did the Chancellor cut the transport budget?

Transport should be the engine of our economy. After years of neglect by the Conservative Government, the time has come to make the targeted investment that will make a difference to people's lives. Yes, costs must be controlled—what happened with HS2, as the Secretary of State for Transport conceded in the main Chamber yesterday, is unacceptable. If we are to get this country moving again, we must learn from the Elizabeth line and give the transport network the infrastructure it needs.

10.30 am

**Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): It is reassuring to have a friendly, if entirely impartial, face in the Chair, Mr Vickers, surrounded as I am by Members who are my opposition. I thank the hon. Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda) for securing the debate and for the tone in which he led it, including his generous sharing of congratulations for the work behind the creation of the Elizabeth line. There have been excellent contributions, which I will leave the Minister to highlight because that is his role and not mine.

There is lots to celebrate in our transport network, but we need to go further to increase connectivity and to react to demographic changes and changing work practices. That is something the Conservative Government tackled head-on. People may not have realised it from the tone of some of the contributions today, but over the last period more than £100 billion was invested in our railways, and under the Conservative and Conservative-led Governments some 1,265 miles of line was electrified. I will spare the blushes of the hon. Member for Reading Central, but were he to ask at his Christmas quiz how many miles were electrified under the previous 13 years of Labour Government, the answer would be not 1,265, nor even 65, but 63. There has clearly been a step in the right direction over the last decade.

There has also been investment in the midlands rail hub, Northern Powerhouse Rail and the Access for All programme—I will talk about some of those in further detail later—but we are here primarily to celebrate the Elizabeth line, which has been a huge success. It was a courageous, large-scale project that has actually delivered and continues to deliver, and I hope it will continue to deliver for many years to come, not just for the residents of London, but for the south-east more generally and for UK plc.

I mention in passing that the Elizabeth line did not have to be over time and over budget. When it was managed by the previous Conservative Mayor of London, he left it on time and on budget, and if the project no longer followed that path, perhaps we should ask Sadiq Khan about the quality of his project management. Nevertheless, the Elizabeth line has created, as the hon. Member for Reading Central said, £42 billion of economic benefit in just two years, creating 8,000 jobs and leading to the building of 55,000 homes. That is unequivocally a success story for London and the greater region.

The next project for London and the south-east is the lower Thames crossing. We have huge bottlenecks at the Dartford crossing. The previous Government had been progressing with the crossing, but the current Government have now kicked it into the long grass. That is a genuine cause for concern regarding connectivity in the south-east, and I fear that it may lead to the next step, which is cancellation. Will the Minister take this opportunity to reassure the House, and the many people who are no doubt watching this debate, that the lower Thames crossing is still very much on course and part of the Government's projections for infrastructure development in the south-east?

It is not just in the south where the new Government are generating delay and doubt. Labour is potentially failing in the north as well, because Network North funding is now in doubt as we wait for the Government's

infrastructure strategy. People may ask themselves what the Network North funding is. Well, it is £19.8 billion of investment in Bradford's new station, and in a mass transport transit system for Leeds and west Yorkshire; it is £12 billion of investment in stronger connections between Manchester and Liverpool; and it is £9.6 billion of investment in the midlands rail hub and in improving 50 stations in the midlands.

It is not just in rail where doubt is creeping into our infrastructure development projects, for the Government have already cancelled major road improvements in their first few months, including the A5036 Princess way scheme; the A358 Taunton to Southfields scheme; the A47 Great Yarmouth Vauxhall roundabout, close to my home; and the A1 Morpeth to Ellingham scheme. The restoring your railway programme has been cancelled. That is a terrible start in just a few months.

Is it the Minister's intention to follow the example of his colleagues in Wales? Is it the Government's intention to deprioritise road infrastructure? Is it the Minister's intention to have a "no new roads" policy? It is beginning to sound like it. If that is not the policy, will he explain why that would be a bad idea, both in England and in Wales? Will he move against the imposition of 20 mph speed limits without local consultation? Will he put in place the updated guidance, which has already been drafted, on how such schemes should be introduced? It was prepared by the previous Government and is ready to go. If the Minister will not introduce it, will he explain why not?

On the record so far, St Francis of Assisi could have said—he probably did not—that Labour brings doubt where there was direction, indecision where there was investment and delay where there was dynamism. What have we got instead? We have inflation-busting pay rises with no working practice reforms to the unions. Paid for how? By debt? Yes. By increased taxes on poor pensioners? Certainly. By jacking up bus fares by 50%? That is true, too. And by delaying critical infrastructure.

The Government need to think again. This excellent debate, which I again congratulate the hon. Member for Reading Central on securing, has given the Minister the opportunity to provide clarity, to focus on transport users rather than just the unions, and to recommit to key transport infrastructure investments throughout the country.

10.37 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Simon Lightwood):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I thank all Members for their contributions to the debate, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda) for securing it. I appreciate the transformational impact that the full opening of the Elizabeth line has had on my hon. Friend's constituents. The Government fully recognise the importance of investing in infrastructure to support economic growth, promote social mobility and tackle regional inequality.

The Government recently delivered to the House their first Budget, which set out significant investment in transport to support everyday journeys and address poor connectivity in towns and cities across the country. That includes capital investment, such as £485 million for Transport for London's capital renewals programme, including funding for rolling stock on the Piccadilly and



[Simon Lightwood]

Elizabeth lines; funding of more than £650 million for local transport to ensure that transport connections improve in towns, villages and rural areas, as well as in major cities; a £500 million increase in 2025-26 compared with 2024-25, for local road maintenance; an additional £200 million for city region sustainable transport settlements, bringing local transport spending for Metro Mayors in 2025-26 to £1.3 billion; an investment of an additional £100 million in cycling and walking infrastructure in 2025-26, to support local authorities to install cycling infrastructure and upgrade pavements and paths; and over £200 million in 2025-26 to accelerate the roll-out of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

Let me turn to the Elizabeth line. This fantastic east-west rail link through central London has revolutionised travel in the city and beyond. Since it opened in 2022, it has enabled more than 400 million passenger journeys. It has dramatically improved connectivity—particularly for areas that previously had poor accessibility—and reduced crowding and cut journey times. Indeed, it has proven so popular that, with Government support, TfL has ordered 10 additional trains. They will be produced by Alstom in Derby, with the first train scheduled to be delivered to TfL in 2026. That will not only further improve the service capability on the line, but enhance supply chain capability throughout the country.

There have also been challenges, of course. I am sure that my hon. Friend is concerned about the issues regarding the overhead electrification on the Great Western main line. I am advised that many of those failures are due to dated equipment installed in the 1990s. Network Rail plans to renew the outdated equipment during the next five years to improve reliability for passengers. Furthermore, some delivery challenges arose due to the relationship between the Department for Transport and Transport for London having grown strained at times. I am pleased to say that that has been reset under this Government, and both organisations are working together to continue to deliver the full benefit of the Elizabeth line.

The benefits of the Elizabeth line will continue to grow. My Department is working closely with the wider industry, in particular TfL, to integrate existing Elizabeth line services effectively into the new station at Old Oak Common. The interchange between High Speed 2 and Great Western main line services at Old Oak Common will provide significantly enhanced connectivity with the west of England, Cornwall and south Wales. Old Oak Common will operate as the London terminus for HS2 until construction of the link into Euston. Onward connectivity to central London will be provided via an interchange with the Elizabeth line, with journey times of about 14 minutes to Heathrow airport, 15 minutes to the west end, 20 minutes to the City and 25 minutes to Canary Wharf.

My Department is working with the rail industry to minimise disruption during the construction of Old Oak Common station. We have allocated £30 million to enable services to continue to operate during construction. That includes electrification of the “Poplars” line, which will enable Elizabeth line trains operating west of Ealing Broadway to get into their maintenance depot.

I will now reflect on some other items raised by hon. Members. I will take part in my hon. Friend’s quiz and say that the Elizabeth line is the most significant addition to London’s transport network in a generation. As I said, journey times have been slashed and new journey opportunities created, while crowding on other routes has declined. Crossrail and its supply chain have supported the equivalent of 55,000 full-time jobs across the country and have created more than 1,000 apprenticeship opportunities. Crossrail was an ambitious, multi-decade £19 billion infrastructure project to build the Elizabeth line, a new, world-class, high-frequency 73-mile railway across central London and beyond, jointly sponsored by the DfT and TfL.

I can tell the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Dr Pinkerton) that transport will of course play a central role in our mission-led Government. We have already seen the introduction of Bills on buses and on the public ownership of our railways. We are absolutely determined to ensure that public transport is improved.

My hon. Friends the Members for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) and for Dartford (Jim Dickson) asked about the extension to Ebbsfleet. Transport for London is responsible for the operation of the Elizabeth line. Currently, there are no plans to extend the line from Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet International, although the route is still safeguarded. I have no doubt that my hon. Friends will continue to lobby TfL on that issue.

Turning to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), of course connectivity is critical. He will be pleased to know that work has already commenced on our integrated transport strategy, which will be an important part of our work in Government.

The hon. Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) talked about railways. The starting gun has already been fired on reform of our railways. In fact, the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill was the first Bill I stood at the Government Dispatch Box to take through the House. I will ensure that the Rail Minister writes to the hon. Member about his other points.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Catherine Atkinson) that increasing infrastructure investment is a vital part of delivering on our No. 1 mission of growing the economy and creating jobs. We are serious about ending the cycle of under-investment that has plagued our infrastructure systems for more than a decade.

I will pass the comments from the hon. Member for Caerfyrddin (Ann Davies) on to the Rail Minister, but needless to say, we are looking at our infrastructure investment as part of the review.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Sarah Edwards) mentioned net zero. As well as placing passengers at the heart of our railway, ensuring that we maximise our potential for freight will go a long way towards achieving that.

The hon. Member for Wimbledon (Mr Kohler) mentioned the overspend. Over the years, the cost for phase 1 of HS2 soared due to poor project management, inflation and poor performance from the supply chain, with a failure to deliver to budget. On 20 October, the Transport Secretary announced a series of urgent measures to control the cost of HS2 and bring that back on track.

Looking ahead, the next spending review will focus on the Government’s mission and manifesto commitments through growth and public service improvements over

the long term. It is important that opportunities presented to invest in complementary infrastructure west of London are considered fully in the context of the forthcoming second phase of the spending review and the need to drive economic growth. The Government will continue to work closely with local communities, local leaders and industry to continue to deliver transport infrastructure projects that ensure that transport remains at the heart of our mission-led Government.

10.46 am

**Matt Rodda:** It is a pleasure to have secured today's debate—thank you for your wise chairship, Mr Vickers. I found the positive mood and spirit in which colleagues conducted the debate wonderful and quite inspirational. It is hugely important to recognise when we do achieve something as a country, and this really was, and is, a national achievement. I just wish it could go all the way to mid-Wales and Northern Ireland—perhaps one day.

I thank the Minister—indeed, the shadow Minister hinted at this—for taking part in my Christmas quiz and repeating the key line that I hope we will all take home: this is £42 billion in just two years, so imagine what it could do over the longer term. Indeed, some of the studies on the economic benefits are yet to be fully updated, and I look forward to further benefits being discovered, including on connectivity just beyond the line. The points from my hon. Friends the Members for Dartford (Jim Dickson) and for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) about the relationship to the area just beyond the Elizabeth line are well made, and indeed, places west of Reading and my area have benefited as well. I would like to thank the House again, and you Mr Vickers, for today's opportunity to speak.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered future transport infrastructure projects and the Elizabeth line.

10.48 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Breast Cancer: Younger Women

11 am

**Martin Vickers (in the Chair):** I will call Vera Hobhouse to move the motion, and I will then call the Minister to respond. There will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up, as is the convention in 30-minute debates.

**Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered breast cancer in younger women.

It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Vickers. I thank the Minister for being here to respond.

Every woman deserves a fair chance against breast cancer, no matter her age. It is the most common type of cancer in the UK. Most women who are diagnosed are over 50, and it is therefore a disease often associated with older women, but young women are at risk, too. Breast cancer in younger women is often caught later when it is more advanced. That is because there is no routine screening and too often symptoms get dismissed as something less serious. That must change. Awareness and early detection are crucial, no matter your age.

The issue arose for me during a constituency surgery when my Bath constituent Lucy shared her story, which resonated with me because my nephew's mother died many years ago of breast cancer aged 35. In 2021 Lucy, who was 38, had two young children and was diagnosed with primary breast cancer. She underwent a mastectomy, chemotherapy and radiotherapy before being given the all-clear. In 2024, when she was 41, a self-initiated MRI scan tragically came back showing that her cancer had returned, leading to a diagnosis of secondary breast cancer, which is currently incurable. In both cases she found it a struggle to be diagnosed.

The first time, despite her mother having had breast cancer and Lucy presenting with a lump, at least three different doctors told her that it was likely to be hormones and nothing to worry about. It was not until she requested the biopsy, which ultimately came back showing it was cancer, that the diagnosis was made. The second time she repeatedly voiced concerns about a symptom that she was experiencing, but she was repeatedly assured that it was just a side effect of the treatment. Still concerned, she approached the GP, who did some initial tests but ultimately suggested that her worries were anxiety-driven. After that appointment she came out and sobbed in her car.

Searching for peace of mind, Lucy then paid privately for a breast MRI, which tragically revealed that the cancer had returned, but by then it was too late. In both cases—first by requesting the biopsy and secondly by initiating an MRI—it was up to Lucy to fight for a diagnosis.

**Helen Grant (Maidstone and Malling) (Con):** I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. Because of the age restrictions in accessing NHS mammograms and the importance of early diagnosis, which she highlights, does she agree that self-awareness and self-examination in young women is critical in the battle to beat breast cancer?

**Wera Hobhouse:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right that we need to continue to raise awareness, but I am pointing out that even when young women are aware

[*Wera Hobhouse*]

and go to a doctor, the doctor says, “Don’t worry about it.” However, I agree that we need to continue to make sure that women examine their breasts and are aware of the risks of breast cancer, even when they are young.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I spoke to the hon. Lady yesterday. This is a massive issue for me and my constituents back home, and they bring it to my attention all the time. It was great to attend the Breast Cancer Now “Wear It Pink” event last month to raise awareness of the most common cancer in the UK. Studies have suggested that breast cancer among younger women has a more aggressive pathophysiology, correlating to poorer outcomes compared with those for breast tumours in older patients. Does the hon. Lady agree that consideration must be given to lowering the age requirement for breast screening to ensure quicker intervention for younger women?

**Wera Hobhouse:** I will come to that later in my speech, but I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. We are here to make the case for earlier screening programmes for younger women, because it is becoming such an issue—the rates are increasing. It is because of Lucy’s struggle to get a diagnosis that she felt the need to speak up on behalf of the countless young people who would not question decisions made by medical professionals.

**Clive Jones** (Wokingham) (LD): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. After I survived breast cancer, one of my many emotional conversations with my daughters was about having the BRCA gene. Currently, there is a postcode lottery for the availability of counselling with proper genetic guidance for those who are identified as having the gene. Does my hon. Friend agree that NHS England should ensure equitable access to information and counselling services, and that fixing the system should be a feature of the Government’s future cancer strategy?

**Wera Hobhouse:** I am sorry to hear that my hon. Friend went through a cancer diagnosis, and I am glad that he recovered. Breast cancer in men is not as well known; people do not necessarily recognise that men can develop breast cancer. Once a diagnosis is made, it is quite traumatic for the whole family. Counselling services need to be adequate, and I agree that there should not be a postcode lottery.

The description of Lucy’s story is in no way meant as an attack on the NHS. Since she was diagnosed, Lucy has received the top-class care for which the NHS is renowned, but she is not alone in having her age used against her. There are countless similar stories of women of a similar age or younger who have found it difficult to receive an initial diagnosis, with concerns often dismissed too early by doctors as hormones, anxiety or tiredness. This is by no means the doctors’ fault; they are forced to make difficult decisions about who to prioritise because of the impossible time and budget constraints that are imposed on them. That does not, however, make it acceptable.

There is a long-standing myth that breast cancer only affects older women, but there has been a global surge in cancers among the under-50s over the past three decades—sadly, the issue is not limited to breast cancer.

Last year, a study found that cancer cases in under-50s worldwide are up nearly 80% in the last 30 years. More than a million under-50s are dying of cancer each year, and that figure is projected to rise by 21% by 2030.

I draw attention to the “Jess’s Law” petition, which has more than 350,000 signatures, to improve the awareness and diagnosis of cancer in young adults. It points out the struggles young adults face in getting diagnosed, even though adults aged 25 to 49 contribute around a tenth of all new cancer cases. According to Cancer Research UK, cancer rates in 25 to 39-year-olds in the UK increased by 24% between 1995 and 2019. In 2019 alone, almost 35,000 people in that age bracket were diagnosed with cancer.

The trend is especially alarming in breast cancer. Diagnoses of breast cancer have increased steadily in women under 50 over the past two decades, but in recent years the increase has been even more stark. In 2013, breast cancer cases in women under 50 topped 10,000 for the first time. To the alarm of experts, breast cancer diagnoses in women under 50 have risen by more than 2% annually over the past five years, so the trend is clearly an increase. That is deeply concerning, especially since women under 50 are nearly 40% more likely to die from breast cancer than are women over 50.

It is truly alarming that in the UK, breast cancer accounts for 43% of all cancers diagnosed in women aged 25 to 49. Despite that, we continue to wait until women are 50 or older to begin routine screening. Why are we delaying early detection when the rates of breast cancer in younger women are rising year on year? Cervical cancer screening is available to women from the age of 25, but of the top 10 cancers detected in those aged 25 to 49 in the UK, breast cancer outweighs cervical cancer by more than five times, so that discrepancy simply does not make sense. If we can screen for other cancers earlier, we should do the same for breast cancer. We all know that early detection saves lives, so we must ensure that all women, regardless of their age, have the opportunity to access lifesaving screenings.

Young women are more likely to develop aggressive forms of the disease. Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women, and it remains one of the leading causes of death in women under 50 in the UK. Unfortunately, as Lucy’s story shows, younger women often face more challenges to diagnosis. They are more likely to be diagnosed at a later stage of the disease, with larger tumours and greater lymph node involvement. Cancer in younger women is also more likely to be biologically aggressive: sub-types such as triple negative breast cancer are harder to treat and have poorer outcomes. As a result, younger women have significantly worse prognoses, with a higher risk of recurrence and death than older women. We cannot ignore that stark reality.

Premature death from breast cancer among women in their 40s accounts for the same years of life lost as those in their 50s, and substantially more than those diagnosed in their 60s. That is crucial. A death of a woman in her 40s or 50s represents not just a loss of life, but a tragic loss of potential life years.

Researchers also found an increase in the diagnosis of stages 1 and 4 tumours, which suggests that if stage 1 tumours are missed in younger women, they tend not to be found until they reach stage 4, at which point the cancer is incurable. Early detection can make all the difference. During the previous Parliament, a petition



calling for funding to extend breast cancer screening to women from the age of 40 got more than 12,000 signatures. That widespread public support reflects the growing concerns about early detection.

The Government's response was deeply disappointing. They continue to use the Marmot review as their main reference point, citing the lower risk of young women developing breast cancer and the fact that women below 50 tend to have denser breasts, reducing the accuracy of a mammogram. It is true that the risk of younger women developing breast cancer is lower, but statistics show that rates of breast cancer in women aged 25 to 49 are rising fast, and that upward trend demands urgent attention.

Although mammograms can be less effective in women with denser breast tissue, that should not limit our approach to early detection. We should continue to use modern digital mammography, but the Government should expand the use of automated breast ultrasounds. Ultrasounds are especially effective in detecting abnormalities in dense tissue that might be missed on a mammogram. The technology is not invasive; it is quick and radiation-free, and it is often used for secondary screening for women with dense breasts. Automated breast ultrasounds can detect up to 30% more cancers in women with dense breasts than mammograms alone. By embracing both mammography and ultrasound, we can significantly improve detection rates, ensuring early and more accurate diagnosis.

Last week, in the light of Sir Chris Hoy's bravery in sharing his story about his struggle with prostate cancer, the Health Secretary asked the NHS to look at the case for lowering the screening age for prostate cancer, particularly for people with a family history of the disease. That is an important and welcome step, but we must look at extending that approach to breast cancer too. Both diseases share a significant genetic link, and a family history often increases the risk. Aligning the screening policies for prostate and breast cancers in recognition of the shared genetic risks would provide a better safety net for those affected.

Various parts of the NHS are competing for investment, but it is clear that short-term investment in this area will save money in the long term, with fewer women needing extensive long-term treatment if breast cancer is caught early. According to Breast Cancer Now, breast cancer will cost the UK economy almost £3 billion in 2024, and the annual cost could rise to £3.6 billion by 2034.

I call on the Department of Health and Social Care to review the national breast cancer screening programme to identify where changes can be made to increase capacity in the system, to ensure that, where appropriate, a woman's initial screening appointment can happen at a lower age. I also call on the Government to investigate the merits of early optional ultrasound for women aged 30 to 49. Finally, we must educate healthcare professionals and increase resources so that younger women who seek help are always taken seriously and investigated thoroughly, and never dismissed.

It is about not just policy change, but giving people the best possible chance to fight back against cancer and live healthier, longer lives. I hope that the Minister has heard Lucy's story and will actively look at changing the way we screen for breast cancer for good.

11.16 am

**The Minister for Secondary Care (Karin Smyth):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I thank the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) for bringing this debate to the House, as well as other hon. Members for their interventions. I also pay tribute to the hon. Lady for championing the story of her constituent Lucy and others, such as Jessica Parsons, who have done so much to raise awareness. We have a powerful role as Members of Parliament, and I commend the hon. Lady for doing an excellent job.

The hon. Lady is absolutely right that awareness raising is key to catching cancer early, and the most effective way to tackle breast cancer in younger women is to encourage them to check their breasts regularly. The NHS is going through the worst crisis in its history, and this Government will turn it around so that cancer patients are diagnosed and treated on time. The investments we are making now in breast cancer treatment and research are part of our plan to make the NHS fit for the future.

Although women of any age can get breast cancer, it is much more likely to occur over the age of 50. That is why our screening programme sends women their first invitation at 50. However, I will take this opportunity to emphasise that the take-up of breast cancer screening is currently below 70%. That is worryingly low, and we are determined to change that. I make a plea to all hon. Members to help the Government achieve greater take-up of breast cancer screening in women over 50. Women need to come forward for screening.

Taken as a whole, the evidence does not support regular mammograms for women below the age of 50. Decisions on screening, including the age at which to offer it, are made by experts on the UK National Screening Committee, and those decisions are kept under review so that they continue to be based on the best available research. Ultrasound can be used as a diagnostic tool, but it is not appropriate for screening. Mammograms provide a fuller picture of the breast, and are better able to spot early signs of cancer. As the hon. Lady said, mammograms used for screening are less reliable for younger women given their denser breast tissue. Change in the screening age could mean a greater risk of false negatives, where cancer is missed, and there would also be a greater risk of false positives, which may lead to invasive testing when there is no need for it. Our approach is in line with that of most European countries, which screen women between the ages of 50 and 69.

For younger women who have a greater risk because of their family history, we offer screening using mammogram or an MRI scan. As I have said, the most effective way to tackle breast cancer in younger women is to encourage them to check their breasts regularly, and to consult their GP straight away if they have any concerns.

**Wera Hobhouse:** Lucy did that and was dismissed. Today's debate is particularly important for awareness raising among the medical profession to ensure that women, particularly those who know about a family history of breast cancer—some do not—are not dismissed and are taken seriously.

**Karin Smyth:** The hon. Member makes a powerful point. When people come in, particularly with a family history, their relationship with their GP should be better and should take that history into account.

We know that the sooner cancer is diagnosed, the more treatment options are available, and that treatment is more likely to be effective with an early diagnosis. Primary care and GPs are essential in that pathway and I agree with the hon. Lady that we need to pay attention to the upward trend in demand. NHS England runs campaigns to increase knowledge and awareness of key symptoms, but we can all do more. Breast cancer is thankfully rare among younger women, but the more aware they are of the symptoms, the likelier they are to see their GP, and the GP will be made more aware of those trends.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight Breast Cancer Now's "Touch, Look, Check" advice. The NHS and the Government support this advice, and I encourage women no matter how young or old they are to check their breasts often. Breast cancer remains one of the most common cancers in England; almost 50,000 people are diagnosed each year. Instances of many types of cancer are rising among young people in this country, and we are not yet certain of the cause of that. Although breast cancer is thankfully less common in younger women, we cannot afford to be complacent and, as the hon. Lady has highlighted, we must remember the human stories behind that number—the lives disrupted, the trepidation of diagnosis and the uncertainty faced by loved ones. We can take some comfort from the fact that more women are surviving breast cancer than ever before. Between 2016 and 2020, the one-year survival rate for breast cancer was over 96%, enabled by advances in screening, treatment and care.

There is much more to be done, and I want to reassure hon. Members that it is a top priority of this Government to speed up the diagnosis and treatment of every type of cancer. On 30 October, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor restated and backed that commitment. The first Labour Budget committed £70 million for new radiotherapy treatment machines and £1.5 billion for new surgical hubs and diagnostic scanners. This investment will allow the NHS to undertake

30,000 more procedures each year, and the capacity for diagnostic tests will increase to 1.25 million. This further funding will enable us to ensure that cancer can be diagnosed or ruled out as quickly as possible, which is something we all want to see.

We also continue to pave the way in identifying the best possible testing and treatment for all types of cancer. Research is a crucial part of this. That is why the National Institute for Health and Care Research has spent £33 million on directly funding breast cancer research in the last five years. But investment alone will not be enough to tackle the problems facing the NHS; it would be like pouring water into a leaky bucket. We need investment and reform. People who work in the NHS, as I have, see first hand what is great but also what is not working—the things more money will simply not fix. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, we need to take the best of the NHS.

We need to do more to meet the challenges presented cancer now and in the future for people of all ages. We recently launched the biggest national conversation about the future of the NHS since its birth to help to shape our 10-year plan, which will allow us to do more to prevent cancer where we can, identifying it as early and as quickly as possible and treating it with speed and precision. But we need suggestions from hon. Members on how to go further. We need to learn from the experiences of people like Lucy, which the hon. Member for Bath outlined today. I urge everyone to visit [change.nhs.uk](https://change.nhs.uk) and help us build a health service fit for the future.

I thank the hon. Lady for bringing this important matter to the House and raising her constituent's issue. I thank all hon. Members who have made such valuable contributions on this important subject. I am pleased to assure them that rebuilding our NHS and delivering world-class cancer treatment and prevention services for every person will always be a top priority for this Government.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.24 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## NHS Dentistry: South-west

[MARTIN VICKERS *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Richard Foord** (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered NHS dentistry in the South West.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Vickers. I am grateful to the Chairman of Ways and Means to have been granted a debate on NHS dentistry in the south-west of England, which has particular problems.

I know that the new Minister will have encountered enough problems with NHS dentistry as it is, but the south-west is a special case. To illustrate: if we were to go back to 2015, 51% of adults in the south-west could see a dentist. That was also the case across England at the time, with 51% of patients who wished to see an NHS dentist having access to one. By 2024, however, that figure has declined sharply. Now, the current average across England is 40%, and in the south-west it is just 34%.

**Sarah Dyke** (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. In Somerset, the percentage of adults who have seen a dentist has dropped by 20% over the past decade. Does my hon. Friend agree with me that we should guarantee access to an NHS dentist for everyone needing urgent and emergency care?

**Richard Foord**: That is exactly what is needed for urgent and emergency care. My hon. Friend draws attention to Somerset; the situation is bleak in Devon too. In Devon in 2015, 55% of adults were able to see a dentist, but that has since dropped to just 37% today.

I have had so much correspondence from my constituents on this subject, and the decline, as I see it, is a direct result of 14 years of Conservative neglect of our health services and of NHS dentistry in particular. I find it really troubling that the situation is affecting people in some of the most vulnerable categories, such as older people and children,

Children in Devon are missing out on crucial dental check-ups. Once upon a time, they used to have check-ups twice a year; now, it is not possible for children to be registered for NHS dentistry in many dental practices. It is therefore no surprise that tooth decay is now the leading cause of hospital admissions for five to nine-year-olds in the country. I talked to one primary school and was told that pupils are going to hospital in Bristol to have their teeth removed—often between four and 10 teeth at a time. The number of NHS dentists in Devon has dropped from 549 to 497, so the reality is that NHS dentistry is simply no longer available for all.

**Perran Moon** (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): I entirely accept the points that have been made about Devon and Somerset. In Camborne, Redruth and Hayle, we have some of the most deprived areas in the country. I have met people who have chosen to access dental care privately at the expense of heating their homes or eating food. This is where we are today: we are in a dental emergency across the south-west, and in Cornwall,

the situation is now critical. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we cannot wait any longer for emergency dental care across the south-west?

**Richard Foord**: The hon. Gentleman is right. We want to move NHS treatment back into primary care and away from the most critical acute care, yet it seems to me that primary care services are moving in the other direction.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): Royal United hospitals in Bath saw nearly 260 people last year with serious dental issues such as abscesses, largely because those people could not get a preventive care appointment from a dentist in their community, forcing them to go to A&E. Does my hon. Friend agree that a lack of NHS dentistry drives up costs because people go to A&E when it should only be there for emergency cases?

**Richard Foord**: I agree that emergency care should not suddenly become the routine. It is there for the most critical cases, but we have not seen that, given the drying up of NHS dentistry provision in our towns and villages.

**Sarah Gibson** (Chippenham) (LD): Does my hon. Friend not agree that part of the problem is that we are only talking about emergencies? The Secretary of State, in his first week in the job, talked about working hard to look at preventive medicine. That should apply to dentistry as well. Does my hon. Friend not agree that we need to look at a serious timeline for reviewing the dental contract? We cannot only talk about emergencies all the time.

**Richard Foord**: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Prevention is clearly cheaper than dealing with the problems down the line. There is no better example than offering check-ups for children's dentistry.

**Rachel Gilmour** (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): I find it absolutely shocking—I am sure my hon. Friend will agree—that the recommendations of a report published 15 years ago by the previous Health and Social Care Committee have still not been implemented.

**Richard Foord**: The hon. Member for Tiverton and Minehead has clearly done her homework. It is quite staggering that recommendations from that long ago are still not implemented.

**Caroline Voaden** (South Devon) (LD): Lord Darzi said in his review of the NHS that

“urgent action is needed to develop a contract that balances activity and prevention, is attractive to dentists and rewards those dentists who practise in less served areas”

such as mine in South Devon, where not a single dentist is taking on NHS patients any more. Would my hon. Friend agree that we urgently need a timeline for this work to be done?

**Richard Foord**: Yes, I think so. My hon. Friend is right to point to some of the recommendations in the Darzi report. I was encouraged to see reference to neighbourhood hubs, where perhaps we can have delivery of primary care, such as NHS dentistry, nearer to the constituents we represent.



**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate. Does the hon. Member not agree that the story in the south-west is being replicated across all of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? He may not be aware of a survey of almost 300 dentists in Northern Ireland that found that almost nine in 10 intend to reduce or end their health service commitments in the coming year. That could be the end of NHS dentistry. Is he experiencing the same thing in the south-west? If he is, Government must really grasp this issue, and, as the hon. Member for South Devon (Caroline Voaden) said, get it done.

**Richard Foord:** I am glad that the hon. Member for Strangford made that point, because I did not know about the situation in Northern Ireland. It sounds like some regions of the UK are not getting the attention that they require when it comes to NHS dentistry.

I want to share the story of two of my constituents, Mike and Shirley. I have received correspondence from them and many other residents, such as Martin Loveridge, who has had a similar experience. Mike and Shirley are hard-working people. Mike is almost 75 and retired after more than 50 years in horticultural work. Shirley, aged nearly 70, is still taking on part-time cleaning work to make ends meet. In 2023, their dentist in Sidmouth finally went private, driven away by the broken dental contract that we have heard described. The impact of that shift has been devastating.

Shirley developed a dental abscess. Anyone who has had a dental abscess will know what excruciating pain it can involve. Years ago, Shirley suffered from a similar infection, which led to sepsis. This time, instead of receiving urgent care from the NHS, Shirley faced the following choice: either wait in pain or go private. Plainly, this incident is a stand-out case, given that it was crucial that she received NHS treatment for sepsis, but typically, it would cost them £1,200 in dental fees—a sum that is simply unaffordable for people in Mike and Shirley's position. Mike has not seen a dentist since May 2022 because he simply cannot afford it. Mike and Shirley tried to get NHS dentistry—they went to NHS England, Healthwatch Devon and the complaints department of the Devon NHS—and they had people admitting to them the dire state of the system, but they were offered no real solution. They spent hours on “Find a dentist”, an NHS website just for that purpose, but they were referred to a clinic that was 80 miles away, an impossible journey for them.

**Max Wilkinson** (Cheltenham) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. Cheltenham, similarly, is a dental desert. My residents often find themselves referred out of our region and into the midlands for treatment, to places as far away as Malvern, if they are not lucky enough to get somewhere in the constituency of the hon. Member for Gloucester (Alex McIntyre). Does my hon. Friend agree that that is simply wrong and unacceptable? Will he join me in thanking community campaigners in Gloucestershire, including Councillor Paul Hodgkinson, the health lead for the Lib Dems on Gloucestershire county council, who are trying to fight this at the local level?

**Richard Foord:** My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to community campaigners, but frankly it should not require grassroots organisations to self-organise

and mobilise; as representatives and as Government, we should be able to provide that in this, the sixth richest economy in the world.

**Carla Denyer** (Bristol Central) (Green): I thank the hon. Member for arranging this debate and for his forbearance on the incredible number of interventions. Does he agree that to solve this problem once and for all, and not just deal with the emergency situations that have been mentioned, the Government need to move towards a model similar to that for GPs, in which dentists are reimbursed for their work and rewarded for caring for patients and taking a more preventive approach?

**Richard Foord:** Dentists need to be rewarded under an NHS dental contract that recognises that not everyone has the same ability to pay. Frankly, if a little money were invested early in preventive measures, some of our constituents would not cost the system nearly so much later.

At a Westminster roundtable on dentistry last year, it was made plain that the issue was about not so much a shortage of dentists, but a need to attract private practising dentists to NHS work. Many dentists, even those who would ideally prefer to work within the NHS, avoid NHS work or leave it, because the current system is not fit for purpose.

On Remembrance Sunday, I was talking to a couple near the war memorial in Sidmouth. They were both veterans. Between them, they had served for 62 years, and they were unable to get NHS dental appointments. They felt that they had dedicated their lives to public service and this was how the state was rewarding them.

**Clive Jones** (Wokingham) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. I am sure that the issues in the south-west are similar to, and as challenging as, those in Wokingham in Berkshire. Commons Library data states that only 32.6% of children in Wokingham have seen a dentist in the past two years, compared with a 40.3% figure for the whole of England. Both figures show the Conservative party legacy of rotten teeth, fillings and agony. Arborfield and Swallowfield in my constituency are without dedicated dentists. That simply is not good enough. Does he agree that NHS primary care needs to be properly funded?

**Richard Foord:** I am appalled to hear about those examples from my hon. Friend. The really disappointing thing is that some of the expense of secondary care could be avoided with a little more investment upstream in primary care.

There is a clear disparity between the work that dentists do in the NHS and in private practice. There is so much more emphasis in private practice on preventive care. We need to see that same level of preventive work happening in the NHS.

At an Adjournment debate last week in the main Chamber, it struck me that although many of us were there seeking to draw attention to NHS dentistry, not a single Conservative MP attended. I thank the Minister in the new Government for showing more commitment to NHS dentistry than the last administration, yet we have further to go. The Government prioritised the NHS in the Budget, allocating it an additional £25.7 billion. However, we needed more reference to dentistry in the

Budget. The Labour party's manifesto talked about a dental rescue plan that would provide 700,000 more appointments and, most critically, focus on the retention of dentists in the NHS. We urgently need that.

We urgently need a dental rescue package to bring dentists back to the NHS, particularly in the south-west, where we have a dental training school in Plymouth. We understand that dentists, once trained, often stay where they went to university, so we need more dentists to be attracted to the south-west and to stay once they are there.

**Dan Aldridge** (Weston-super-Mare) (Lab): It is important to look at the role of public health in local government as well. Better Health North Somerset has a great programme led by Catherine Wheatley that is all about promoting oral health, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, in early years and for children and young people. One thing I have noticed is that what works and good practice is not often shared between integrated care boards across local areas. With the strength of feeling here, demonstrated by the amount of south-west MPs that have attended this debate, there is a real opportunity for us to collaborate and share what works. That would be really useful.

**Richard Foord:** I agree. One way in which we can share best practice is by thinking about not only training places, but the recognition of qualifications. After the UK's exit from the European Union, we saw a breakdown in the number of EU dentists wanting to stay or being attracted here. With fewer eastern European dentists, in the south-west of England, for example, we need to look again at dental qualifications and whether there are some dentist qualifications we might recognise that might make it more attractive to be a practising dentist in the UK.

The rural south-west of England needs to be able to expect the same level of NHS dentistry provision that we see in urban areas across the country. Will the Minister commit to the reform of NHS dentistry so that constituents such as Mike and Shirley do not have to go into the red or forfeit heating their homes to get dental care that avoids them going to acute hospitals such as the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital at Exeter?

**Martin Vickers (in the Chair):** I remind Members that if they wish to speak, they should bob. If they could limit their contributions to an absolute maximum of four minutes, we will probably get everyone in. But it is going to be a squeeze, particularly if there are too many interventions.

2.48 pm

**Tom Hayes** (Bournemouth East) (Lab): My constituent Jonathon Carr-Brown recently went to his dentist for a routine check-up. Dr King seated him in the dentist's chair, as he had done many times before, and felt his throat, as he had done many times before. Unlike those other times, Dr King found something: he found a lump. After that visit to Bournemouth dental centre and further investigations, a tumour was identified.

I saw Jonathon at the weekend. He had just completed a course of chemotherapy, because his dentist had helped to spot cancer. He was doing well: he was a little tired following his treatment, but he was not too tired to talk passionately about the importance of dentistry

within our wider healthcare and about how more lives could be saved with the right changes by our Labour Government.

Jonathon's story shows the potential of so many things, including co-location, the promise of innovation and the possibilities of integration. Imagine if Jonathon had been able to go up the corridor to get diagnosed even faster and receive the right kind of support even faster. Jonathon's story shows the power of prevention. There are so many people in Bournemouth East who are struggling to get the routine appointments that could spot problems and fix them sooner.

Of course we need more appointments and of course we need more workers, but we also need a rethink of who does what. In my constituency, as elsewhere, I know the potential for local hygienists and therapists to use the full scope of their practice, and indeed for Bournemouth to pilot a new model of therapy-led practices, with dentists covering only the work that sits outside scope.

I would welcome investment in the training and development of an oral health team who could learn by doing, providing clinical and preventive services to people who need them. Right now, Health Sciences University in Boscombe could help to increase local people's access to oral health care by training even more professionals for the future and getting support to people who need it, bringing down the waiting list while also training people up and particularly providing outreach in areas of deprivation.

There are so many areas of policy that we could focus on. I would love to talk at length about the reform of the dental contract, but in the hope that colleagues will do so, I will focus instead on the importance of empowering people by giving them accurate and clear information about NHS dentistry.

The NHS app and the nhs.uk website are managed by NHS Digital and the NHS Business Services Authority—I said "NHS" quite a lot there. It is the responsibility of NHS contractors to update for their specific provision. That means that there is no kind of oversight or meaningful guarantee of accuracy of information.

In April, before the general election, my team rang around all the surgeries in Bournemouth that were offering spaces to new NHS patients. They discovered that many had not updated their details, sometimes for years. Since then, there have been a small number of updates, perhaps prompted by my team's calls. However, most of the surgeries that were recently showing as not having updated their details were private. They were only offering private appointments and seemed baffled to be rung by somebody looking for NHS care.

It is not just that time-poor people who are desperate for dental care might be accessing incorrect information. It struck me and my team that people could be ringing surgeries listed on NHS platforms for NHS care—they are not listed as private dental providers. When those people are unable to access NHS care, they may be so desperate for any kind of care that they will buy into private dental provision.

When we checked it out with the NHS, it had no way of determining whether patients commit to private dental provision, or what service members of the public may be offered. We were told that although so many private surgeries were not listed as private on the website and digital platforms, the NHS could not comment on the

[Tom Hayes]

advertising of private dental providers. In April, under the Conservative Government, we discovered that there were no new NHS places available in a dental surgery in Bournemouth. Things have improved slightly since then, but only slightly.

We need to improve the accuracy of the information that we provide to our public by putting in place the right mechanisms. We need to strengthen our digital platforms to ensure that citizens can book appointments, get personalised notifications to book routine check-ups and compare waiting times and patient satisfaction scores.

Lastly, we need a digital health record as a single source of truth about someone's health. That information is fragmented across pharmacies, GP surgeries, dental practices, hospitals and people's phones. How much better would it be to bring that information together so that someone's medical record is in hand and complete when they are seen? That would allow them to be seen by the right person at the right time in the right setting.

Our NHS was founded on the principle that health should not depend on wealth. However, people who can pay are paying. The use of private healthcare will continue to rocket, perhaps even through unintended encouragement on NHS platforms, unless we co-locate, innovate and integrate.

A healthy population will unlock a stronger Britain. I look forward to supporting the Government in their efforts to change our NHS and our NHS dentistry, so that they can survive and serve our public.

2.53 pm

**Anna Sabine** (Frome and East Somerset) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) for securing the debate. As the MP for a rural constituency in Somerset, I do not need to repeat the well-known fact that the south-west is one of the worst dental deserts in England.

As a mum, and as someone who received excellent dental care as a child because my grandad was a dentist, I particularly worry about the effects on children. With such a scarcity of NHS practices accepting new patients and with the rising cost of living, working families simply cannot afford to go private. More often than not, that means that parents have to unwillingly forfeit their children's health.

This is a topic that people care about up and down the country. The regular emails I receive about it from my Frome and East Somerset constituents normally describe the same regrettable situation: they cannot get a space, there is no room anywhere in the vicinity and they are forced to go to hospital. However, one recent casework email was particularly stark: it was from a retired man and his wife who have recently become kinship carers for their two grandchildren following the sudden death of their daughter. Although one child had "luckily" already started orthodontic treatment prior to their mum's death, the grandparents cannot find a single NHS practice that will onboard the other child. They receive the state pension and one child benefit. Luck should never be a factor in the question of children's health, let alone set two siblings apart. NHS dentistry should be there to level the playing field and give access to all, regardless of background or family set-up.

I know from having met local dentists and national dentist groups that the growing consensus is that there are two reasons why there are so few spaces in NHS dental practice. One reason is budget; the other is the availability of NHS dentists, many of whom are leaving the NHS or leaving dentistry altogether because of low morale and stress. Recruitment is already difficult, but retention is even more so. NHS dentistry has been chronically underfunded. The UK spends the smallest proportion of its health budget on dentistry of any European nation, and England spends almost half less per head than other parts of the UK.

Just as working families in the south-west are struggling with the rising cost of living, high inflation, energy costs and the cost of everyday household items, so are NHS dental practices. The chronic underfunding has coincided with rising overheads. Most notably, the rise in employer's national insurance contributions announced in the Budget will have a severe impact on NHS dental practices, which are already on their knees. That tax rise will significantly affect health and care services for patients. The Liberal Democrats fear that it will only make the crisis in our NHS and social care sector even worse.

We have urged the Chancellor of the Exchequer to urgently rethink the rise in employer's national insurance contributions, either by cancelling it for all employers or at the very least by exempting those employers that provide vital health and care services, including GP services, dentists, social care providers and pharmacies. Without that exemption, the health and care crisis will only worsen and regional disparity will widen. Children in the south-west region will depend on good fortune. Parents will feel helpless and will be forced to make sacrifices. It risks setting apart and setting back thousands of children.

2.56 pm

**Jayne Kirkham** (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): I will not rehearse the numbers that Members have already given for the south-west, except to say that fewer than half the children in Cornwall have been seen by an NHS dentist in the past 12 months. That is down 13 percentage points from five years earlier. It is just getting worse and worse: people simply cannot get an NHS dentist now in the whole of Cornwall. It is impossible.

We are fortunate in that we have a new Government. We are looking at 700,000 new urgent appointments. Everybody recognises that the dental contract needs reforming, and there is a commitment to reform the contract. Obviously that will take time, so in the meantime we may need to look at what can be done locally.

In Cornwall, the commissioning of dentistry has been passed down to the integrated care board, which has done some quite innovative things. A surgery in Lostwithiel that was just about to hand back its contract went into bespoke negotiations so that the under-18s, the elderly and vulnerable people could retain their NHS dentist. There is the option, within the contract, for local ICBs to do more, to go into bespoke negotiations and maybe to salvage some things while we are waiting for the large renegotiation of the dental contract.

There are other things that I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider; I am sure he has done so. Could he say more about health hubs, about having more bespoke contracts and about how much power ICBs have to



enter into those contracts? Will he look at things such as emergency dental vans, which I understand are a sticking plaster, but which have been used in some places?

2.58 pm

**Vikki Slade** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. It is interesting that the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham) mentions dental vans: we were due to have one in Dorset, but I heard from my local NHS dentist in Corfe Mullen that they were seriously concerned about the prospect. They were worried that if they took it out to their rural community, there would be mayhem and frustration on the part of people who had not seen a dentist in so long. They were actually in fear for their staff, so they decided not to take the dental van. They also noted that it was 2.4 times more expensive than operating a practice, so they decided that they would invest the practice's extra money in an additional graduate dentist. I met her a few weeks ago: her name is also Vicky. I am really excited about the work she could do, particularly in children's health, but the decision to increase national insurance without exempting dentists means that the equivalent of half her salary will now go on additional national insurance for the staff within the practice. That is jeopardising the opportunity for practices like Corfe Mullen dental surgery to take on such staff.

It is interesting that dental care was available on the NHS from its inception. The original advert for the NHS stated that it would provide

"all medical, dental and nursing care"

for everyone—

"rich or poor, man, woman or child".

I am sure Beveridge and Bevan would turn in their graves if they thought that adults were pulling out their own teeth and children were being hospitalised for tooth extraction. It has already been said that fewer than a third of adults in the south-west are receiving dental care. When we describe it as a desert, we are not talking about our wonderful beaches. It is genuinely a dental desert.

I find it hard because NHS Dorset has told us that it had a £9 million underspend in the last year, yet people are spending hours on the phone, begging for help. I am pleased that our ICB has approved an increase in the price of the unit of dental activity, but why is that being delayed until next year, and why are we not going further? Why is it that our hospital can find the money to go to a private hospital and sort out all the knee replacements, but our dentists cannot be brought online to deal with urgent cases? I ask the Minister to instruct ICBs across the south-west and beyond to ringfence the underspend in dental budgets, so that it cannot be used to plug the gap elsewhere in the service while people are struggling.

Katie in Bearwood told me that she will lose her front tooth if she does not get help soon. She wakes up every day with blood on her pillow and all over her teeth. The pain is so unbearable that it has her in tears, and she has lost two stone in weight as she can barely eat. She cannot get a referral to hospital without paying to see a private dentist. She is ashamed to go out in public. She said that she will have to pay £1,000 in private costs before she can be seen, but nobody will give her a loan.

Zoe in Wimborne told me it has been nine years since she has seen a dentist, and that she is close to using the old-fashioned method of string and a door. It is absolutely ridiculous. It cannot be allowed to carry on.

I cannot not talk about the children in our area. It is wonderful that the Government are bringing in supervised toothbrushing, but what is the point if children then cannot see a dentist? I was mortified in 2022 when I took a foster child who had come to live with me to my dentist, because I had assumed that, as with GP practices, looked-after children would automatically be added to a family's NHS practice. How wrong I was. We did not realise, so we insisted on telling the dentist that they had to see this child. He was 11 years old and he had seven teeth gone already. He needed those teeth replacing for his future and for his smile. If we cannot do it for the adults, we must at the very least do it for our children, especially our looked-after children.

3.3 pm

**Steve Race** (Exeter) (Lab): I am here to speak on behalf of Exeter residents about the parlous state of NHS dentistry in our city after 14 years of the Tory Government, who allowed NHS dentistry to fall into complete disrepair.

We have heard that the south-west is one of the most notorious dental deserts, but most troubling is the proportion of children who get to see a dentist. In Devon, it has dropped by a fifth, from about 61% of children in 2016 to 47% in 2024, well below the English average of 55%. The reality is truly shocking. Across the country, tooth decay is now the No. 1 reason why children are admitted to hospital, and more than 40,000 children in 2021-22 had teeth removed at hospitals across the UK. That is the case in Exeter too. The Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS foundation trust states in its annual accounts that tooth decay is still the most common reason for hospital admission in children aged between six and 10 years old. According to the oral health survey of five-year-old children, more than a fifth of children in Exeter—22%—have tooth decay by the time they are five.

I talked to one of my local primary schools in preparation for this debate, to get the views of its staff. They said that they know of multiple children who have had teeth removed due to a lack of dentistry and then had to miss school. Some children have joined reception with all of their teeth brown or blackened stumps. Children are missing school due to being in agony from toothache and having no dentist, and many families—and indeed teachers—are unable to find an NHS dentist that will take them on. It is truly shocking, and, as with many things, our primary schools do what they can to pick up the slack. This primary school already teaches children how to brush their teeth, and they do so each day in reception. Exeter's NHS dentist crisis is not just having a detrimental impact on people's teeth and health; it is having a detrimental impact on children's education and on our economy. It is also having a detrimental impact on our local A&E department, which is already stretched to capacity. Tooth decay forced 740 patients to attend the emergency department between April 2022 and March 2023, according to NHS Digital data.

Comparing NHS regions, those in the south-west and south-east were least likely to have an NHS dentist and most likely to have a private one. Given that the cost of simply being accepted on to a private dentistry

[Steve Race]

register can be upwards of £70 a month for a small family, before treatments are added in, this is clearly a cost of living issue for many.

As referenced already, the NHS dental budget across the south-west is underspent by more than £86 million in the financial year 2023-24. That is not due to any lack of demand, of course, but largely due to dental practices being unable to work under the current NHS contract, which simply does not cover the cost of treatment. We are asking dentists to deliver NHS services at a loss, which is clearly unsustainable.

Instead of seeking to provide flexibility in the dental contract, as I know some integrated care systems do across the country, Devon ICB simply reallocates that dental funding elsewhere in the budget, despite the fact that it is supposed to be ringfenced. That is causing us further issues in Devon, as the BDA informs me that dentists are leaving the NHS in droves. In Devon, we saw a 9% drop in the number of NHS dentists last year alone.

My residents welcome the Labour Government's pledge to provide an extra 700,000 urgent dentists' appointments and to reform the NHS dental contract, as part of a package of measures to rescue NHS dentistry. I know the Department is working at pace to roll out those extra, urgent dental appointments, and to pave the way for a new reformed dental contract.

I met the chair of the BDA recently to talk about Exeter specifically; he stressed that NHS dentists, who are stung by the many broken promises from the previous Government, need the Labour Government to deliver meaningful change, including a clear timeline for negotiations. I know the Government treat NHS dentistry extremely seriously—the Health Secretary made the BDA the first organisation he met after the election—and I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister say recently at Prime Minister's questions that he would work as quickly as possible to end the current crisis. Given what I know and what we have heard today, for my constituents in Exeter that change cannot come soon enough.

3.7 pm

**Rebecca Smith** (South West Devon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I congratulate the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) on securing this vital debate about NHS dentistry in the south-west.

My constituents know the issues with access to NHS dentists only too well. Since 2020, the number of dentists in the county has fallen from 549 to 497. That means that each remaining dentist must see almost 300 additional patients a year. It is clear that we have a significant shortage of dentists in Devon. Only 34.7% of adults in the county have seen a dentist in the past year, compared with 55% 10 years ago. As we also heard from the hon. Member for Exeter (Steve Race), very few children are seeing dentists: 46.6% of children in Devon in the past year, compared with 61% in 2016.

For those who live in or around Ivybridge in my constituency, there are currently only two dental practices within a 10-mile radius accepting new patients. That only gets worse for the more rural and coastal communities, and the statistics are not good for the communities

within the Plymouth boundary. I am aware that an anomaly in Devon is that there is actually a waiting list for NHS dentists.

At one recent meeting with local senior health officials, it was pointed out that Devon's waiting list is unusual, perhaps even unique. We have 60,000 people on that list, believing they are entitled to an NHS dentist, when, as was discussed at the same meeting and I was led to believe on the day, the existing NHS contract was designed to serve only 55% of the adult population. The assumption was that others would access dental care privately.

I am not making a judgment about whether that is right or wrong; I am just stating the fact that most people do not understand that. The dental system was set up to be more like that for opticians than GPs at the time. The issues we currently face in Devon have in many ways gone beyond those points' being particularly relevant, but it is worth reflecting how important it is to be honest with people, as we make changes, to ensure they understand what the impact of those changes might be for them.

Before I reach the main point I wish to make today, I will briefly mention two challenges we face in Devon: how we train dentists and how NHS contracts are awarded. Devon is fortunate to have an outstanding dental school at the University of Plymouth. When it opened, many believed it would provide the city and the region beyond with a ready supply of new dentists to help us tackle our dental shortage. The school, however, is so successful that it is incredibly difficult to secure a place to study there, which has an impact on local people's being able to study at home and perhaps stay after graduation.

Equally, I have been informed by an expert on dental training that the way we train dentists makes it very difficult for people to stay where they have studied. Currently, the system almost forces the non-local dentists—the ones that might be coming down from the midlands—to go back to where they came from, rather than staying in the south-west if they want to. I urge the Minister to look into what more can be done to ensure that students can more easily stay where they have studied; at the moment, even if a dental student falls in love with Devon, it is very difficult for them to stay and help us to solve our problems.

Secondly, I am concerned about the lack of flexibility in the awarding of new NHS contracts at a time when we are in desperate need of more dentists. I was contacted about a year ago by a dentist seeking to open a practice in my constituency, who was told by the ICB that the window for applications had closed. That may have been the case but, given that we are in such dire need of dentists, perhaps an exception could have been made.

That leads me, finally, to my main point. In the last 12 months, 876 people attended the emergency department at Derriford hospital for a dental reason. Of those, 18% were under the age of 20 and 82% were over 20. That is an average of 2.4 people per day having to resort to using the emergency department to access dental care. Of these patients, 77 were then admitted for treatment. That is why we need to see the stalled review into funding for Derriford hospital's urgent and emergency care facility, because it is part of the bigger picture of how we provide dental care across the south-west. If we free up emergency, we have more capacity to look after the region more fully.

3.12 pm

**Alex McIntyre** (Gloucester) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I extend my congratulations to the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) on securing this important debate on NHS dentistry in the south-west.

NHS dentistry stands at a critical crossroads, facing the most challenging period in its history. A recent report from the Nuffield Trust described the threat to NHS dentistry as “existential”. Under the previous Conservative Government, NHS dentistry was put under immense strain, with only enough dentists to serve half the population and a severe shortage of investment. The Tories left Britain with one of the smallest dentistry budgets across Europe. At the start of the year, a staggering 13 million people were unable to access NHS dental care, which is more than three times as many as before the pandemic. Tragically, 7% of adults have resorted to the most desperate of measures: performing DIY dentistry, including pulling out their own teeth.

In the south-west, and particularly in my Gloucester constituency, the situation is deeply concerning. The region is one of the worst dental deserts in the country, as we have heard today, with just over a third of adults in the south-west having seen an NHS dentist in the last two years. In some cases, people are waiting up to four years for an appointment. The effects on children are particularly shocking. In the south-west, only one in two children was seen by an NHS dentist in the last year—well below the national average. That is a disgrace. We see an increasing number of children suffering from tooth decay, to the point that the most common reason for hospital admissions among children aged five to nine is to have their teeth removed due to rot.

In my constituency of Gloucester, two in five constituents are facing significant delays in accessing dental treatment, with many unable to see an NHS dentist at all. I heard some of these challenges first hand on a visit to the Bupa surgery on Painswick Road in my constituency. Sadly, Gloucester falls below the national and south-west averages for children and adults seen by a dentist, and has one of the lowest numbers of dentists in England. Families across Gloucester are suffering.

Plans are afoot to change that, and I have had positive early discussions with the ICB and the University of Gloucestershire about their plans to establish a new dental hub at the university’s new campus in the city centre, which is very exciting for my city. I am also aware that we need long-term change and investment from the Government to ensure that we meet the current challenges in NHS dentistry and reverse the worrying finding that 60% of NHS dentists in England have considered leaving the profession.

That is why I am proud to support the Government’s plan to fix NHS dentistry to deal with the immediate crisis. The Government have committed to providing 700,000 additional urgent dental appointments to tackle the backlog and to provide immediate relief to those suffering in my constituency. I look forward to the Minister’s update on that in his closing remarks. I know that the Labour Government are committed to providing the necessary investment and reform to ensure that our dental services are fit for the future, but these measures are desperately needed in Gloucester and across the south-west.

3.15 pm

**Mr Gideon Amos** (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) on leading a genuinely important debate. I also congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Glastonbury and Somerton (Sarah Dyke), for Frome and East Somerset (Anna Sabine), for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour), for South Devon (Caroline Voaden), for Chippenham (Sarah Gibson), for Wokingham (Clive Jones) and for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Vikki Slade)—to mention but a few. I also thank Government Members for their contributions to this important debate.

Nearly three years ago, in 2022, long before I was a Member of Parliament, I launched a survey of dental provision for the NHS in my Taunton and Wellington constituency. It showed that fewer than half of people there had access to an NHS dentist. Nearly three years on things have, incredibly, got worse. There are 64,000 children in the county who did not see a dentist last year. That puts Somerset in the worst-hit 5% of local authorities in the country.

As has been mentioned, access to NHS dentists in Somerset has fallen from more than half of people back in 2015 to less than a third—32%—this year. Over half the constituents who contacted me did have an NHS dentist but were then told it was going private, so they lost it. That decline has been consistent. My constituents are having to travel out of county and, as I said in the Chamber a couple of weeks ago, one of my constituents, a stage 3 cancer sufferer, is having to use her savings to pay for dental treatment that she is entitled to for free on the national health service.

Taunton and Wellington has many of the same problems as other areas of the country, in particular the terrible state of the dental contract, which is at the root of much of this issue. I have met the BDA chair, as have Government Members, and it definitely wants a timescale for the negotiation of the new dental contract. I hope the Minister will give a clear timetable for the negotiations so that we can have a new contract, which is what is needed to unblock this situation. If we are to train and equip the profession for the future, which we need to do, we have to end the uncertainty that is exacerbating the drain from the profession and the retention crisis we have seen over the past few years. It is vital that that uncertainty comes to an end.

Uncertainty hits in other ways as well. For example, we all want more housing built—certainly, those on the Liberal Democrat Benches do, and I know that Government Members do too—and we want new housing developments to be infrastructure-led, with GP surgeries and dental surgeries. Developers could contribute to those surgeries, but what would be the point in building them if they are to lie empty, unstaffed by the dentists we need? Will the Minister consider whether ICBs can be required to support the finding of dentists to staff those facilities, when they are provided?

I put on the record the fact there was a huge £11 million underspend in Somerset last year. Children, pregnant women and cancer sufferers are all being denied free treatment and £11 million is sitting in the coffers—it is a



[Mr Gideon Amos]

scandal. I hope the Minister will consider ensuring that that money is ringfenced year on year, so that it is ultimately spent on the patients who need treatment.

I urge the Minister both to give a timetable for the negotiation of the new contract and to safeguard the underspends so that the money can be used to help patients in Taunton and Wellington, in Somerset and in the south-west as a whole.

3.19 pm

**Dr Simon Opher** (Stroud) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Vickers, for chairing this essential debate about dentistry in the south-west. My mailbox is full of people complaining about the lack of NHS dentistry, and we have heard all the horror stories. As a GP, I see people staggering into my surgery holding their face. I know no more about teeth than anyone else here, but we GPs have to try to treat them with painkillers and antibiotics, because there is nothing else available. We must change that.

Let me quickly talk through the dental contract; I then have a couple of positive stories, which will perhaps stimulate the Minister in respect of what could lie ahead. As has been said, the current dental contract nationally has an £86 million underspend, which is absolute madness, but it is because the contract is incredibly restricted and restrictive. The funding for units of dental activity is very poor.

**Richard Foord**: The £86 million underspend relates to the south-west in particular.

**Dr Opher**: Yes, but that is even more shocking, is it not?

There are also disincentives in the contract for dentists to take on new NHS patients. When we look into it, there are all sorts of other things. For example, a dentist cannot provide urgent NHS dentistry unless they have used up their quota of UDAs, which are issued to dentists at the start of the year. The whole system is crazy, which is why there has been such a massive saving. As we have heard, dentists are leaving the profession, and it is clear that we are not training enough. I accept what the hon. Member for South West Devon (Rebecca Smith) said about how dentists are trained and where they are likely to end up working, because that is incredibly important.

As to solutions, we must have prevention. Dentistry is exceptional because dental treatment is preventive in its own right, so as soon as NHS dentistry is stripped away, there are immediately problems. We also have to make sure that young people's diet is better. Dentist Cerri Mellish and I have developed a project in our area. Cerri sees young pre-school children who are under five. She has a quick look in their gobs and if there are signs of decay, they are whipped out and the children are given treatment. If there are any other signs of problems, she can give them fluoride enamel. These types of innovative solutions are really important.

One thing that happened with the pandemic was that NHS dentists stopped registering new patients. The pandemic started in 2020, so almost all pre-school children are likely not to be registered with a dentist, which is a real disaster. We should remember that two

thirds of general anaesthetics used for children are used for dental reasons, and a general anaesthetic is not without risk.

**Chris Bloore** (Redditch) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) on securing this important debate. I apologise for being an interloper from the west midlands, but it such an important debate that I want to add some thoughts.

My hon. Friend has hit on an important point. As the father of a toddler, I struggle every day to ensure that he brushes his teeth. The gap in the number of registrations since covid is creating a generation of children who are not used to going to the dentist. We have to reverse that trend; otherwise, we will have huge problems as a society, having to treat teenagers and adults with severe dental problems who have never been to the dentist.

**Dr Opher**: That is absolutely true. Simple things such as dental brushing schemes, which we introduced in the Stroud area before the election, are essential. Those sorts of things are often laughed at, but they are probably the most important thing we do as a Government.

One other quick win relates to urgent care. The Gloucestershire ICB, particularly in the Stroud area, was able to pay more for the units of dental activity and allowed all NHS dentists to do urgent care. In that way, some of the £86 million that the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) talked about was spent. We were able to quadruple the number of urgent appointments.

We can do that kind of work on a smaller scale, but I suggest that we need to do things step-wise. We must get the prevention in place and start doing urgent dental care, and when we have enough money we can do more. It is all very well talking about fantastic NHS dentistry, but we need the funding for it and we need the taxes to pay for it. As a Government, we are responsible for that. In the long term, we need to look to universal NHS dentistry in this country.

3.24 pm

**Steve Darling** (Torbay) (LD): I thank you, Mr Vickers, for ably chairing the debate, and my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) for securing it.

I represent Torbay, which is sadly a dental desert. We have more than 2,200 people on our waiting list, desperate to receive support from a dentist. I fear that is just a shadow of the reality of the need there, because people think that it is a forlorn hope to be able to register for a dentist. More than half the adults of Torbay have not seen a dentist in the past two years. More than a third of children have not seen a dentist in the past year. This is a cocktail of severe dangers for the health of communities across the United Kingdom.

I have spoken to a number of residents since being elected, and I want to share a couple of examples of how the situation is impacting on real people. One of them told me that she was halfway through treatment to resolve challenges in her mouth when her dentist withdrew, leaving her with a job half done. She still suffers with pain and is upset about her dentistry needs.

Another resident, Kirstie, tells me that she suffers with a condition that means she is highly likely to develop mouth cancer. She is meant to receive three-monthly checks yet, as she has no NHS dentist and cannot afford a private practice dentist, she is having to go without. That is resulting in severe depression and her having to medicate for those depression issues. That is not where the United Kingdom should be.

Coastal and rural communities face real challenges in dentistry. When we look at the national picture, urban areas tend to be rich in dentists; our far-flung areas are much more challenged. I am delighted that we are looking at about 700,000 new emergency appointments, but how many of those will happen in Torbay? On the renegotiation of the dentists' contract, how will we be able to take account of rurality and coastal issues as part of the mix?

3.27 pm

**Claire Young** (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) for securing the debate.

Last year, a staggering 58% of children in south Gloucestershire were not seen by an NHS dentist, despite the NHS recommending that under-18s see a dentist at least once a year. When we talk to dentists, however, that is not surprising. As we emerged from the pandemic, one local dentist stopped NHS work for all, including children. When I spoke to those at the practice, they were clear that the contract was at fault, but they also explained that they would have liked to continue NHS dentistry for children but NHS England in the south-west was not supportive.

The last Conservative Government failed to fix the broken contract, and the new Government have yet to show that they grasp the scale of the challenge. We are calling for an emergency rescue plan, including the use of the underspends that have been referred to today to boost the number of appointments.

I will mention a couple of examples from my inbox. The first I alluded to recently in the Adjournment debate on rural NHS dentistry led by my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Sarah Gibson). A constituent who had to retire from his job due to health and mobility issues is entitled to free NHS dentistry, yet he was unable to find treatment anywhere near where he lives. Facing a dental emergency, he ended up having to seek private treatment, because of the pain he was in. He struggled to afford it, but felt he had no choice.

Later, my constituent experienced another painful dental issue. This time, when he contacted the NHS, he was told that there was provision but, because he was now registered, it was unavailable to him; it was available only to unregistered patients. As a result, he had to pay £95 for a small temporary filling at a private practice. He was then told he was not entitled to be enrolled as an NHS patient, as he was registered as a private patient with the practice. I hope the Minister will agree to look into that situation to ensure that everyone can get the care they need.

Another issue I will draw attention to is people missing appointments. A constituent of mine got in touch to complain that, although he is one of the lucky ones in the area who is still able to access dental treatment on the NHS, he was shocked to see a sign

saying that 39 people had missed their appointment last month. Staff confirmed that that was the number of people who missed appointments at the practice with no warning or formal cancellation—and that is just one practice. They also said that number was actually quite low, and that it was regularly much higher.

Because those missed appointments were no-shows, not cancellations, the slots could not be offered to other people desperately in need. That resulted in the equivalent of more than eight days of lost work. That brings us back to the question of the contract and how we can make sure that dentists are rewarded for their time, because it adds to the problem of them not being remunerated in a way that enables them to continue NHS work. It is also a question of making the best use of limited resources. I welcome the Minister's thoughts on how to ensure that happens.

Over 12 million people were unable to access NHS dental care last year. That is more than one in four adults in England, and three times as many people as before the pandemic. I echo the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Steve Darling) about the challenges, particularly in rural areas, and look forward to hearing the Minister's comments on that. We have been warning about the issues for years, yet there has been little decisive action to address the crisis. The British Dental Association has been pushing hard to get the Government to ditch the current failed dental contract and instead move to a more prevention-focused, patient-centred system that rewards dentists for improving the overall health of the communities they serve.

In short, I welcome the warm words from the Government on dentistry, but we need more than words; we need action. I urge this Government not to kick the can down the road as the previous Government did.

3.31 pm

**Alison Bennett** (Mid Sussex) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) for securing this debate. The strength of the contributions by south-west Members from all parts of the House show how important this issue is for everyone in the region. I thank my hon. Friend for making the debate about the south-west. I grew up in Gloucestershire, and my dentistry as a child began in Tewkesbury. The comment by the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Opher) that dental treatment is preventive in its own right was helpful. Indeed, thanks to the insistence of my mother, Christine, on my going to the dentist twice a year, I never got a filling until I was into my 40s. I thank her for that.

While I welcome the Government's injection of funds into the NHS as a whole, we must be clear that dentistry should not be forgotten. That is why I, along with many of my Liberal Democrat colleagues, have today written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ask her to reconsider the proposed increases in employer national insurance contributions in the case of various healthcare providers, including the dentistry sector and those providing NHS dentistry. Commenting on that letter, the British Dental Association said that the changes, should they go ahead, will inevitably punish patients.

[Alison Bennett]

Before coming to this debate, I had meetings with the National Care Forum and the children's hospice charity Together for Short Lives. In all those forums, grave concerns have been raised about the impact of the increase in employer national insurance contributions on the work that providers do, and the potential cuts to the number of people they employ and the services they offer. I ask the Minister to urge his team in the Department of Health and Social Care to reconsider and to press the Treasury to rethink the increase, or at least look at finding some form of dispensation.

As hon. Members have said, tooth decay is the most common reason for hospital admission in children between the ages of six and 10. Thanks to a freedom of information request commissioned by the Liberal Democrats, we know that over 100,000 children have been admitted to hospital with rotting teeth since 2018. That is shameful, yet also entirely preventable. That is what makes it so tragic.

Our failures stretch across the full breadth of age groups. Last year, a poll commissioned by the Liberal Democrats revealed that a shocking one in five people who fail to get an NHS appointment turn to DIY dentistry. Indeed, during the general election, I knocked on the door of somebody who told me that he had pulled his own teeth out. It is simply Victorian that that has happened to dentistry in our country in 2024. The Darzi review found that

“only about 30 and 40 per cent of NHS dental practices are accepting new child and adult registrations respectively.”

To me, and I think to everyone here, the fact that our dentistry system is in a position where people feel the need to pull out their own teeth is appalling.

The south-west is feeling the full force of the crisis, having lost more than 100 dentists last year alone. However, the issue is not limited to the south-west. Only one of the 13 dentists in my constituency of Mid Sussex is accepting children as NHS patients, and none is accepting adults. Using data from the House of Commons Library, it is estimated that 44% of children in West Sussex did not see a dentist in the year to March 2024.

My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I are calling for three things and we have a plan to make them happen. First, we need guaranteed access to an NHS dentist for everyone who needs urgent and emergency care. Secondly, we need guaranteed access to free NHS check-ups for those already eligible: children, new mothers, those who are pregnant and those on low incomes. Thirdly, we need guaranteed appointments for all those who need a dental check before commencing surgery, chemotherapy or a transplant.

The first thing that we can do to achieve those vital baselines in dental care is to deliver a dental rescue package, including investing in extra dental appointments, fixing the broken NHS dental contract and using flexible commissioning to meet patient needs. Secondly, we need to ensure that a proper workforce plan for health and social care, including projections for dentists and dental staff, is written into law. Thirdly, we would reverse the previous Government's cuts to public health grants to support preventive dental healthcare. We must tackle the root causes of the oral health catastrophe in the south-west by focusing on investment in prevention.

In doing so, we can put an end to the suffering of so many children and adults, take away the need for DIY dentistry and provide some much-needed respite for the NHS system as a whole.

3.37 pm

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I congratulate the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) on securing a debate on this important subject, starting at the significant time of two-thirty—I thought that was particularly skilled of him. [Laughter.] I thought you would like that one, Mr Vickers.

Nobody should have painful teeth and nobody should have difficulty accessing an NHS dentist. Lincolnshire, which is home to my constituency, suffers similar challenges with access to NHS dentistry; indeed, I led an Adjournment debate on the topic in October 2021. It has been pointed out that the number of dentists is not the issue; in fact, we have more dentists per capita than we did 10 years ago. Rather, dentists are either in the wrong place—concentrated in urban rather than rural and coastal areas—or they do not perform NHS work, for a variety of reasons. That leads to the underspend that has been described.

There has been some progress, with 500 more practices accepting NHS patients as a result of the dental recovery plan, and 6 million more dental treatment processes completed in 2023 than in 2021-22. One thing that helped with that was the patient premium for new patients, who are more likely than repeat patients to have a problem with their teeth that requires treatment. They are also more expensive for dentists to treat, so the current contract disincentivises the seeing of new patients. The patient premium is funded until April 2025. Will the Minister say whether he plans to continue it beyond that date? Another help has been the golden hello of up to £20,000 for dentists working in underserved areas, including the south-west, the midlands and East Anglia. Will the Minister say whether that scheme will continue?

A number of hon. Members have mentioned a long-term workforce plan. There are already additional dental training places in the south-west, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Rebecca Smith) pointed out, there can be challenges in the way the training is organised, which means that people do not stay in the local area—although more do stay than if they had been trained elsewhere. Will the Minister look in detail at the problems my hon. Friend raised?

Ultimately, we have more dentists than ever before, but private dentistry is much more lucrative than NHS dentistry, and the NHS contract is complicated, offers disincentives and needs reform. The previous Government began reforming the 2006 contract by increasing the UDA rate to £28 as a minimum. The Labour party had a manifesto promise to negotiate with the BDA. Will the Minister confirm if negotiations have started and, if they have not, when he expects them to start?

**Tom Hayes:** I have just been rereading the 2010 Conservative manifesto—a delightful read. On page 47, it promises full dental contract reform. I then looked at comments by Conservative Ministers in 2024, when they promised to “consider” dental contract reform. Can the hon. Lady explain why no meaningful reform happened over those 14 years of Conservative government?



**Dr Johnson:** It is unfair to say that there was no meaningful reform. There was reform, but it has not been enough to ensure that everyone gets a dental appointment, and we need further negotiation and reform. We can relitigate the election, but the Labour party won a majority for this term and it needs to use it to do what it promised. One of those things is reforming the contract, and that is why I am asking the Minister to tell us whether he has entered negotiations to do so.

One thing the Government have done—this was brought up by the hon. Members for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Vikki Slade) and for Mid Sussex (Alison Bennett)—is increase national insurance contributions and lower the thresholds at which they are paid, which presents a challenge for dentists across the country. I know the BDA has written to the Chancellor to ask for an exemption, and I wonder whether the Minister can comment on that. I have tabled a number of written questions, and the answers I have received have been less than satisfactory; they are really not proper answers at all. The Government do not seem to have worked out how much they intend to mitigate the increase in national insurance contributions, for whom they might do so, or how much it might cost. That is clearly a great worry.

The *Health Service Journal* published a leaked letter suggesting that the cost of the 700,000 extra appointments—and presumably, in many cases, the national insurance contributions—will have to be found within the current budget. The Department of Health and Social Care has suggested that the letter was never sent and therefore may be inaccurate. Will the Minister put on the record the reality of the situation? Will the funding be expected to come from the current budget, or will there be extra money—and, if so, how much?

The Minister has said himself that water fluoridation is safe and effective and reduces tooth decay, so will he be adding fluoride to our water? He said in answer to a parliamentary question that he would do so “in due course”. Will he tell us what that means and how quickly he expects to do it? The Government have talked the talk on prevention; now they need to take action.

The previous Government conducted a consultation on whether newly qualified dentists could be tied into working for the NHS for a period of time. What is the Government’s assessment of that consultation, and what do they intend to do about the issue? Supervised toothbrushing is an interesting plan, but what about children of other ages? What is being done to encourage parents to take responsibility for ensuring that their children’s teeth are cleaned?

Armed forces families move around the country a huge amount, and our forces do an excellent job keeping us safe. The Conservative Government brought in the armed forces covenant to protect our armed forces and their families. What plans does the Minister have to ensure that families can access NHS dental care as they move around the country, and that they do not have to wait for a place only to not get one, and then move again and have the same problem?

I think it was the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth who brought up international dentists. An international dentist with equivalent qualifications can work in the UK privately, but they need to go through an additional process to work for the NHS and be on the performers list, which is unnecessarily complicated.

What will the Minister do to ensure that, if a dentist is able to practise privately in the UK, they can also practise on the NHS—or does he think that is not the right thing to do?

Other Members have mentioned fluoride varnish. Does the Minister have a plan to ensure that young children have access to that treatment? Finally, the Secretary of State for Wales has said that Labour will “take inspiration from Wales”. Given that dental activity is at 58% of pre-pandemic levels in Wales, compared with 85% in England, and that 93% of practices in Wales—a greater proportion than in the rest of the UK—are not taking on new adult NHS patients, will the Minister reassure us that that is definitely not the case?

3.44 pm

**The Minister for Care (Stephen Kinnock):** It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Vickers. I congratulate the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) on securing this very important debate on NHS dentistry in the south-west.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that this Government will be honest about the problems facing the NHS and equally serious about tackling them. The truth is that we are very far from where we want and need to be. Lord Darzi’s report laid bare the true extent of the challenges facing our health service, including NHS dentistry. Even he, with his years of experience, was shocked by what he discovered.

I pay tribute to all the hon. Members from across the House—too many to name in the short time available to me—for helping to highlight and elucidate their concerns. In many ways, those reflected what Lord Darzi set out, but we have also heard today some heartbreaking examples of the experiences our constituents are having. Colleagues across the House have brought those to life today.

Lord Darzi’s report is vital because it gives us the frank assessment we needed to face the challenges honestly. Lord Darzi is clear that rescuing NHS dentistry will not happen overnight, but we will not wait to make improvements to the current system, to increase access and to incentivise the workforce to deliver more NHS care.

We inherited a broken NHS dentistry system. It is truly shameful and nothing short of Dickensian that the most frequent reason for children of between five and nine years old to be admitted to hospital is to have their rotten teeth removed. That is, frankly, disgraceful. Those are the sort of challenges that we need to face.

Some 13 million people in England have an unmet need for NHS dentistry. That is 28% of our country. It is absurd that people cannot access NHS dentistry when each year the budget is underspent—in recent years, that has been to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds-worth of care going undelivered. That is why we need to reform the dentistry contract.

In NHS Devon integrated care board, which includes the constituency of the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth, 34% of adults were seen by an NHS dentist in the 24 months to March 2024, compared with an average of 40% in England. In 2023-24, there were 40 dentists per 100,000 of the population, whereas the national average, across all integrated care boards, was 50 in the same year.

[Stephen Kinnock]

We acknowledge that there are areas of the country that are experiencing recruitment and retention issues—including many rural areas, where the challenges in accessing NHS dentistry are exacerbated. As Lord Darzi said, we have enough dentists and dental care professionals at an aggregated national level; the problem is that not enough of them are doing NHS work in the right parts of the country, where they are most needed.

The mountain that we have to climb is daunting, but this Government are not daunted and we are working at pace. Take for example the golden hello scheme, which will see up to 240 dentists receiving payments of £20,000 to work in those areas that need them most for three years. ICBs have already started to advertise those posts through that scheme. Nationally, there have been 624 expressions of interest and 292 of those have since been approved. Thirty-eight posts are now being advertised with the incentive payment included. Or take our rescue plan, which will help to get NHS dentistry back on its feet by providing 700,000 additional urgent appointments as rapidly as possible.

We know that rescuing NHS dentistry means acknowledging that we need more dentists doing NHS work and we know from survey data that morale among NHS dentists is low. We must turn that around. This Government will do all we can to make NHS dentistry an attractive proposition. Strengthening the workforce is key to our ambitions, but for years the NHS has been facing chronic workforce shortages and we have to be honest that bringing in the staff we need will take time.

We are committed to reforming the dentistry contract to make NHS work more attractive, boost retention and deliver a shift to prevention. There are no perfect payment models, and careful consideration needs to be given to any potential changes to the complex dental system, so that we deliver genuine improvements for patients and the profession. We are continuing to work with the British Dental Association and other representatives of the dental sector to deliver our shared ambition to improve access to treatment for NHS dental patients.

The Secretary of State met with the BDA on his first day in office, and I engage with it regularly, including at a meeting earlier this month. I share the BDA's desire for a timeline for negotiations, but we have had to wait for the Budget and the ensuing discussions with the Treasury to initiate and conclude those discussions.

**Mr Amos:** Is the Minister able to say when the timeline for those negotiations will be available?

**Stephen Kinnock:** As the hon. Gentleman will understand, we are in a sequence: we have the Budget, then the complex negotiations around the spending review. We cannot engage in meaningful, formal discussions and negotiations until we are clear on what exactly the financial envelope is. We are working at pace on that. However, we have been meeting informally to sketch it out, so I would say that the scope of the negotiations is agreed. The formal negotiations will really start only once we have the detailed budget in place.

We will listen to the sector and learn from the best practice to improve our workforce and deliver more care. For example, the integrated care boards in the south-west are applying their delegated powers to increase

the availability of NHS dentistry across the region through other targeted recruitment and retention activities. That includes work on a regional level to attract new applicants through increased access to postgraduate bursaries, exploring the potential for apprenticeships and supporting international dental graduates.

There are two dental schools in the south-west: Bristol Dental School, and Peninsula Dental School in Plymouth. I recently had the pleasure of visiting Bristol Dental School and seeing the excellent work that they are doing there, training the next generation of dental professionals, supporting NHS provision by treating local patients, and reaching underserved populations through outreach programmes. I also know that Peninsula Dental School, which first took on students in 2007, is doing the same for Plymouth and its surrounding areas.

I would also like to pay tribute to Patricia Miller of NHS Dorset, Lesley Haig of the Health Sciences University and council leader Millie Earl for working so constructively with my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Tom Hayes) on improving oral health in his constituency.

A number of hon. Members have rightly highlighted the importance of prevention, and we are working around the clock to end the appalling tooth decay that is blighting our children. We will work with local authorities and the NHS to introduce supervised toothbrushing for three to five-year-olds in our most deprived communities, getting them into healthy habits for life and protecting their teeth from decay. We will set out plans in due course, but it is clear that to maximise our return on investment, we need to be targeting those plans at children in the most disadvantaged communities. In addition to that scheme, the measures that we are taking to reduce sugar consumption will also have a positive effect on improving children's oral health.

Separate from the national schemes, I was pleased to note that NHS Devon integrated care board has committed £900,000 per annum for three years to support further cohorts of children for supervised toothbrushing, fluoride varnish and Open Wide Step Inside, with a new fluoride varnish scheme due to go live in September 2025. Open Wide Step Inside is a local scheme in which a dental outreach team, run by the Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise, goes into schools to deliver 45-minute oral health education lessons across Devon and Cornwall. It is a truly commendable scheme.

The steps we take in NHS dentistry will feed into the wider work we are doing to fix our broken NHS. We have committed to three strategic shifts: from hospital to community, from sickness to prevention and from analogue to digital. Our 10-year plan will set out how we deliver those shifts to ensure that the NHS is fit for the future.

**Dr Johnson:** The Minister has iterated the problem, and he has spoken warm words about listening, talking and working with people. However, he has said little that is concrete, except about things that were happening already, either locally or as a result of the previous Government. With a minute left to answer all the questions he has been asked, can he commit to answering in writing those he does not have time to answer in the remaining minutes?

**Stephen Kinnock:** The first thing I will say is that I am not going to take any lectures from any Conservative Member about the state of our dental system. What brass

neck we see from that party, both in the Chamber and in this place—lecturing us, given the disgraceful state of our NHS and the fact that the biggest cause of five to nine-year-olds going to hospital is to have their rotten teeth removed! I will not be taking any lectures on that from the Conservative party. Of course, I am more than happy to answer the hon. Lady's detailed questions, many of which I feel I have already answered in my preceding comments. I will not take any more interventions from her because I need to finish shortly.

Our 10-year plan will set out how we deliver these shifts to ensure the NHS is fit for the future. To develop the plan, we must have a meaningful conversation with the public and those who work in the health system. We are going to conduct a range of engagement activities, bringing in views from the public, the health and care workforce, national and local stakeholders, system leaders and parliamentarians. I urge hon. Members from across the House to please get involved in this consultation—the largest in the history of the NHS—at [change.nhs.uk](https://change.nhs.uk). I urge them to make their voices heard in their constituencies, through the deliberative events.

**Vikki Slade:** I have been on to the survey, and it is incredibly limited. It would be helpful if there were a way for the public to be encouraged to introduce more freeform responses.

**Stephen Kinnock:** I am slightly surprised to hear that. The presentation I received on the portal showed there was a clear channel through to having a more discursive engagement with the platform. I will take that feedback away and, through officials, will come back to the hon. Lady on that point.

I thank the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth once again for bringing the issue of dentistry in the south-west to this debate. On 4 July, we inherited a profoundly challenging fiscal position, but I can assure

him that we remain committed to tackling the immediate crisis facing NHS dentistry, and that we are taking steps to make delivery more efficient through long-term reform.

To recap, we are committed to providing 700,000 more urgent dental appointments, delivering the golden hello scheme to recruit more dentists in areas of greatest need, bringing in preventive measures to improve our children's oral health and negotiating long-term contract reforms to make NHS dentistry more attractive. Those steps will help tackle the place-based disparities commonly seen in dentistry, and ensure that everyone who needs to access NHS dentistry can get it, including in the south-west.

Our NHS dentistry is broken after 14 years of Tory neglect and incompetence, but it is not beaten. In 1945, it fell to Clement Attlee's Labour Government to create a health system for the 20th century. Now, 79 years later, it falls to this Government to clear up the mess we have inherited, to get NHS dentistry back on its feet and to build an NHS dentistry service fit for the 21st century. That is what we shall do.

3.58 pm

**Richard Foord:** I acknowledge what the Minister said about the Conservative Government's legacy for NHS dentistry, which is apparent for us all to see. The *Health Service Journal* revealed last month that in Devon and Cornwall, the wait for an NHS dental appointment for a new patient is 1,441 days—almost four years. Many of my constituents cannot wait that long. I hope the Minister has heard not only the examples of pain and suffering set out today but some of the prescriptions proposed by the Liberal Democrat spokesperson and other MPs from across the west country.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered NHS dentistry in the South West.



## Tackling Image-based Abuse

4 pm

**Kirith Entwistle** (Bolton North East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of tackling image-based abuse.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Vickers. I declare an interest as a member of the Women and Equalities Committee. I am bringing this motion before the House to maintain the steady pressure from campaigners and parliamentarians on an issue that is both urgent and often neglected: image-based sexual abuse, which is a form of violence that overwhelmingly affects women and girls.

Today, I aim to shed light on where our legislation on image-based sexual abuse is falling short and to propose three reforms that this Labour Government can deliver. This will build on the fine work conducted by Members across the House—including the Minister for safeguarding and violence against women and girls, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips); Madam Deputy Speaker, the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes); the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage) and current and previous members of the Women and Equalities Committee—as well as Members of the other place.

Image-based sexual abuse encompasses a wide range of violations, from digitally altered images such as deepfakes to invasive acts such as upskirting, downblousing and so-called revenge porn. In an increasingly digital world, this abuse—this violence—is an escalating crisis.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady. This is a massive issue in my constituency, and that is why we are all here to support her. The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland has revealed that 96% of deepfakes surveyed online were non-consensual pornographic materials, and 70% of targets were private individuals' photos that had been harvested from social media. Does she agree that more must be done in schools to make young people aware of the dangers and risks that come with sharing private content online?

**Kirith Entwistle:** Yes, that is an important point. It goes to show the extent and the seriousness of the issue.

Drawing on two powerful accounts that have profoundly shaped my own perspective, I will highlight the three glaring flaws that we must confront. The first is the failure to ensure the permanent removal of abusive content, which leaves survivors chained to their trauma. The second is the weak regulatory enforcement that allows platforms to shrug off their responsibilities. The third is the lack of civil remedies for survivors, a lifeline that we know to be critical to restoring dignity, control and hope.

I will not have the space today to discuss how we can prevent online violence against women and girls by embedding it into the relationships, sex and health education curriculum, to which the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) alluded, or how proceeds from the digital services tax and Ofcom fines could sustainably fund lifesaving support services for victims. However, those issues loom large in the debate.

I am grateful that the Minister for victims, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones), is present. I look forward to hearing how tackling image-based abuse aligns with this Government's unprecedented commitment to halving violence against women and girls. I also hope to hear from the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology on these issues. In the UK, we face an escalating crisis of image-based sexual abuse. Every week, new victims emerge and women and girls lose their right to control their most intimate images.

**Luke Myer** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): So many young women are having their life destroyed by the proliferation of deepfakes and AI-enabled images. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill introduced by Baroness Owen—the Non-Consensual Sexually Explicit Images and Videos (Offences) Bill—would go some way towards addressing the issue, and that the Government should look favourably on it?

**Kirith Entwistle:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. I will come on to that important Bill. I know that Baroness Owen has already done a great deal of work on the issue.

In 2023 alone, the Revenge Porn Helpline reported nearly 19,000 cases of abuse, a staggering increase from just 1,600 cases in 2019. Deepfake-related abuse has surged by 400% since 2017, with over 99% of these vile creations targeting women and girls. The numbers are shocking, but they are more than statistics. Behind each one is a life and a human story—another innocent person whose confidence, relationships and sense of safety is shattered. Survivors often describe their experience as digital rape, a term that captures the intensely personal and profoundly scarring nature of this violation.

Just two weeks ago, the escalating crisis hit home in my constituency of Bolton North East with the case of Hugh Nelson, who was sentenced at Bolton Crown court to 18 years in prison for creating and distributing depraved sexual images using artificial intelligence. Detective Chief Inspector Jen Tattersall of Greater Manchester police described Nelson as

“an extremely dangerous man who thought he could get away with what he was doing by using modern technology.”

Yet Nelson's sentencing is something of an exception. Too many perpetrators remain beyond the reach of justice, shielded by gaps in our legal framework. This reality raises a question: has our response truly kept pace with the escalating scale of this crisis? Are we really doing all we can to support victims and survivors?

**Jo Platt** (Leigh and Atherton) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent case on this important subject. I was deeply shocked to learn from Refuge that, in some cases, reports of intimate image abuse are not being taken seriously by the police force. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is essential for police officers to receive consistent, comprehensive training on internet image abuse so that they understand how the law can further protect women and girls?

**Kirith Entwistle:** Yes, training would be exceptionally valuable in combating the issue. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

**Rachel Taylor** (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing the issue to Westminster's attention and giving us the opportunity to debate it. I place on the record my interest as another member of the Women and Equalities Committee.

We must also do better to protect male victims who reach out to the Revenge Porn Helpline. It is time we prioritised victims. We must not let technology develop without the necessary safeguards to protect us all from harm. I was alarmed to hear last week that online platforms do not take images down while they are reviewing their harmfulness; that practice simply exacerbates the harm that victims face. It is vital we ensure that image-based abuse does not get lost in the excitement of this Government's new, packed legislative agenda. It is time that the legislation recognised adult non-consensual intimate images as illegal content, in the same way that abusive images of children are so considered. The Online Safety Act 2023—

**Martin Vickers (in the Chair):** Order. Interventions are supposed to be short. May I ask the hon. Member to conclude hers?

**Rachel Taylor:** My apologies, Mr Vickers.

**Kirith Entwistle:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. We should absolutely be putting victims at the heart of any legislation on this topic.

I do not believe that in their 14 years the previous Government did anywhere near enough to tackle the issue. I can already see the Labour Government taking decisive steps to change the answer to the question of whether we are doing enough. I welcome the Government's manifesto commitment to ban the creation of sexually explicit deepfakes, an essential step in safeguarding women and girls from malicious technology. I am encouraged by the collaborative work under way among the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice to identify a legislative vehicle to ensure that those who create these images without consent are held accountable. I am also pleased that new changes to the Online Safety Act will make image-based abuse a priority offence.

Although those are positive steps, they represent only modest progress. As experts such as End Violence Against Women and the #NotYourPorn campaign have pointed out, sharing intimate images without consent was already prioritised under the Online Safety Act. So far, the changes under this Government have been merely administrative and merely incremental. Having listened to survivors of image-based abuse, I urge the Minister to agree that this is no time for incremental change.

Georgia Harrison is a courageous campaigner who shared her story with the Women and Equalities Committee. Georgia's images were distributed without her consent, leading to years of harassment, scrutiny and anguish. Even after her abuser was convicted, Georgia continued to see her images circulate online—a haunting reminder that, as she has stated, her life will never be the same again.

Another survivor is “Jodie”, who bravely spoke to the BBC about the trauma of being deepfaked by someone she once considered her best friend. Jodie discovered that images from her private Instagram account had been overlaid on pornographic material and posted

across Reddit and other forums, with users invited to rate her body. Jodie endured this abuse for five years. She recalls:

“I felt alone. The emotional toll was enormous. There were points I was crying so much I burst the blood vessels in my eyes. I couldn't sleep and when I did, I had nightmares.”

In Jodie's case, the perpetrator was asking others to create explicit images of her, revealing a shameful grey area in our current legislation. That is why Jodie, along with campaign partners the End Violence Against Women coalition, *Glamour* and #NotYourPorn, is calling for an image-based abuse law.

Speaking as a mother, I cannot imagine having my child endure such horror. I am grateful that Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge has introduced a private Member's Bill in the other place to address this gap. She has done a great deal of work on the issue, keeping victims like Georgia and Jodie at the heart of her Bill.

Georgia and Jodie's experiences underscore three critical flaws in the Online Safety Act. The first is the glaring failure to criminalise abusive images themselves. Georgia's story illustrates this brutal oversight: despite her abuser's conviction, the absence of a stay-down provision allows her images still to circulate online, forcing her to relive the trauma with each resurfacing. To quote Professor Clare McGlynn,

“every day these images remain online is another day of extreme suffering for victims.”

Survivors deserve certainty that once their abuse is addressed, it is addressed permanently.

A second flaw in the Act is its reliance on Ofcom, whose current enforcement powers lack the agility and speed needed for an online world in which, if one website is blocked, another can appear instantly. Initiatives such as the StopNCII.org campaign have revealed how social media platforms consistently outmanoeuvre Ofcom. This is effectively leaving tech giants to determine whether supporting survivors like Georgia serves their profit-driven interests. To close the enforcement gaps, I stand with the End Violence Against Women coalition, Glitch and others in calling for a national online abuse commission—a dedicated body to champion the rights of victims and survivors of online abuse.

Finally, our legislation fails survivors by denying them accessible civil remedies—such as immediate take-downs and compensation for emotional harm—outside the criminal process. For survivors such as Jodie who have endured years of abuse, the inability to seek swift relief without a lengthy, retraumatising trial is a devastating gap. Creating a statutory civil offence for image-based abuse would not only empower survivors to seek redress directly against perpetrators and platforms, but give them that all-important second chance. The Minister will know that organisations such as South West Grid for Learning and the UK Safer Internet Centre consider civil remedies as much-needed lifelines for survivors. I wholeheartedly agree.

Today, through Georgia and Jodie's stories, we have seen the devastating cost of our inaction on the escalating, ever-evolving crisis of image-based abuse. For too long, our legislation has had three glaring deficiencies: the absence of a stay-down provision, the lack of an online abuse commission and the unavailability of civil remedies.

[Kirith Entwistle]

Returning to my earlier questions, I want to be able to tell survivors that this Government are doing everything possible to support them. I want to reassure them that our Ministers are responding in real time to the scale and urgency of the crisis. With every day we delay, more women and girls are thrust into cycles of harm without the protections that they urgently need and deserve. I look forward to hearing from the Minister exactly how we will deliver this assurance. I would also be grateful if I could discuss the matter further with the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology at the earliest opportunity.

Let us not wait another day to act. Survivors need real action, not just incremental change. We owe it to Georgia, Jodie and all those who have suffered.

4.15 pm

**Dame Caroline Dinenage** (Gosport) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I thank the hon. Member for Bolton North East (Kirith Entwistle) for tabling such an important debate, and she made some really powerful points.

I declare an interest: being very elderly, at one stage I was the Minister for Women and Equalities, and I was responsible for bringing forward the Revenge Porn Helpline. When that legislation came through, I was hopeful that that vital resource would be something temporary, and that one day it would be abolished because we did not need it any more. In actual fact, quite the opposite is true: it is busier than ever. As the hon. Member for Bolton North East said, it is catching some terrible perpetrators of the most horrific online abuse.

I was also the Minister for Digital and Culture who held the baton for a couple of years on the Online Safety Act 2023. I hope that legislation will offer more protection for the victims of this humiliating crime, which, as we know, disproportionately affects women. But technology moves so fast. I am concerned that, despite the protections in the Act and the Revenge Porn Helpline, the emergence of deepfakes in particular has opened up a new front in the war on women—I say that because 99% of pornographic images and deepfakes are of women. Literally tens of millions of deepfake images are being produced every year, most of them sexual, as the hon. Member for Bolton North East said.

The fact that the use of nudification apps and the creation of ultra-realistic deepfake porn for private use is still legal, and worse, becoming more popular, is a war on women's autonomy. It is a war on our dignity, and a war on our identity. The creation of these unpleasant sexual or nude deepfakes serves to push us out of those spaces and to undermine and silence us, both online and offline. We must do everything we can to stand against it.

I am sure the Minister agrees that we owe a debt to my noble Friend Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge for her work to legislate in this area. She encountered some hate of her own when she was appointed to the other place—she was too young and too female—but her very presence there indicates exactly why we need young women in both Houses to stand up against these injustices and bring them to the fore. I hope the Minister will do everything in her power to see my noble Friend's fantastic Bill become law.

4.18 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Davies-Jones)**: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton North East (Kirith Entwistle) for securing a debate on this very important subject. I look forward to discussing it with her and other members of the Women and Equalities Committee later this month.

This Government are absolutely committed to tackling violence against women and girls, and to restoring trust so that victims know that the justice system sees them, hears them and takes them seriously. In our election manifesto, we promised to make tackling violence against women and girls a political priority—finally, after years of neglect—with a pledge to halve violence against women and girls over the next decade. It is an ambitious target, but I believe we can do it.

Tackling online abuse is crucial. As outlined so eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton North East, the statistics are clear, but behind them are real people—real victims. Many of us will have experienced it ourselves, or know friends or family who have. Women have the right to feel safe in every space, online and offline. The rise in intimate image abuse is utterly devastating for victims, but it also spreads misogyny on social media, which can develop into potentially dangerous relationships offline. It is truly an abhorrent crime, which is why the Government are determined to act. It will not be easy and we are just at the start, but we will use all the tools available to us to tackle it.

Let me set out some of the work we are doing right now. First, it is vital that our criminal law is equipped to deal effectively with this behaviour. A range of criminal offences tackle intimate image abuse, whether online or offline. That includes offences of voyeurism and sharing or threatening to share intimate images without consent. However, the current law has developed in piecemeal fashion, with new offences introduced over many years to address different forms of offending. The result is a patchwork of offences with known gaps in protection for victims. For example, while it is currently an offence to share a deepfake of an intimate image without consent, it is not an offence to make one. That is why the Government's manifesto included a commitment to ban the creation of degrading and harmful sexually explicit deepfakes. This is not porn; this is abuse. We are looking at options to swiftly deliver that commitment in this Session of Parliament. We will consider what further legislative measures may be needed to strengthen the law in this area.

While intimate image abuse rightly has serious criminal consequences, we also need to tackle the prevalence of such content online. That is why, on 12 September, we laid before the House a statutory instrument to add the new criminal offences of sharing or threatening to share intimate images to the list of priority offences under the Online Safety Act. This strengthens the duties on providers to prioritise tackling intimate image abuse under the Act by holding them responsible for stopping the spread.

**Victoria Collins** (Harpenden and Berkhamsted) (LD): Strengthening those duties is key. As the hon. Member for Bolton North East (Kirith Entwistle) mentioned, Ofcom does not have the teeth it needs. Would the Minister agree that Ofcom needs to use its codes of practice to push social media companies to be more innovative to tackle the issue at the source?



**Alex Davies-Jones:** The hon. Lady makes a very good point; she has pre-empted my next sentence. As I have said, this is a start. Ofcom's codes of practice are being developed and will give it the tools to go after the platforms, but there is nothing stopping the platforms taking decisive action now. They do not need to wait for Ofcom to have the powers available to make them act. They could remove this imagery now; there is nothing making them wait. Other things could be done to take that further by building safety into design, which I know the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology is looking at very carefully.

Ofcom is working on the illegal harms codes of practice, which will take effect next year, and already working with the tech companies to ensure that the Online Safety Act is implemented quickly and effectively. Firms will also need to start risk assessing for that illegal content by the end of this year. Ofcom will have robust enforcement powers available to use against the companies that fail to fulfil their duties. It will be able to issue enforcement decisions that may include fines of up to £18 million or 10% of qualifying global revenue in the relevant year—whichever is higher. The Online Safety Act also means that when users report illegal intimate image abuse content to the platforms, they will be required to have systems and processes in place to remove the content.

It is important that the police respond robustly to such crimes. We have heard the importance of that today. In our manifesto, we committed to strengthening police training on violence against women and girls. We must ensure that all victims of VAWG have a positive experience when dealing with the police. That is essential to increased reporting of these crimes and delivery of better outcomes for victims. We will work closely with the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council to improve and strengthen training for officers. This is a start, but I am clear that it is not the be-all and end-all of tackling intimate image abuse. We can and must do more. If we want to see true and lasting change, we need a culture shift. I have said this before and I will keep saying it: we need everyone, especially men, to play their part in slowly but surely, bit by bit, wearing away outdated views and misogyny to ensure women are safe, wherever they are.

**Chris Bloore** (Redditch) (Lab): I echo that point. When we see this abuse on social media, hear of it in discussions in our constituencies and, in particular, hear from young men—this horrifies me—about the number of men sharing these images, we have to challenge it. We must be strong on that and do more.

**Alex Davies-Jones:** I could not agree more. This is about all of us playing our part and saying that we will not stand for it—we will not be passive bystanders and we will challenge these views to tackle it. It will not happen overnight. It will take time, but I believe we can do it. Women deserve to feel safe, whether that is online or out in the physical world. Men who abuse, harass and discriminate should have nowhere to hide.

**Charlotte Nichols** (Warrington North) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her work on this policy so far, which is among the most meaningful things that has happened since we came into office, particularly the removal of the intent provisions. We have seen too many women

unable to get justice because of a technicality, including a horrific case in my constituency that the Minister is well aware of. We are talking a lot about the online space today, so can she clarify that, where intimate image abuse is part of the commission of an offline offence of voyeurism or rape, for example, that will factor into the work that she is doing?

**Alex Davies-Jones:** I am well aware of the horrific case in my hon. Friend's constituency. I am pleased that we have been able to go further on intent versus consent with some of these crimes. The right to banter should not trump the right to feel safe; I have said that before in this place and I will say it again. Women have the right to feel safe everywhere and we are looking at all offences in that regard, but it will take a whole system effort. My colleagues and I across Government know that, and that is why we are working together to get to the root causes of violence and misogyny to create the lasting change that we all want and need to see.

Finally, we need to ensure that when someone has been the victim of intimate image abuse, they get the support that they need and know that they as victims and survivors have done nothing wrong. A key part of that is the invaluable work of victim support organisations such as the intimate image abuse helpline, which is funded by Government and was set up by the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage). Not only do these services provide high quality support and advice to victims of intimate image abuse, but they work with law enforcement and others to improve the response to these awful crimes. Representatives from the helpline recently gave evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee on this very issue, and I am grateful to them for all that they do to support victims. Their work is more valuable and more needed than ever.

**Charlotte Nichols:** I thank the Minister for giving way a second time—she is being very generous. Just to clarify, non-contact offences, including intimate image abuse, are not currently covered in the criminal injuries compensation framework. Could conversations be had with her ministerial colleagues about providing financial support for victims to access things such as therapy, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton North East (Kirith Entwistle) brought up as a really important feature of the debate?

**Alex Davies-Jones:** I was about to come on to therapy, support services and other things that the Ministry of Justice funds to support victims and survivors. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton North East mentioned redress, and compensation can be made available from the perpetrators directly through the civil courts. That has been pursued previously, and it is available to victims and survivors to get the redress that they need by claiming that compensation.

On victim support, the Ministry of Justice funds many other services to help victims cope and recover from the impact of crime. For example, we have the rape and sexual abuse support fund, which supports more than 60 specialist support organisations. As others have mentioned, we also have Refuge, which the Government fund to deliver a specific tech abuse function. It has been at the forefront of the response to tech abuse. We also provide police and crime commissioners with annual

[Alex Davies-Jones]

grant funding to commission local, practical, emotional and therapeutic support services for victims of all crime types, not just intimate image abuse.

The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 will aim to improve support to victims of sexual abuse, including intimate image abuse, by placing a duty on local commissioners to collaborate when commissioning support services so that victims and survivors get the support that they actually need. That brings me back to the key point: collaboration, with everyone pulling together and playing their part. That is what we need if we are going to truly see a shift. Again, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton North East for securing the debate and I thank everyone for coming and showing support. It really is important that we have good representation in Parliament. We are absolutely committed to tackling violence against women and girls, as are this Government, and we are just at the start of it.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## School Transport: Northumberland

[CAROLYN HARRIS *in the Chair*]

4.30 pm

**Carolyn Harris (in the Chair):** Before I call the hon. Member for Hexham to move the motion, I inform Members that the parliamentary digital communications team will be conducting secondary filming during the debate.

**Joe Morris (Hexham) (Lab):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered school transport in Northumberland.

It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris.

In Westminster Hall today, I am delighted to see Members who share my concerns about school transport, not just in my constituency but across the county. I place on the record my thanks to organisations such as Contact, Adapt North East and local schools, in particular Queen Elizabeth high school, for their valuable contributions. The future of school transport is a pressing and increasingly concerning issue affecting my constituents—parents, students and teachers—in Hexham and in Northumberland more broadly.

I grew up in Hexham. I was fortunate enough to have been educated at Sele first school, Hexham middle school and Queen Elizabeth high school. I am, and always will be, incredibly grateful to my teachers for the valuable education that I received. In particular, I mention Tony Webster, my former headteacher at QE—he filmed a video supporting me during the general election campaign—for his constant support and mentorship.

Meeting students and teachers across my constituency—from Queen Elizabeth high school to Longhorsley St Helen's Church of England first school and back to Sele first school, where I went a few weeks ago—has provided valuable insight into the issues affecting our local schools, and school transport in Northumberland is raised again and again.

During my maiden speech, I said:

“a great state education has the ability to change lives and to lift and change entire areas. I want every child in the constituency to have access to the kind of education that I was lucky enough to get.”—[*Official Report*, 19 July 2024; Vol. 752, c. 347.]

That is my motivation to secure this debate. Ensuring that every child in Northumberland gets the best education is a commitment that I share with my hon. Friend the Member for North Northumberland (David Smith), and with my hon. Friends the Members for Blyth and Ashington (Ian Lavery) and for Cramlington and Killingworth (Emma Foody), who cannot join us today.

Home-to-school transport is an integral part of our education system in Britain. It ensures that no child of compulsory school age is prevented from accessing education by a lack of, or the cost of, transport.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate. He is right to bring up the issue of school transport, especially in rural areas. We should never deplete services that children rely on to get to school; instead, we should increase their accessibility. I had a meeting with my Translink bus service and the education authority, and we were able to sort out some of the problems with rural transport. Does he agree that more needs to be done for bus

services, especially in rural areas where transport is already limited, to ensure that kids' education does not falter as a result of bus service issues? That is what could happen.

**Joe Morris:** I thank the hon. Member for his intervention and for his attendance. I think he has attended every Westminster Hall debate that I have spoken in. I completely share his assessment. The provision of appropriate bus routes is important, and it comes up in my casework. I have spoken to families in villages such as West Woodburn, where they allegedly have a choice of school, but the only available routes go to one single school.

**Sarah Dyke** (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for securing this important debate. I recently spoke to a constituent, Sara, who lives just outside Bruton in my constituency. She told me of her frustration that her daughter cannot catch the school bus that literally stops at the end of her farm track and goes to the local school. Instead, the council insists that she must drive her daughter or get a taxi to a different school, which is further away. Does he agree that our existing home-to-school transport legislation is too rigid? It is stifling local authorities' ability to make common-sense judgments.

**Joe Morris:** As constituency MPs, we all hear the frustrations of parents, teachers and students, who, because of school transport provision, are often hit with lateness marks or are forced to attend schools that they would rather not attend, as the hon. Lady said. It is something that we need to address properly, considering all the solutions in the round to ensure that we can provide great education to every child. I know from looking at my inbox that the 685 bus in Hexham is regularly full and delayed by up to 40 minutes. When people rely on commercial bus routes to get to school, it becomes an additional barrier to attendance. That is damaging to children's educational attainment and future prospects, simply because buses cannot always be relied on.

I spoke in the rural affairs debate in the main Chamber yesterday. Too often, people in rural communities pay more and get less. The previous Government, and other Governments before them, have allowed that to sail through without challenge. When we talk about rural-proofing our policies, it is essential that we look at things through the prism of how they affect some of our most isolated communities.

Fourteen years of Conservative austerity and neglect broke the very foundations of Britain and our education system, and took hope away from our young people, who have been let down and overlooked. I am extremely proud of our new Labour Government's commitment to increasing funding for schools, to putting our younger people first and to ensuring that every child receives a world-class education. Parents want the best for their child's education; they want their children to learn in a safe and secure environment where they feel part of the community and supported in their educational development. No child should be restricted from that because of inaccessibility.

I am proud to have secured this debate, and to be a voice for students and parents as we champion school transport in our local community. As Members—

particularly the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron)—do not tire of hearing, I represent England's largest constituency; I am delighted to see the silver and bronze medallists here today. The rural landscape has a considerable impact on school transport services. The reality of rural roads means that, despite having relatively short journeys, children are regularly late for the start of the school day. Children's education is suffering, and more transport vehicles and a reassessment of transport routes could make considerable headway in reducing the number of pupils who are late for school.

I have had one constituent raise the fact that delays to school transport mean that her daughter regularly receives late marks at school. Despite the fact that her daughter is a 14-minute journey from school and is collected at 7.45 am, she does not get to school until after 9 am. That is a case of a student's education suffering from a lack of adequate school transport services. As the early grid for learning report outlined, missing 15 minutes of school per day equates to 2 weeks' absence a year, and that is equivalent to missing 55 lessons a year. Being late negatively impacts a child's education and contributes to a loss of learning.

Home-to-school transport is often available only through the local authority, along with the additional support offered by parents and carers. Across the Hexham constituency and the Northumberland county council area in general, the provision of local bus and train services is unreliable—I have already mentioned the 685 bus—and not regular enough for young people to access when travelling to or from school.

I am pleased to see that North East Mayor Kim McGuinness has launched a consultation on the north-east local transport plan. That plan will cover five areas that are necessary for my constituents to be able to access a public transport system that is fit for all our communities, not just those in centralised areas. Those five areas are: journey planning and customer support; ticketing and fares; expanding infrastructure and making it more resilient; enhancing safety, especially for women and girls; and improving links between different modes of transport. There is a clear delivery plan that has outlined and established targets for 2040, setting the path for overcoming the current challenges and creating a more efficient and resilient transport network for the future of the north-east. That will make considerable headway in helping my constituents access education and training opportunities, as well as work and social opportunities more broadly.

The system on offer in Northumberland provides inconsistent results for families when they are allocated school transport places. One of my constituents, who is a resident in the far north of the constituency, contacted me to say that his daughter has obtained a free transport place but his son has not. As a result, he has to drive his son 170 miles a week, alongside the bus that takes his daughter to the same school. That is not just illogical, but vaguely Kafkaesque. It has environmental implications, in addition to educational ones, and it places a financial and administrative burden on a family who already qualify for free transport provision. I am sure the Minister will agree that we need to support the families in my Hexham constituency and families across Northumberland, ensuring that the provision of school transport is consistent



[Joe Morris]

for siblings within the same family. We cannot allow administration to provide inconsistent results for families.

In my constituency, I am often asked questions about school catchment areas. I was on a call with Northumberland county council on the train down here, and I was informed that one of the school catchment areas in my constituency is larger than the area contained by the M25. Unsurprisingly, I get quite a lot of incoming casework on this. Many students who are outside catchment areas and ineligible for school transport services require commercial public transport to get to school. That is particularly common in constituencies such as mine, and those of my hon. Friend the Member for North Northumberland or the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale. Villages and towns such as Haydon Bridge, Bardon Mill and Haltwhistle, as well as settlements such as Falstone, Greenhaugh and Kielder, have considerable numbers of students who travel to Hexham middle school and Queen Elizabeth high school, which sits in the Tyne valley at the centre of my constituency. Such places are deemed to be outside the catchment area for those schools, but the safety of students travelling to and from school in Northumberland should be a priority. Those children should feel safe travelling to school, and parents should be reassured about their safety.

A constituent has shared a deeply concerning story about the 685 bus breaking down on the side of the A69, with children being required to stand on the side of the A69—one of the busy roads running through the constituency—without any police presence or safety measures in place. I am sure that the Minister is aware of the growing concerns over that road. Since 2019, there have been 191 crashes on it between Hexham and Carlisle, with 44 of them being deemed serious by the police and six people losing their lives. When I heard about children standing on the side of the A69, I was deeply concerned. They should not be in that position.

Constituents frequently mention the delays to the 685 bus service, which affect children getting to and from school. Despite petitions by parents to change the service from a single-decker to a double-decker bus—that was raised with the previous Conservative MP—no action was taken to resolve the issue. Constituents have said that their children have had to wait for more than an hour for the next bus service to collect them, because of a lack of space in addition to delays to the service. We need to work collaboratively with local bus companies and local councils to ensure that the safety of our students is protected as they journey to and from school.

I will briefly mention transport for children with special educational needs and disabilities. I know that the Minister and the Government agree that SEND needs urgent attention, as has been demonstrated by the devastating consequences of the previous Government's actions. In Northumberland at present, there are 407 routes transporting 1,738 pupils and their escorts. In six years, the number of children in Northumberland requiring an education, care and health plan has doubled, from 1,679 in 2017 to 3,369 in 2023. The figure is still rising, and the failure of the last Government to adequately provide for children with SEND is a damning indictment of that Government and indeed the Conservative party.

Children with educational needs and disabilities often have to travel further to schools, not through choice but just to get the education that meets their needs. My constituency surgeries are often attended by families who have to travel from the far west of my constituency to the coast of Northumberland—a journey that does not take a small amount of time. In large rural areas such as mine, the need for children to travel such extremely long distances isolates them from their local communities and friendships, and it ultimately undermines their potential to have a local support network.

I was contacted by a parent who travels from Prudhoe to Berwick every day, which is a three-hour round trip, to ensure that their child receives the support they need. We must ensure that parents feel supported as we look to reform the SEND framework. One of the things I am most proud of in the autumn Budget is the £1 billion uplift in SEND education and the prioritisation of improving SEND education nationally. I am hopeful for the future of SEND education and will always support the Minister and the Government in their commitment to it.

I want to acknowledge the work of Kim McGuinness on her Kids Go Free initiative, and her commitment to improving public transport services for young people across our region. That initiative offers free transport to children during school holidays, reducing travel costs for families, promoting sustainable public transport and encouraging families to explore the wonderful region that is the north-east—I draw attention to my Westminster Hall debate next week on improving tourism in Northumberland, at which I look forward to seeing the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). It is a positive step in the right direction in terms of improving transport services in the region. Through that collaboration and co-operation we will increase prosperity and make a real difference to the lives of young people.

I am sure Members present can agree that every child in Britain deserves an accessible and safe education. Moreover, every parent should feel safe and secure in the knowledge that their children are receiving support. Children deserve to have a safe and sustainable passage to school, to arrive on time and to access an education that is appropriate for their learning requirements. For my constituents in Hexham and for people across Northumberland, school transport is jeopardising that promise. With rural geography, inconsistency in allocating school transport places, problems with catchment areas, and journey delays, the very premise of that principle is being jeopardised.

I am proud that this Government are putting students and young people at the heart of the agenda, following the neglect of the previous Conservative Government. I am sure Members can agree that more can always be done to ensure that our young people access the educational support they need and deserve. Providing clearer guidance on transport provision for children will minimise confusion for local families. Giving more attention to the eligibility of SEND children will make a considerable difference to many of my constituents across Hexham.

I know that the Minister and the Secretary of State are committed to finding long-term solutions for education, school transport and SEND education. I hope the Minister will consider how, in the vast rural communities that make up my constituency, having greater provision for SEND students closer to their homes would minimise

journeys and go a long way to dealing with the central issues we are debating. Everyone deserves the opportunity to access education, and we cannot allow a lack of access to appropriate school transport to jeopardise that.

4.47 pm

**David Smith** (North Northumberland) (Lab): I am absolutely delighted to speak in this debate alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Joe Morris), and I am delighted that he secured it. The lack of accessible transport options to Northumberland secondary schools, in particular, may not attract national attention, but it affects children, young people and parents in my constituency much more directly than almost anything else we discuss in Parliament. In North Northumberland, it is now common in villages such as Pegswood for an 11-year-old to spend up to two hours a day on four different buses making the round trip to school and back. When we factor that in for SEND students, as my hon. Friend said, parents face a collective nightmare.

One constituent recently wrote to me—I have changed the name of their daughter—to say:

“We are currently having issues with school transport for our daughter who is autistic. Northumberland County Council have rejected our appeal for alternative provision. Sarah is no longer attending school, due to a number of issues, the first being transport. We are now homeschooling Sarah.”

That issue is repeated over and over again in my mailbox.

There are two reasons why it matters so much. The first, which I have just highlighted, is the most obvious: the cost and strain on parents is totally antithetical to the ideal of the state school. Families are spending hundreds of pounds a year making sure that their child gets to school, worrying the whole time about their safety, as we heard. Our state school system should not rely on significant private expenditure to meet basic educational needs. In fact, it was designed to do the very opposite.

Secondly, school transport is a pinch point in terms of a wider range of northern rural inequalities in education and transport, and deservedly reinforces the idea that places such as Northumberland have been left behind and ignored over the years by the powers that be. There have been repeated failures across the county in the way that our schools, roads and rail are run, and school transport exposes them all, pointing to a much wider range of issues.

How did we get here? North Northumberland has too few schools, and in some areas that is leading to huge pressures. The nearest secondary school to Pegswood, the village I mentioned, is in Ashington—Ashington Academy—which is a 20-minute bus journey away. However, Ashington is oversubscribed, so students are often sent to Cramlington instead. If parents cannot drop them off, there is a range of ways to get there, of which the quickest takes 41 minutes and involves a train. The season ticket for that train costs £1,120 a year, so most take the cheaper option—a bus journey. Actually, it is two bus journeys, which take up to an hour and a quarter and will cost at least £960 a year, according to the very confusing and unhelpful Arriva website. This very afternoon, teenagers from Pegswood who finished school in Cramlington at 3 o'clock will only just be getting home, having taken four buses on a £1,000 ticket. Commutes like that are happening in

towns all over North Northumberland, from towns and villages such as Belford, Wooler, Rothbury and Amble. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham about the state of some rural roads and about how that often makes journeys more challenging.

Nowhere is this issue more visible than with SEND schooling. Like my hon. Friend the Member, I welcome the Government's commitment to spend £1 billion pounds more on SEND next year. North Northumberland has three SEND schools and they do a remarkable job supporting the flourishing of young people with more complex needs. However, the nearest school might not necessarily be the best option, which can require pupils to spend over an hour in a taxi or bus to get there—we heard about the hour-and-a-half journey in each direction that some have to make in my hon. Friend's constituency. Parents are increasingly resigned to the notion that having a child with more complex needs will require spending large amounts of money and time travelling to school.

The Education Act 1944—I am sure hon. Members did not expect me to bring that up in this debate—established modern secondary schools and came into being because,

“when poorer children were offered free places”

—at grammar schools, as they then were—

“parents often had to turn them down owing to the extra costs involved.”

Free state schools were instead set up to cater to all needs and incomes, but my constituents seem to have ended up trapped in a new system that promises equal and free schooling, but includes submerged and unexpected costs that put family finances under strain.

On the wider issues, the school transport issue has not emerged in isolation but is evidence of a wider series of pressures on public services across the county. First, the education system is struggling in various guises in some parts of Northumberland. The town of Berwick, in my constituency, is extremely reliant on its one state secondary school to nurture the necessary skills and qualifications for the town's economy, so when the school struggles, the town struggles. A 2017 report said:

“Berwick is one of Northumberland's most deprived towns. It has a vulnerable economy characterised by poor quality job opportunities, part time working, low wages and very limited education facilities.”

North Northumberland's further education is in a poor way too, and 16 to 18-year-olds who want to take up a vocational course have to travel miles out of the constituency and at great expense. Another constituent recently got in touch about this very issue, saying:

“I have been made aware of a colleague's 16 year-old daughter who undertook an apprenticeship across the border in Scotland in July. She lives in Berwick and was catching a bus to and from work. However, after just a few weeks, Border Buses removed the morning bus. Emma”—

whose name I have changed—

“is now relying on taxis to get her to her apprenticeship in the morning. This is costing her family, who are not in a position to afford this, £150 a week. Emma is a vulnerable young woman who has endured a difficult time at school and yet is thriving in her apprenticeship, but this is now at risk.”

North Northumberland's GCSE and apprenticeship levels keep pace with the rest of the country, but A-Levels and higher education qualifications are behind the England and Wales average, and that will be in part because of

[David Smith]

the inaccessibility of further and higher education. However, those pressures are also evidence of a public transport system that is not up to the job.

North Northumberland residents are right to be sceptical about local bus services, considering that Arriva, the largest provider, is owned by an American equity investment fund based in Miami, which is hardly ideal for a public service. In fact, from 2017 to 2022, the distance travelled by bus services in Northumberland fell by over a third—one of the highest reductions for any authority in the north-east.

It is for that reason that, like my hon. Friend, I am delighted that the Mayor of the North East, Kim McGuinness, has started the process of bringing buses back under public control so that we know that they go where they are needed and not just on the routes that make the most money. Having spoken to the Mayor of the North East about that, I know that one reason she is keen to do that is the positive impact it would have on rural services.

Meanwhile, local train services are increasingly sidelined in favour of London to Edinburgh links on the east coast main line that squeeze stopping services from the timetable. Cost-benefit calculations designed to extract value do not favour rural areas, which need targeted public investment and intentional support. Poor transport is a contributing factor to low rural productivity.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham said, all of this is the natural end point of 14 years of a real-terms education spending freeze, with reduced school capital spending; of 14 years of neglect of public transport that let franchising diminish the value of rail travel and bus companies be driven by international investors; and of 14 years of letting economic liberalism expose rural communities to economies of scale that make post offices, banks and other essential services non-viable. It is not by accident that hundreds of schoolchildren cannot go to schools in their own communities—it is the consequence of the policies of the last Government.

However, the work of change has begun locally and nationally. I am working with Berwick stakeholders to rethink our vision of what an outstanding education system could look like, with a campus model and associated further education facilities having the potential to transform education in the town and even the town itself. I am fully supportive of the campaign by the South East Northumberland Rail User Group to introduce a regular stopping service up the east coast main line that serves local residents and opens up the region to inward investment. I welcome the £1 billion committed by the Government to local transport, with another £650 million towards transport and buses in towns, villages and rural areas.

The difference between a Labour and a Conservative Government is that when we see communities facing economic disadvantage and inequality, we have no issue putting our money where our mouth is and making sure that where someone starts in life or where they live does not determine the opportunities they can pursue.

4.57 pm

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is an absolute joy to serve under your guidance, Mrs Harris. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Hexham (Joe Morris),

who is becoming almost as much of a regular in this place as our recently departed friend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). As he rightly set out, he, I and the hon. Member for North Northumberland (David Smith) are the big three—we represent the three largest constituencies in England. The hon. Members for Hexham and for North Northumberland made really great points, not just on behalf of their constituents in Northumberland, but on an issue that is of huge significance across the country, particularly in rural communities such as mine.

The hon. Member for Hexham talked about rural communities paying more and getting less. Sadly, that is absolutely how things are. About a year ago, the Rural Services Network calculated that if a single region was created from rural England and compared to the geographical regions of England, it would be comfortably the poorest. Although the depiction of rural life is often full of a bucolic, ideal, wonderful and high quality of life—of course rural places are beautiful, and we are proud to live in them—poverty is undoubtedly real, and the cost of transport and the distance people have to travel to get to the services they need are a major driver of that.

As the hon. Members for Hexham and for North Northumberland set out, one issue we face in rural communities is that, with huge catchment areas, the divide between two school catchments can be incredibly blurred. Someone may well be sending their child to the nearest school, but it may technically not be the one in catchment, so they are left having to pay a significant amount for their child to go to that school. As the hon. Member for Hexham rightly pointed out, people often find that one of their children can get a bus to school but that the other cannot. That is definitely the case in parts of my constituency.

This problem is exacerbated by the reduction in the number of small village schools over the last few decades. In my constituency I have at least three schools with fewer than 20 children and three schools that have closed in the last few years as well—in Ravenstonedale, Satterthwaite and Heversham. The communities around those schools are now, and have been for a generation in some cases, forced to make alternative arrangements. That has largely come about because of the growth in second home ownership, unchecked, in many communities in the lakes and dales, which has gobbled up the homes available for a full-time permanent population. Without that, where are the children coming from? Where are affordable houses being built to replace those second homes? There are some, but nowhere near enough. It is all part of the fabric of rural life, which comes under enormous pressure. The community's school is at risk and may go, and bus services are lost, along with the post office, as mentioned by the hon. Member for North Northumberland.

The patchwork of rural life under such strain is often maintained by decent public transport links, if they exist, but they are often lacking in rural communities. I will come back to the debate about £2 and £3 bus fares. It is hugely regrettable that the Government have increased that cap on bus fares. As I often say, any bus fare cap is of no use if there is no bus to use it on.

It is important to look at this issue seriously, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Hexham for bringing it forward. One reason a child might not be sent to the



nearest school is that that child has special educational needs. That may be formalised, and I have some figures on that. We have seen a 24% increase in the number of children travelling to special schools in the past five years. We have seen the number of EHCPs increase from 105,000 in 2015 to 230,000 across the country in 2023.

The County Councils Network estimates that by 2027 spending on special needs transport will have trebled over a decade to a vast total of £1.1 billion. Many children do not have an EHCP because there is an incredible backlog, and there are people who have special needs who are not formally assessed. Nevertheless, parents will send those children to the schools more able to cope with them and provide the best quality of education. If that is not in catchment and the child does not have an EHCP, parents pay for that themselves. Many parents in my communities are struggling as a result. They cannot afford it but, for the sake of their children, they do it.

The use of taxis over the past five years to get children with special educational needs to school has gone up by 36%. The school and the local authority between them bear the cost of that. It is encouraging to hear the new Government talk about special educational needs and try to focus on this as a crisis to be fixed. The Liberal Democrats believe strongly that there should be a national body for special educational needs, with additional support for local authorities and schools to fund provision. We should not be in the situation where those schools that do the right thing by children with special educational needs are penalised for doing so, and end up losing staff as a consequence of paying the costs of those children they have rightly taken on and supported.

I will talk about the communities across the Pennines in Westmorland and Furness. We have historic spend factors that account for 28% of our high-needs allocation and which do not reflect the changes in demand and the costs incurred in the past six years. Historical spend factors mean that Westmorland and Furness is funded 45% less than other high-cost authorities, and the impact is felt by children across our communities.

It is worth bearing in mind that Northumberland and Cumbria have very high visitor numbers. Although we do not pay for the education of visitors, we do pay for lots of other services that visitors use when visiting Northumberland national park, the lakes and the Yorkshire dales. There are 20 million visitors to Cumbria in the average year. That costs the local authority, and there is nothing in the funding formula to recognise that, to ensure that we do not dip into money that might otherwise be spent on education, in order to prop up other services, because we have all those visitors and do not have the money to pay for and support them.

When talking about school transport, we should pay attention to the plight of young people over 16. I am deeply concerned, along with others who represent rural constituencies, that although we rightly have young people continuing their education beyond 16, as is mandatory, we do not support or fund them to get to those places of education. It is probably quite straightforward in an urban area, where people could just walk to their nearest sixth form, but students at Kendal college are coming from right across Westmorland and north Lancashire, travelling maybe 40 or 50 miles in one direction to get there each day.

The sixth forms at the Queen Katherine school and Kirkbie Kendal school also take young people from far outside Kendal. At the Lakes school in Troutbeck Bridge, people travel from Grasmere, Ambleside, Windermere and the likes to get there. Dallam school takes children from the rest of south Cumbria and north Lancashire. There is also Ullswater community college. Kirkby Stephen and Appleby sixth forms are really small and in wonderful schools, and young people travel there at great cost to themselves and their parents. A student might find their brother in year 9 has his place at school funded, but they may have to pay £700 or £800 a year for the privilege. As a result, young people are choosing not to go into further education and take A-levels; they are choosing other routes instead, because they simply cannot afford to do so. That is why this issue is so important. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Hexham has managed to secure this debate, because it is of great significance to all of us who represent rural communities.

5.5 pm

**Neil O'Brien** (Harborough, Oadby and Wigston) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve with you chairing, Mrs Harris. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hexham (Joe Morris) on securing this hugely important debate. This is an important subject to talk about, and there have been really good contributions from multiple Members. I declare an interest in Northumberland, as it is where I got married, in Wooler near Rothbury, which has already been mentioned. I have a great appreciation for Northumberland as a county. If I am not in the constituencies of the hon. Members for Hexham or for North Northumberland (David Smith) in the summer, I am normally in the constituency of the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), so they are all places for which I have a lot of love.

I will recap the story a little. Last year, we announced an extra £500 million of funding for local government for adult and children's social care, particularly to reduce the pressure on other areas of children's services, such as home-to-school transport. It was part of our wider strategy for children's social care reform and allocated to things such as expanding family help, targeted early intervention and all those things. It was part of a wider settlement for local government last year, which was another above-inflation settlement. Local government absolutely was squeezed in the coalition years, when we were clearing up the large deficit after the financial crisis, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies has pointed out, but funding per person in 2024-25 is set to be 10% higher in real terms per person than in 2019-20, with bigger increases for the most deprived councils. It is worth recognising that what happened over the last Parliament is not the same as what happened in the period 2010-2015, when there were real-terms increases per person for local government.

I mention that because the local government financial settlement for next year is now looming; I guess that we should expect it some time in the next month. Perhaps the Minister will tell us when it is coming. I have a couple of specific questions that I hope she will be able to answer, as they are relevant to this debate. What will the total cost to local government be of the national insurance increase announced in the Budget? What will the cost of the national insurance increase be specifically to home school transport? Will local authorities be compensated for those costs?

[Neil O'Brien]

We know that one of the recurring issues with the national insurance increase is who will be compensated. Public services that are not part of the public sector are not included in the protection. For example, GPs are up in arms about the enormous bills that they all face, and there are similar issues for nurseries, which are extremely concerned. The university sector has already learned that the entirety of the increase paid for by the breaking of the tuition fees promise will pay for the breaking of the promise on national insurance, so one broken promise will pay for another. All the gains that it thought it was going to get from the tuition fees increase are being entirely wiped out and eaten up by the cost of the national insurance increase, so real-terms funding for universities will go down. Those issues very much apply to home-to-school transport, a public service provided by people outside the public sector. Will the Minister tell us whether they will be fully compensated for that? I hope she will be able to give us that assurance.

We have touched on some of the wider issues in which this issue is situated. The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale has mentioned this, but I was really sad to see the end of the “get around for £2” scheme, which we introduced and extended to the end of 2024. I know from my own community that it has particularly benefited people in rural areas, so I am sad to see that it has gone and there is effectively a 50% increase in the cost of a lot of journeys on buses. That is a real shame, because I felt we were making progress on buses. I was involved in the Bus Services Act 2017, which gave mayoral combined authorities the power to introduce into other areas of the country the kind of franchising that London has enjoyed for a long time.

It was sad to see the scrapping of the dualling of the A1 through Northumberland. Land and houses had been bought up to allow for the work, which makes it even worse. I was astonished to see that in the Budget, although there was lots of capital for other things, including the different things that the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Ed Miliband) wants to do on net zero, there was an overall reduction in capital transport spending. I was really surprised by that. I do not really understand what the logic was.

**David Smith:** I have a simple question: would the hon. Gentleman agree that the last Government had 14 years to dual the A1 and did not manage to do so?

**Neil O'Brien:** We had finally got there. We had bought the land and the houses, and the thing was about to happen. Somehow, the new Government snatched defeat from the jaws of victory, which is desperately sad. We will have to agree to disagree on that.

We have talked a bit about SEND funding in the round. The high needs block spending grew 70% between 2018-19 and 2024-25, so we put a lot more money into it. Hon. Members might say that is still not enough, and I would totally understand where they are coming from, but the demand is exploding upwards. I know that the Minister will be thinking equally about the causes of that and what she can do about it—not just meeting the need, but trying to understand the root causes and reduce the need for these services. There was a very large increase in that high needs block SEND spending.

A couple of hon. Members mentioned that one of the ways to solve the issue is not to look at the transport but to look at the schools. This is a long-term obsession of mine. I had a Westminster Hall debate not so long ago about this very issue. Since 1980, the number of small schools with fewer than 200 pupils had roughly halved, from 11,464 to 5,406, by 2018. That is a long-term trend. Since 2000, rural schools—those in villages and hamlets—have been twice as likely to shut. When they have shut, the typical walk time to the nearest school has been about 52 minutes. That long-term trend, which has occurred under Governments of all three of the main parties, has posed all sorts of challenges for rural areas.

To try to arrest that trend, we brought in the lump sum within the national funding formula, which is about 60% of the total funding. It is a hugely important part of the funding and I look forward to hon. Members championing it. We must think about how we keep village and rural schools, which are such an important part of rural communities, going. That is not just because they make life simpler and the whole transport issue simpler, but because they are at the heart of rural communities. The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale talked about a 36% increase in taxis. We need to think about how we can attack the underlying causes of the need. I am sure that the Minister will be thinking about this.

I will end where I started by congratulating, in an honest way, the hon. Member for Hexham on securing this debate. It is hugely important. He made a super-important point about siblings being treated differently, which seems like absolute craziness. I am sure that we all agree that we ought to tackle that, but there are opportunities to address these issues, particularly through the local government funding formula. Government Ministers will stand up in a few weeks' time and give us the numbers for how much local government is getting, but those in local government will want to know what is happening to their costs and for which of the services they provide, such as home-to-school transport, they will get compensation on the national insurance increase, because otherwise they will not know whether they are really ahead or behind.

5.13 pm

**The Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell):** It is an honour to serve under you as Chair today, Mrs Harris. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Joe Morris) on securing the debate today on this very important subject. I know how hard he works to represent the constituents of Hexham and how passionate he is about access to the best education possible for the children in his rural constituency. I am very familiar with my hon. Friend's constituency, having lived there, spent most of my holidays there, and represented parts of it for 14 years leading up to the last general election. It is a truly beautiful and blessed part of Britain, but I totally understand that it is not without its challenges. He is rightly here today raising them and ensuring that he can deliver change for his constituents.

The Department's home-to-school travel policy aims to make sure that no child is prevented from accessing education by a lack of transport. As my hon. Friend will know, local authorities are required to arrange free travel for children of compulsory school age who attend

their nearest school but cannot walk there because of the distance, because they have special educational needs, a disability or a mobility problem, or because the route is not safe.

There are additional rights to free travel for low-income households, so that they can exercise school choice, but local authorities are struggling to fulfil those duties for all eligible children and the costs of doing so have risen sharply in recent years. All local authorities are looking for ways to deliver that service efficiently and cost-effectively. In 2023, Northumberland county council conducted a comprehensive review of home-to-school travel, which made wide-ranging recommendations that are being implemented.

There are several reasons for the steep increase in the cost of home-to-school travel in recent years, such as fuel price inflation and a shortage of drivers, passenger assistants and transport operators. Those things have pushed up costs, but most of the increase can be attributed to challenges in the school system itself that have built up over many years, specifically the way the school system currently educates children with additional needs. My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham raised that in his speech. More children have education, health and care plans and more of those children travel long distances to a school that can meet their needs. As well as their journeys being longer, which is more expensive in itself, that also reduces the opportunity for economies of scale. Fewer children are likely to take each route, so more vehicles are required.

We want more children and young people to receive the support they need to thrive in their local mainstream setting, which will reduce the need for them to travel a long way to access specialist placements. Many mainstream settings already deliver specialist provision locally, including through resource provision and special educational needs units, but there will always be a place in the system for special schools, which are required by children with the most complex needs.

The Department supports local authorities to provide suitable school places for children and young people with SEND through annual high needs capital funding. It can be used to deliver new places in mainstream and special schools as well as in specialist settings and to improve the accessibility and suitability of existing buildings. We will set out plans for future high needs capital funding in due course.

Making sure that more children can be educated in their local community will reduce pressure on home-to-school travel over time. We want to work with the sector to ensure our approach to SEND reform is planned and delivered with parents, schools, councils and expert staff, who we know go above and beyond to support children. There are no quick fixes. Fixing the SEND system is a key priority for this Department and a vital part of our opportunity mission, but it will take time. We will work with the sector as essential and valued partners to ensure our approach to SEND is fully planned and delivered with parents, schools and councils.

For many children with SEND, learning to travel independently is an important part of preparing to lead an independent and fulfilling adult life. Independent travel training is a tailored programme to help children with SEND to learn to travel independently, for example by public transport or walking. My hon. Friend the Member for North Northumberland (David Smith)

highlighted the length of the journeys that some children in Northumberland face. Local authorities should offer independent travel training to children with SEND who are eligible for free travel to school and who think they could successfully complete the programme. Many parents are anxious about their child's ability to travel independently, and the child may also be worried about it, so it is important that local authorities support families to help them to understand the benefits of being able to travel independently, which will build their confidence.

We are also aware of significant concerns around home-to-school travel for children in temporary accommodation. We understand that when a child has to move to temporary accommodation—for example, as a result of homelessness or fleeing a difficult situation—they will benefit from the continuity of remaining at their current school, with familiar teachers and friends. However, they might not be eligible for free travel to school—for example, if there are other school places that are nearer, between their school and their temporary accommodation.

Local authorities have a discretionary power to arrange free home-to-school travel for children, even if they are not eligible. We know there is incredible pressure on local authority home-to-school travel budgets, but we encourage local authorities to exercise that discretion whenever they can for children who are vulnerable.

In the Budget, we announced an additional £233 million for tackling all forms of homelessness, taking the total spending on reducing homelessness to nearly £1 billion in 2025-26. That will be directed at supporting people into secure and stable housing, and at supporting children. We recognise that there are similar pressures on local authorities providing transport support to post-16 students, and the cost and availability of public transport can be a real issue, as my hon. Friend also pointed out.

Nevertheless, it is a responsibility of local authorities to put in place transport arrangements to help young people aged 16 to 19 to access education or training, as well as for people aged 19 to 24 who have special educational needs, using funds that they have available locally. Most local authorities do offer some form of subsidised transport, and it is combined with the 16 to 19 bursary. It is intended to provide financial support to students from the lowest-income households. For example, in the constituency of Hexham, Northumberland county council offers free transport to young people from low-income backgrounds and those on EHCPs. However, I appreciate the concerns that my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham has outlined today.

The vast majority of central Government funding for home-to-school transport and post-16 transport goes through the local government finance settlement, administered by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. We recognise the challenges local authorities face as the demand for their critical services continues to rise. We have listened to voices across the sector, and we prioritise local government funding. In the Budget, we announced £1.3 billion of new grant funding in 2025-26 for local government to deliver core services, which, together with the local income from council tax and business rates, will provide a real-terms increase in core spending power of around 3.2%. I appreciate the concerns the shadow Minister raised, but the amounts and the way they will be administered will be announced in due course—the announcement is due this month.



**Neil O'Brien:** I am grateful for the Minister's answer. I am keen to understand whether local authorities will be compensated, not just for the direct costs to their own staff of the increased national insurance payments, but for the costs of services that they buy in, such as home-to-school transport. Will that also be fully compensated?

**Catherine McKinnell:** All those details are being worked through and will be announced in due course. I appreciate the hon. Member's keenness to have advance sight of the statement—it is coming, and it will set out all of the detail.

In addition, local government in England is expected to receive about £1.1 billion of new funding in 2025-26 through the implementation of the extended producer responsibility for packaging scheme. Hon. Members might wonder what that has to do with transport, but it will shift the burden for managing household packaging waste from local authorities to the producers who supply and import the packaging. That will create additional revenue for local authorities to channel towards vital services such as public transport.

The Government are committed to reforming public services and the local government funding system, while providing as much certainty as possible. It is important that we deliver that reform in partnership with local government, and my ministerial colleagues will be setting out more detail shortly.

The Department routinely collects data on local authorities' expenditure on home-to-school travel, and we understand the increasing financial pressures that they face. However, as things stand, the Government have not collected data on the actual travel being arranged, even fundamental information such as the number of pupils receiving free home-to-school travel, the transporting of siblings—as my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham highlighted—and information on catchment areas. I am determined, given the concerns that he and other hon. Members have raised, that we improve our data on the subject so that local authorities can benchmark themselves against similar authorities and learn from one another, and so that central and local government have the robust evidence to inform decision making on those issues. We will be writing to local authorities in the coming days, setting out our plans to ask them to provide data on travel that they arrange for children and young people to get to school and post-16 providers. It will be voluntary at first, but I hope local authorities will see the benefit of the data collection and share the requested data that they hold.

Another big issue that we know we must tackle is school absence. If children are not in school, they cannot benefit from their education. Thanks to the efforts of the sector, more children are in school in 2023-24 compared with the previous year, but 1.6 million children are still persistently absent, and that is a major challenge. We know that some children, particularly those with additional needs, face additional barriers to attendance, so we have to work to tackle those issues. We know that schools need to take a support-first approach and ensure that they have an attendance champion and policy and that they work with local authorities. Clearly, transport to school is a big part of that jigsaw.

Public transport clearly has an important role to play. Good local bus services are an essential part of thriving communities, providing access to education and other

services. Outside of London, buses were deregulated in 1985. They now largely run on a commercial basis, and my hon. Friend the Member for North Northumberland pointed out some of the challenges that that can present. The Government have pledged to fix that, and the Bus Services Bill announced in the King's Speech will put the power of local buses into the hands of local leaders. I know the North East Mayor Kim McGuinness is working to improve bus routes and has committed to repairing our broken bus system in the north-east.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham again for bringing the matter forward and all those who have made contributions to the debate. It is an issue that many people rightly feel passionately about. I acknowledge the challenges that far too many families face when seeking to get the right support for their children. By fixing our broken SEND system, by transforming our education system so that more children can access an inclusive, high-quality education locally and by fixing our broken transport system, we can truly make this change.

5.27 pm

**Joe Morris:** I thank the Minister for her response and thank her ministerial team, the other Ministers in her Department and the Secretary of State for their continued proactive engagement with me and other rural MPs. For the first time we have a Government that truly get the challenges of rural Britain, aided in no small part by the new Labour intake.

I do not want to finish the debate with a political point; I want to finish with the words of some of my constituents. One of my constituents wrote to me saying that she has a daughter who travels from Stocksfield to Prudhoe community high school, which is a wonderful school that I look forward to visiting. The only way to get there is to walk 2.9 miles along a busy road, and that would be unsafe. That was one of the many emails that led to me requesting this debate. The son of a constituent had to move school due to bullying and sadly does not qualify for school transport. That is the reason why I brought the debate: those stories that make up portions of my constituency surgeries that bring me here every day to fight the corner of my constituents.

I hope people across my constituency feel that we have given voice to their concerns. I hope those at County Hall who have the power to intervene or look again at certain cases are watching and take notice. It is a privilege to represent the people of the Hexham constituency, whether that is Throckley and Callerton, ably represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for many years, or the Northumberland part.

I thank all Members from across the House for their contributions, particularly the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who sent me a wonderful note, and the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), who paid me a wonderful compliment by comparing me to the hon. Member for Strangford.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered school transport in Northumberland.

5.29 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statements

*Tuesday 12 November 2024*

## TREASURY

### Notification of Contingent Liability

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves):** The independent Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England decided at its meeting ending on 3 February 2022 to reduce the stocks of UK Government bonds and sterling non-financial investment-grade corporate bonds held in the asset purchase facility by ceasing to reinvest maturing securities. The Bank ceased reinvestment of assets in this portfolio in February 2022 and commenced sales of corporate bonds on 28 September 2022, and sales of gilts acquired for monetary policy purposes on 1 November 2022. The sales of corporate bonds ceased on 6 June 2023, with a small number of outstanding corporate bonds reaching maturity on 5 April 2024. Therefore, the APF is now comprised solely of gilts.

The Chancellor at the time agreed a joint approach with the Governor of the Bank of England in an exchange of letters on 3 February 2022 to reduce the maximum authorised size of the APF for asset purchases every six months, as the size of APF holdings reduces.

Since 30 April 2024 when the maximum authorised size of the APF was last reduced, the total stock of assets held by the APF for monetary policy purposes has fallen further from £704.2 billion to £654.5 billion. In line with the approach agreed with the Governor, the authorised maximum total size of the APF has therefore been reduced to £654.5 billion, comprising entirely of gilts.

The risk control framework previously agreed with the Bank will remain in place, and HM Treasury will continue to monitor risks to public funds from the APF through regular risk oversight meetings and enhanced information sharing with the Bank.

There will continue to be an opportunity for HM Treasury to provide views to the MPC on the design of the schemes within the APF, as they affect the Government's broader economic objectives and may pose risks to the Exchequer.

The Government will continue to indemnify the Bank, the APF and its directors from any losses arising out of, or in connection with, the facility. Provision for any payment due under the liability will continue to be sought through the normal supply procedure.

A full departmental minute has been laid in Parliament providing more detail on this contingent liability.

[HCWS208]

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Launch of Youth Strategy

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy):** The Government are today announcing the development and co-production of the national

youth strategy. Young people's needs have never been more complex. Through this strategy, we will improve our understanding of young people's priorities as well as run an ambitious and wide consultation.

In the coming months this consultation will feed into a report—"Today's Youth, Tomorrow's Nation"—detailing young people's priorities to inform our new approach. The national youth strategy will be published next year.

Through this strategy we will better co-ordinate youth services, as well as move away from one-size-fits-all approaches from Government, bringing power back to young people and their communities and rebuilding a thriving and sustainable sector.

Given our ambition, we will be winding down the National Citizen Service programme from the end of the financial year and the National Citizen Service Trust when parliamentary time allows. All necessary processes will be followed including engagement with Parliament and His Majesty the King.

The Government are grateful for the valuable contribution of every member of NCS staff and board members, past and present, as well as for the contributions of young people who have engaged with the NCS programme and with the trust all those years. We will work closely with the NCS Trust to ensure there is an orderly transition from the end of the NCS programme to what comes next.

The Government have announced that, in 2025-26, we will increase the total funding for other Department for Culture, Media and Sport youth programmes to ensure young people can continue to access opportunities, no matter where they are from. This includes funding for the local youth transformation pilot to support local authorities to build back lost capability and improve youth offers. We will also allocate over £85 million of capital funding in 2025-26, including launching the £26 million better youth spaces fund and completing the youth investment fund projects.

In addition to this Government funding, £100 million of dormant assets funding will be dedicated to youth outcomes over 2024 to 2028.

This will drive the transition to a future in which young people have choices and chances and local communities are empowered to support a generation to succeed.

[HCWS210]

## EDUCATION

### Contingent Liability: Local Government Pension Scheme Guarantee

**The Secretary of State for Education (Bridget Phillipson):** I am today laying before both Houses a departmental minute on the use of a contingent liability by the Department for Education to provide a local government pension scheme guarantee to further education providers operating in the statutory sector.

The Department for Education further education local government pension scheme guarantee is a Government commitment to fund pension deficits in the event of a closure and where the provider's reserves are insufficient to fund their own LGPS deficit upon closure.

We expect LGPS administering authorities to recognise the Crown guarantee provided by the further education guarantee in their funding strategies, setting employer contribution rates and deficit recovery periods.

A full departmental minute has been laid in both Houses providing more detail on this contingent liability.

[HCWS202]

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

### Paris Emissions Reduction Target: UK's Nationally Determined Contribution

**The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband):** On Tuesday 12 November at the 29th UNFCCC conference of the parties (COP29) in Baku, the Prime Minister will announce the UK's 2035 nationally determined contribution (NDC) under the Paris agreement. This will commit the UK to reducing economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions by at least 81% by 2035, compared with 1990 levels, excluding emissions from international aviation and shipping.

The 2035 NDC is based on advice from the independent Climate Change Committee (CCC). It is a clear progression on the UK's previous NDC pledging to reduce emissions by at least 68% by 2030. It was informed by the outcomes of the global stocktake from COP28 and is aligned with limiting global warming to 1.5 °C. It is aligned with the level of ambition in carbon budget 6 (2033-37) on the pathway to net zero by 2050.

The headline target will be followed by submission of the detail underpinning the NDC—known as information to facilitate clarity, transparency and understanding (ICTU)—to the United Nations framework convention on climate change ahead of the February 2025 deadline. A copy of the ICTU will be laid in the Houses of Parliament.

The UK's early and ambitious NDC will help restore our global climate leadership and encourage greater ambition from other countries. It is one important part of the UK's overall contribution to global emissions reductions, alongside our international climate finance and other support.

Globally, the world is way off track from meeting the Paris agreement temperature goal. Climate action must be accelerated drastically to reduce emissions and keep the annual average global temperature rise below 1.5°C. The ambition and delivery of the next round of NDCs, due to be submitted to the United Nations framework convention on climate change (UNFCCC) by February 2025 and implemented in the 2030s, will be critical in enabling this.

The UK's domestic action is the first crucial step to restoring UK international leadership on climate change. The clean energy transition is also the economic opportunity of the 21st century and will support the creation of hundreds of thousands of good jobs across the UK and protect our economy from future price shocks while delivering a range of social and health benefits.

That is why making Britain a clean energy superpower is one of the five missions of this Government—delivering clean power by 2030 and accelerating to net zero across the economy.

[HCWS206]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Bathing Water Regulations 2013

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Hardy):** Our water system urgently needs fixing. There have been repeated failures for the public and record levels of sewage polluting our rivers, lakes and seas. This must be stopped. Fundamental reform of the water sector is under way but will not happen overnight. This Government are committed to reforming the system so that it works for the public, and are taking further steps to restore our rivers, lakes and seas to good health.

Bathing waters, as set out in the Bathing Water Regulations 2013, are designated coastal or inland waters that are used by large numbers of people for bathing. Bathing waters are one of the most visible ways in which the public interacts with the water environment. They are local assets that bring social and health benefits to communities, and it is critical that the regulations around bathing waters meet the fundamental needs of the public, and those managing bathing water sites.

We recognise that the way the public interacts with bathing waters has changed, driven by the increasing popularity of wild swimming and other water-based activities.

That is why today, DEFRA, jointly with the Welsh Government, is launching a consultation on a package of reforms to the Bathing Water Regulations 2013. These proposed changes to bathing water rules will prioritise public safety and water quality so that more people can enjoy our rivers, lakes and seas throughout the seasons. The proposed reforms will modernise the system to meet the needs of the public, including removing strict automatic de-designation, taking water quality and public safety into account when applications for new bathing waters are assessed, and removing the fixed dates of the bathing season from the regulations to allow for a more flexible approach to monitoring, extending the dates of the bathing season where necessary to better reflect when people use bathing waters. The purpose of the regulations is to ensure the protection of public health through the use of monitoring and classifications. It is the Government's intention to pursue an increase in the designation of safe bathing water sites.

DEFRA is also seeking both public and stakeholder views on expanding the definition of bathers to include participants in water sports other than swimming, to encompass all who use bathing sites, as well as views on the introduction of multiple testing points at each bathing water. This is to gather initial views for potential longer-term considerations.

Proposed technical amendments will also bring legislation in line with modern best practice, allowing the Environment Agency to improve ways of working and improve delivery for the public.



The consultation will run this winter with a Government response to be published in the new year.

Alongside these reforms, the Government are working on other major changes to the water system. The Water (Special Measures) Bill will deliver on the Government's commitment to put water companies under special measures, strengthening the powers of the regulators to ensure that water companies—and their executives—are firmly held to account for wrongdoing. The regulators will also be able to recover costs for a much greater range of enforcement activities.

An independent commission into the water sector and its regulation was also launched on 23 October—the largest review of the industry since privatisation. This commission forms the next stage in the Government's long-term approach to ensuring we have a sufficiently robust and stable regulatory framework to attract the investment needed to clean up our waterways, speed up infrastructure delivery and restore public confidence in the sector. The commission will provide overarching recommendations on transforming how our water system works and cleaning up our rivers, lakes and seas for good. The bathing water reforms will tackle a discrete and technical part of the current framework.

It is through these reforms that we can begin to regain public trust, fix the system, and restore our rivers, lakes and seas for current and future generations to enjoy.

[HCWS207]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Contingent Liability: TPIMS Accommodation Provision

**The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis):** I have today laid before the House of Commons a departmental minute concerning a new uncapped contingent liability for the Home Office. The liability relates to Home Office approved accommodation for use by individuals subject to terrorism prevention investigation measures orders. This contingent liability will enable the Home Office to secure appropriate accommodation for such cases. Failure to secure accommodation for TPIMs subjects may result in unacceptable risks to national security. These are risks I am not willing to take.

The need for the liability arises due to the limited information that the Government can share with housing suppliers when securing properties for individuals subject to TPIMs and the potential implications for the validity of insurance covering the relevant properties.

Treasury guidance on managing public money requires that Parliament be notified of any novel contingent liabilities. In normal circumstances, notification would be made when Parliament is in Session, however due to the urgency in this case, the liability was made during the period when Parliament was in recess. I am satisfied that this course of action was necessary in the circumstances.

HM Treasury has approved this liability. In the unlikely event the liability was to be called, provision for payment would be sought through the contract with the supplier.

A full departmental minute has been laid before the House of Commons providing more detail on this contingent liability.

[HCWS203]

## HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Housing Design and Quality

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook):** The Government are committed to building 1.5 million new homes over the next five years, but we have also been clear that increasing house building rates cannot mean units at any cost. We want exemplary development to be the norm not the exception so that more communities feel the benefits of new development and welcome it. As we act to boost housing supply, we are therefore determined to take steps to improve the design and quality of the homes and neighbourhoods being built.

These guiding principles are woven into the fabric of the reforms we have initiated over recent months. The new towns taskforce, for example, has been asked to ensure that quality and design are integral to its agenda, and it has been explicitly tasked with setting out clear principles and standards for new large-scale communities to ensure they are well-connected, sustainable, well-designed, and attractive. Our proposed reforms to the national planning policy framework also highlighted the Government's ongoing commitment to well-designed homes and places, and retaining the objective of creating high-quality, beautiful, and sustainable buildings and places.

My Department intends to update the national design guide and national model design code in spring next year, and we will continue to bolster design skills and capacity through the £46 million package of capacity and capability support provided to local planning authorities. This will be used to fund the recruitment and training of 300 graduate and apprentice planners, along with the £1 million funding to public practice for the recruitment of planners, architects and urban designers.

Together, this framework provides a clear basis for the delivery of more high-quality, well-designed homes. To help support this delivery, in particular as we progress our consideration of large-scale sites and large-scale new communities, I intend to establish quarterly steering boards on design and placemaking, ensuring that our work is guided by those with relevant professional and practical expertise.

It was announced in July 2023 that the Office for Place, previously a small team in the then Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, would become an arm's length body to be based in Stoke-on-Trent. Work to establish the Office has continued since then. I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the interim board, led by Nicholas Boys Smith as chair, and the Office for Place team for their exemplary work on this important issue. In putting design and quality at the heart of the housing supply agenda and establishing the principles of design coding and embedding them in practice across the planning and development sectors, Nicholas and the team have made a significant contribution.

Alongside spending decisions taken at the Budget and the re-setting of departmental budgets, the Deputy Prime Minister and I have, however, concluded that support to improve the quality and design of new homes and places can be more efficiently and effectively delivered by the Department itself. The Office for Place

will therefore be closed down and the expertise of its staff redeployed within the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, across the country. I would like to reassure the House that this will not impact on wider Government commitments to Stoke-on-Trent, including the award of £19.8 million for their levelling up partnerships programme.

In taking the decision to wind up the Office for Place, the Government are not downgrading the importance of good design and placemaking, or the role of design coding in improving the quality of development. Rather, by drawing expertise and responsibility back into MHCLG, I want the pursuit of good design and placemaking to be a fully integrated consideration as the Government reform the planning system, roll out digital local plans and provide support to local authorities and strategic planning authorities. I also believe that embedding this work within MHCLG will allow experience to be better reflected in decision-making, as well as integrated within an existing delivery team in Homes England already focused on design and placemaking.

It will also ensure continuity of current Office for Place key activities, including support for pathfinder authorities who received a share of £1 million to produce exemplar design codes, alongside work on digital design codes and funding to support local and regional urban design best practice and skills.

The Government regard improving the design and quality of the homes and neighbourhoods we will build over the coming years as conducive to, rather than in tension with, our ambition to significantly increase housing supply, and we have put in place the necessary policy and delivery framework to ensure we deliver on both objectives.

[HCWS209]

### **Local Government Best Value: London Borough of Tower Hamlets**

**The Minister for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon):** I have previously updated this House that this Government are committed to resetting the relationship between local and regional government, and to establish partnerships built on mutual respect, genuine collaboration and meaningful engagement. Never is this more important than when individual councils face governance challenges. We are keen to work with local authorities to support focus on recovery and reform. It is imperative that all councils are fit, legal and decent. There must be a clear and deliverable plan in place to address problems where these have been identified to protect the interests of local taxpayers. In that context, I would like to update the House on the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

It is a matter of public record that the London Borough of Tower Hamlets was subject to statutory intervention under section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999 between December 2014 and September 2018. This followed an inspection by PwC which identified best value failure, particularly in relation to grant making, property disposal and publicity spending. Commissioners were withdrawn and functions returned to the council in March 2017 on the condition that it continued to

achieve against its best value plans and report regularly to the Secretary of State on its ongoing compliance with the best value duty. In response to a corporate peer review by the Local Government Association in June 2018, which concluded the council was now “on a positive trajectory”, Ministers took the decision to end the intervention in September 2018.

Following evidence that suggested recent changes to the council’s governance arrangements may have the potential to undermine past improvements that had allowed the intervention to end, on 22 February 2024 the then Secretary of State (the right hon. Michael Gove), commissioned an inspection of the council’s compliance with its best value duty. He appointed Kim Bromley-Derry CBE DL as lead inspector, along with Suki Binjal, Sir John Jenkins and Philip Simpkins as assistant inspectors, and asked them to report their findings to him by 31 May 2024. On 24 May, following the announcement of the general election, this deadline was extended to 31 July. The inspectors completed their inspection and submitted their report to the Secretary of State and, as statute requires, provided a copy to the council.

The report identifies several positive features at the council, such as the finance service and the enthusiasm shown by officers and members for serving the borough. It also notes that the council has already taken steps to make improvements, including in response to the Local Government Association’s corporate peer challenge report of September 2023. However, the report documents serious concerns across a number of areas which I considered against its best value duty under part 1 of the 1999 Act:

*On Leadership:* The report concludes that a lack of respect and co-operation between political parties prevents councillors from engaging in a culture of genuine improvement. A lack of trust has contributed to officer churn at the top few levels of the organisation. Inspectors also found insufficient challenge of the executive and a perception among many staff that “many good managers had left the organisation as a result of ‘speaking truth to power’”.

*On Governance:* The report paints a picture of an organisation with a clear drive and mandate to deliver the mayor’s priorities, but for whom due process is often treated as an obstacle to priorities rather than as a necessary check and balance. The inspectors consider the council’s scrutiny culture to be “weak and confused”, and the level of challenge “inadequate”.

*On Culture:* The report concludes that the entire organisation is impacted by a lack of trust, with the administration “suspicious and defensive in its behaviour”. The culture appears to be one where decisions are taken based on advice from a small number of people who are trusted by the mayor and has been described by many staff and partners as “toxic”. A culture of patronage, even if not at play in every appointment, is perceived as pervasive enough to undermine trust between members, staff and leadership, as well as with external stakeholders.

*On Partnerships and Community Engagement:* While the report notes the strong community focus of the mayor, councillors and wider council, it concludes how the “significant time and energy” spent in local communities “seems to distract from their critical and statutory strategic relationships”. Inspectors found a lack of co-production and joint planning undertaken by the council and saw insufficient evidence that the council undertook meaningful and comprehensive consultation with key partners, staff, and service users before decisions were taken in some key areas.

*On Continuous Improvement:* While the council has made targeted and concerted improvements over the last two years, this has lacked a strategic focus or a cultural prioritisation

of continuous improvement. The culture set and exemplified by the leadership is to reactively respond and counter criticism rather than honestly appraise and self-improve. On some issues, the inspectors are sceptical of the council's capability to self-improve.

I have carefully considered the report and other relevant material and am satisfied that the council is failing to comply with the requirements of part 1 of the 1999 Act, namely that it is failing to comply with its best value duty in relation to continuous improvement, governance, leadership, culture and partnerships. I am therefore minded to exercise powers of direction under section 15(5) of the 1999 Act in relation to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to secure its compliance with the best value duty. I believe, given the evidence of serious concerns in the report, a broad and supportive intervention package, with robust external assurance, is necessary and expedient for the council to secure compliance with this duty. To that end, and in line with procedures laid down in the 1999 Act, I have today, 12 November 2024, written to the council asking them to make representations—if they wish—both on the inspection report and on the statutory support package that I am now proposing.

This proposed statutory support package, to be in place for an initial period of three years, is designed to strengthen and expand the improvement work that the council has already begun. It acknowledges the political mandate the mayor holds, while recognising the need to tackle deeply rooted and persistent issues. It recognises the constructive engagement I have had with the council and acknowledges that they stand ready to work in partnership with Government to deliver the change needed for local people. It also recognises that the council has some corporate capacity to address the challenges identified in the report and has already put in place some of the building blocks for continuous improvement and will help to ensure that the council remains in a stable financial position.

This approach balances the evidenced need for Government support, with the desire to work constructively so that we see sustained improvement. A core element of the proposed support package will be the reconfiguration and strengthening of the council's transformation advisory board to provide external expertise, challenge and advice to the council. I am proposing directing the council to work with ministerial envoys to reconfigure its existing board into a transformation and assurance board, and to draw on existing and additional members to appoint independent and external leads for leadership, governance and culture and partnerships—all areas where the council is currently failing. I am also proposing directing the council to appoint at least two opposition councillors to the board and for the mayor to continue his role as chair. The council will be required to report to this board on the delivery of its continuous improvement plan every three months or at such intervals as the board may require. The council will also be required to have regard to and respond promptly in public to any recommendations from the board with respect to the council's improvement work.

In order to assist the council to achieve the necessary improvements, I am minded to appoint a ministerial envoy and assistant envoy to act as adviser, mentor and monitor to the council, and to oversee its improvement work. The ministerial envoys will work comprehensively within the council to oversee the proposed changes to the board, including agreeing its scheme of work and

meeting agendas, preparation of the council's continuous improvement plan and an open recruitment exercise to appoint a permanent lead for the council's improvement work. They will attend meetings, provide ad hoc advice and challenge, and be available to senior leadership for support. They will also work closely with the board leads for governance, leadership and culture and partnerships to ensure the realisation of comprehensive programmes of cultural change and political mentoring. I am proposing directing the council to co-operate with the ministerial envoys, and to allow them all reasonable access to their premises, documents, employees or members in support of their work.

I would like the ministerial envoys to report on the council's progress against its improvement agenda after the first four months, and then regularly as we agree is appropriate. Their assessment will provide the assurance local residents, strategic partners and I need to ensure the council's compliance with its best value duty.

I will carefully consider any representations the council and other interested parties make and decide how to proceed. If I decide to intervene in the manner described here, I will then make the necessary statutory directions under the 1999 Act and appoint the ministerial envoys. Any directions that I make will be without prejudice to making further directions, should this prove necessary.

This action is not undertaken lightly, and I am committed to working in partnership with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to provide whatever support is needed to ensure its compliance with the best value duty and the high standards of governance local residents and service users expect. I hope with focus and oversight that improvement will come at pace, but I will not hesitate to consider further action and escalation if necessary, in the interests of Tower Hamlets residents. I will deposit in the Library of the House copies of the report and letter I have referred to, which are also being published on gov.uk today. I will update the House in due course.

[HCWS204]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Completing the Implementation of Universal Credit

**The Minister for Social Security and Disability (Sir Stephen Timms):** This Government are committed to getting Britain working. Completing the implementation of universal credit will support this mission. Universal credit provides greater support and incentives to get people into work and increase the hours they work than the benefits it replaces.

Move to UC statistics published today show that, by the end of September, the Department had, since 2022, notified 943,343 households of the need to make the transition to UC. The latest published complaints data show that as of March 2024 with over 500,000 households asked to move to UC, DWP had only 35 complaints about the process, with 10 upheld. Plans have now been agreed to notify the remaining households receiving income-related employment and support allowance (ESA), building on the insight that DWP has gathered through the summer. This insight, and the learnings from scaling



the move to universal credit for all legacy benefit customers, will be published by the end of 2024.

DWP is investing up to a further £15 million in Help to Claim to support employment and support allowance customers moving to universal credit. This means that free confidential and impartial support will continue to be available to help people make a new universal credit claim and manage their claim, up to receiving their first correct payment.

DWP will steadily increase the number of migration notices being sent to people receiving ESA over the next months and are aiming to issue 63,000 migration notices each month from February, sending the final notices in early December 2025 and fully moving people to universal credit and closing legacy benefits by the end of March 2026.

As DWP moves into this final phase for Move to UC, it will make the transition from delivering “Move to UC” in a programme-led approach to a “business as usual”

operation. I am therefore announcing today the intention to formally close the Move to UC programme by the end of March 2025, as the work of the programme will be complete by then.

My Department will continue to work closely with stakeholders throughout this transition and under the new operating model. It will also publish all the remaining UC programme board papers in April 2025 when the programme closes. This has been a major undertaking for DWP. As the Department heads towards such a significant milestone, I would like to thank officials who have delivered this transformational reform, and I would also like to thank all MPs and external stakeholders who have shared their insight and expertise to make this process work for those we are supporting and realise this transformation fully.

[HCWS205]

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