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26 March 2025**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 26 March 2025**

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# House of Commons

*Wednesday 26 March 2025*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Technology-enabled VAWG

1. **Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help tackle technology-enabled violence against women and girls. [903444]

**The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Peter Kyle):** I praise my hon. Friend's work as Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee. She knows full well the importance of this area. She will also know that the Government have pledged to halve violence against women and girls over the course of a decade. That is one of our missions in government. Ofcom has now published its draft guidance and I expect it, after that good work and good start, to implement that in full in the months and years ahead.

**Sarah Owen:** Like many, I have seen adverts for artificial intelligence apps, which are some of the most downloaded apps across the world, targeted directly at teenagers. These adverts boast about the apps' ability to create AI videos of non-consensual intimate acts between real people without their knowledge. We know that these tools disproportionately hurt women and young people. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to protect women, girls and young boys from this deeply malicious use of artificial intelligence, and will he take action against AI companies that promote these features?

**Peter Kyle:** I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for her question, because she raises an incredibly important point. It is one that was tackled in our manifesto—our promise of change for the country—and it is one that we are now delivering in government. We will bring forward amendments to the Data (Use and Access) Bill, and we are working closely with Baroness Owen in the House of Lords to make sure that they are effective. We expect these issues to be dealt with. The creation of non-consensual deepfakes will become illegal, and they will be tackled into the future.

**Josh Babarinde** (Eastbourne) (LD): Technology is a significant enabler of trafficking, which has affected many women in my constituency. The incredible social enterprise Bramber Bakehouse supports women victims and survivors of trafficking through the art of baking. Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating Bramber Bakehouse and its founder, Lucy Butt, on

their work and on her being the inaugural co-chair of the new domestic abuse network in Eastbourne, which is trying to reduce violence against women and girls?

**Peter Kyle:** I praise the work of the charity that the hon. Member mentions in his constituency. May I also praise him for the interview he gave at the weekend on this subject, which was very touching indeed? I assure him that the experiences being tackled by the charity he mentioned and the ones he raised in his interview are being tackled by this Government.

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

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): I applaud the Government's commitment to halving violence against women and girls over a decade, even as the vectors for that violence evolve. The Science, Innovation and Technology Committee inquiry into harmful social media algorithms has heard how they can drive the adoption of misogynist and extremist views among young men and boys, as powerfully illustrated in the series "Adolescence". Does the Online Safety Act 2023 give Ofcom the powers to address these harms before they reach the threshold of illegality, and if so, how?

**Peter Kyle:** I thank my hon. Friend in particular for the work she is doing on behalf of her Select Committee. I am also grateful for the national debate that has been sparked by the programme "Adolescence". It is incredibly important that we act in these areas. The powers that came in last week to take down illegal content, but also the powers that are coming in later this year in June, will mean that all those publishing content must make sure it is age-appropriate. That will be a step forward. I am watching the impact of these new powers closely, and I will act accordingly if they are not strong enough.

**Graham Leadbitter** (Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey) (SNP): Significant concerns were raised in the recent Westminster Hall debate on the implementation of the Online Safety Act 2023. Will the Minister take urgent steps to better categorise online platforms, to better protect women and girls online?

**Peter Kyle:** I can assure the hon. Member that, whatever the size of the organisation and whatever category that organisation or platform is in, the onus is on them. The legal duty to remove illegal content and to act with the new powers that will be coming in later this year remains intact, and they must act. I expect Ofcom to use those powers as assertively as necessary to make sure that people are protected in our country.

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

**Dr Ben Spencer** (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): Tragically, flaws in data and its processing are posing grave risks to women and girls. The Sullivan report exposed serious failings in the collection and use of biological sex data, which is often being replaced with gender identity. The report highlighted the risk that poses to the safe delivery of health services, policing and security. The Health Secretary has already shown leadership on this issue, but to date the Secretary of State has remained silent. When did he first have sight of the Sullivan report, and when does he intend to act on it?

**Peter Kyle:** The hon. Gentleman is right to ask that question. The Government are acting on it, and the Health Secretary has been acting on it. I myself have contacted all Government Departments on the back of that important review to ensure that every Department is aware of it, of some of its contents, and of its relevance to different Departments, and I will be meeting the author in the coming days and weeks to ensure that she is satisfied with the action that the Government are taking.

### Motor Neurone Disease

2. **Frank McNally** (Coatbridge and Bellshill) (Lab): If he will have discussions with Cabinet colleagues on providing additional support for research into motor neurone disease. [903445]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Feryal Clark):** We work closely with the Department of Health and Social Care to support research into this terrible disease. UK Research and Innovation invested £10 million in MND research in 2023-24, and it also plays a key role in funding the underpinning research that benefits medical research more generally. Since 2022, the Medical Research Council and the National Institute for Health and Care Research have awarded £2.8 million to MND projects led by Scottish research organisations.

**Frank McNally:** My hon. Friend will know of the important work of MND campaigners, including my constituent Mark Sommerville, who are seeking more Government investment in MND research. I recognise that any further plans for research and development investment would be outlined after the spending review in June, but can my hon. Friend give some reassurance to those with MND and their families, for whom time matters so much, that the Department is giving consideration to boosting investment in MND research, working with key partners to accelerate the development of new treatments?

**Feryal Clark:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to the work of the Mark Sommerville Foundation in this important area. Government funders are investing in MND research to accelerate progress. Let me give just one example. Through UK Research and Innovation and the National Institute for Health and Care Research, the Government are investing £6 million in the MND translational accelerator, led by Dementias Platform UK. The aim of the funded projects is to accelerate the development of treatment for MND.

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): It is good to hear that there is continuing investment in the search for therapies and indeed cures to deal with this horrific disease, but even if therapies do emerge, one of the frustrations in getting them to patients may be the inability of scientists to obtain access to clinical trials. In “Life Sciences Vision”, published in 2021, a number of groups combined to look into access to clinical trials in the UK and the possibility of increasing the number of such trials, but acceleration has not been good. I chair the all-party parliamentary group for life sciences, and one of the comments I hear most frequently in the industry is about the need for a more focused effort in this regard. Would the Minister consider establishing a clinical trials taskforce in her Department to drive this important work forward?

**Feryal Clark:** The Government are doing and have done a great deal. We have continued to support this work through both UKRI and the NIHR, and a large amount of funding has gone into clinical research. However, I should be happy to discuss the issue further with the right hon. Gentleman, and to let him know what more work could be done on clinical trials.

### UK Space Launch

3. **Douglas McAllister** (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab): What plans his Department has to support a UK space launch. [903446]

**The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Peter Kyle):** Being a leader in the new space race is vital to protecting the UK’s security and delivering on our mission for growth. The Government have invested in a range of launch capabilities, including spaceports in Cornwall and Scotland and also launch vehicles. Most recently, we invested £20 million to enable the UK rocket manufacturer Orbex to complete the construction of its launch vehicle.

**Douglas McAllister:** What work is the Department doing to ensure that the UK space sector is a launch pad for innovation and investment, and creates skilled jobs—both commercial and in the defence sector—across Scotland and the United Kingdom as a whole?

**Peter Kyle:** We have space skills across the UK, but we have particular expertise in Scotland. I enjoyed visiting Glasgow recently to see how every part of its economy supports the space sector, especially the small satellite manufacturing sector. Several launch operations, including Orbex, are targeting orbital launches from SaxaVord spaceport in Shetland this year. That is a testament to the innovation taking place throughout the UK and specifically in Scotland.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If that first space launch happens, and I believe it will, it will happen at SaxaVord in Unst, and the Secretary of State will be very welcome to join us when it does. For the UK space sector as a whole to recognise the full opportunities we have, we need to get serious about the delivery of the Government’s space strategy. Last year, the National Audit Office identified a number of challenges that the strategy faces. When will we hear the Government’s response?

**Peter Kyle:** I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that, when we came into office, we did not inherit a clear strategy for delivering on our priorities for space. That strategy is now being developed. The investments we are making as a Department and a Government into space, and the way we are making sure that our relationship with the European Space Agency is delivering for the British sector—we have more grants being delivered in the UK in the latest round of funding than any other country—show that we are delivering. I share his enthusiasm and certainty that a launch will happen this year, and I very much look forward to being there alongside him to witness it.

### Mobile Coverage: Ofcom Reporting

4. **Claire Hughes** (Bangor Aberconwy) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Ofcom's reporting of mobile coverage. [903447]

**The Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms (Chris Bryant):** I am sure that every Member of the House would agree that Ofcom's reporting of mobile coverage is rather over-optimistic and does not reflect people's lived experience. I am absolutely determined to change that, and Ofcom is helping me to do so.

**Claire Hughes:** My constituent Lesley suffers from multiple health conditions, including epilepsy, and lives with the constant risk of seizures. Her family rely on broadband to use the landline, but recently the broadband went down for several days, which meant she was completely unable to make calls because of the ongoing problems with mobile coverage in Llandudno. Will the Minister agree to meet me to discuss how we can safeguard vulnerable customers such as Lesley and address the issues in Llandudno?

**Chris Bryant:** I think my hon. Friend also has a problem at one of her universities, which we are going to try to deal with as well. She has written to me, and I will write back as soon as possible, but perhaps we could short-cut that with a meeting. I am conscious that, for medical conditions, the resilience of someone's connectivity is just as important as the day-to-day coverage.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): I thank the Minister for his candour and honesty. He is one of the most effective, experienced and able Ministers in the Government. Having paid those compliments, can I encourage him to visit Shropshire, where there are still too many notspots? Perhaps one of the reasons is that this country has only four mobile network operators. Is it not time that we had more competition? Finally, is the shared rural network agreement likely to hit its targets by the end of this year?

**Chris Bryant:** The shared rural network will reach its targets. The right hon. Member makes a very good point, which is that, frankly, the connectivity that people think they are getting from Ofcom is simply not what they are actually getting. Their phone looks as though it has lots of bars and is saying 4G, but they cannot even download an app to park their car. We have to transform that across the whole of the UK. In the end, most of that is down to the industry, and I want to make sure that we remove some of the barriers to further investment in the industry to improve mobile connectivity for every single Member of the House.

### Smaller Platforms: Regulation

5. **Susan Murray** (Mid Dunbartonshire) (LD): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that smaller platforms are adequately regulated to protect children from online harms. [903448]

**The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Peter Kyle):** I welcome the national conversation taking place about how we protect children online. The Online Safety Act 2023 requires all regulated user-to-user

and search services to comply with the illegal content and child safety rules. The illegal content duties came into effect last week, and I am closely monitoring the impact of these duties on online safety.

**Susan Murray:** Many schools in my constituency of Mid Dunbartonshire use mobile phones as an educational tool, yet along with this learning opportunity comes easy access to sites posting horrendous content. I would like to know how the Government plan to tackle small, foreign-based websites exposing people to graphic content. What steps is the Department taking to ensure that smaller platforms are adequately regulated to protect children from online harms?

**Peter Kyle:** I am grateful to the hon. Member for her question and the manner in which she expressed it, which recognised the complexity of smartphone use—the benefits as well as the potential harmful aspects. I can assure her that, as of last week, the power to demand that illegal content be taken down has come into force. I accept that there is still illegal content online, but I am closely watching the way that Ofcom responds. I think that, in the coming days and weeks, she will see action showing how assertive it intends to be, and I expect it to be, in doing so. It also has a taskforce looking at the small but risky sites she mentions. I will be looking at this very closely and supporting Ofcom in relation to its requirement to act in those circumstances.

**Ms Polly Billington** (East Thanet) (Lab): The domestic abuse charity Oasis in my constituency has alerted me to the appalling situation whereby young women are being coerced into setting up OnlyFans accounts to generate income. Will the Secretary of State outline what steps he is taking to ensure that the sector can root out coercion and exploitation?

**Peter Kyle:** My hon. Friend is a champion on these issues. Oasis, a great charity, is lucky to have her here in the House of Commons as a voice for its work and for the need to make radical changes to keep people safe online. I can assure her that the situation she describes breaches several aspects of law, including the need to take down illegal content. I will be watching closely, as she will, and working with her to ensure that the new powers and those that are coming online are effective and that we adapt to these challenges in future.

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

**Victoria Collins** (Harpenden and Berkhamsted) (LD): On my safer screens tour, to discuss online safety for children, students themselves are calling for action. They talk about brain rot and the subtle but dangerous impact on their mental health, their self-esteem, their world outlook and their time. Does the Secretary of State agree with the Liberal Democrats that, given this public health crisis and the massive profits made by social media giants such as Musk, we should look to seek revenues from a digital service tax, rather than cutting benefits from disabled people and struggling families?

**Peter Kyle:** I can assure the hon. Lady—she will have heard this from my previous answers—that we are determined to keep young people safe online. Online



activity and the services offered to people in this country and around the world are adapting and evolving fast because of the speed of innovation. We need a regulatory and legislative landscape that can keep up with that innovation, and we need a Government who will ensure they are on the side of young people and vulnerable people of any age. I can assure her that, in this Government and this Secretary of State, they have that.

### Digital Inclusion

**6. Michelle Welsh** (Sherwood Forest) (Lab): What recent progress his Department has made on improving digital inclusion in Sherwood Forest constituency. [903449]

**The Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms (Chris Bryant):** If we are to be a successful digital nation, we have to take the whole nation with us. We were proud recently to publish our first digital inclusion action plan, the first for 10 years, because of precisely that: we want to take everybody with us.

**Michelle Welsh:** Too often, in ex-mining communities such as Ollerton and Edwinstowe, in rural communities such as Farnsfield and even in Hucknall West, people struggle to get a phone signal and access to the internet. Constituents feel that they are left behind and miss out on the new and upcoming technologies that we know improve access to online jobs, education and business opportunities. Does the Minister agree that we need to ensure such communities are at the heart of the Government's digital inclusion ambitions, so no one is left behind, especially those in deprived communities?

**Chris Bryant:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and her constituency exemplifies one of the issues we face, which is that we might have relatively affluent areas cheek by jowl with much poorer areas. That is why, in our digital inclusion action plan, we have tried to ensure that we address all the different forms of digital exclusion, whether it is by virtue of age, ethnicity, educational background or physical geography.

**Sarah Dyke** (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): Lack of access to digital services prevents people from applying for jobs, studying and accessing healthcare, but community interest companies such as Donate IT, based in Wincanton, are helping to bridge the gap by diverting IT equipment that was otherwise heading to landfill. By refurbishing that tech and distributing it to the people, schools and groups who need it, Donate IT is helping to address digital poverty. How does the Minister plan to support such organisations to prevent electrical waste from going to landfill and to tackle digital exclusion?

**Chris Bryant:** I am really pleased that that is happening in the hon. Lady's constituency. We were pleased as a Government to be able to say not only that many Government Departments will make sure that we do precisely the same thing, but that many major employers will also do the same. It is crazy to chuck old kit into landfill when, frankly, it could be used much better to provide people with digital opportunities for the future.

### Topical Questions

**T1. [903459] Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Peter Kyle):** I start by thanking Professor Sullivan for her independent review into sex and gender data. This is an important area, and we have shared the report with Departments as part of our ongoing policy work. After landmark online safety regulations came into force last week, platforms will now have to act to take down illegal content. I have just got back from the United States, where, from Nvidia's conference stage to investor meetings, my message was clear: the UK is hungry for the new era of growth that is promised by AI and emerging technology. As the Chancellor shares her spring statement, that is an era I will keep working with her to deliver.

**Dame Meg Hillier:** The Secretary of State has today referred to space and AI as key drivers of growth. Closer to home, in my constituency and across the country, our creative industries are huge drivers of growth, but there is a battle with AI. If our creators' content is taken and they are not recompensed, that will damage the economy, too. Is he talking to those industries and to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that our creative content creators are protected?

**Peter Kyle:** I can assure my hon. Friend that I am speaking to both sectors, and I am determined that both sectors will get fit for the future as we face the opportunities and challenges. We are lucky as a country to have the second largest creative arts sector and the third largest AI market in the world. This is both a benefit and an opportunity for our country, and this Government will navigate any challenges it poses so that both sectors are fit to exploit the opportunities they have and for commercial gain into the future.

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

**Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): Luke Shipley has grown his tech start-up from two employees to more than 100 in just five years. This year, Luke wanted to double his workforce in Britain, but Labour's jobs tax is forcing him to look abroad. While our competitors benefit, our communities at home are missing out. Why has the Secretary of State failed to protect them from Labour's jobs tax?

**Peter Kyle:** I can assure the business the shadow Secretary of State is referring to that the economic environment here will not only fix the foundations of our economy, but face the future. The very fact that so many people from organisations around the world are now building out in the UK shows that Britain has the best regulatory, legislative and economic environment in which to invest and thrive as a tech sector into the future. Thank goodness this Government are doing that, instead of offering the decline of the previous Government.

**Alan Mak:** Luke says Labour's jobs tax is a huge blow to Britain's tech sector, and he is absolutely right. Jobs are being destroyed, investment is down and our wealth creators are leaving the country. Why is the Secretary of State not clearing up the Chancellor's mess?

**Peter Kyle:** I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman has been reading the news. We have had more than £30 billion of tech investment in this country from around the world. He should be celebrating that, not talking it down.

T2. [903460] **Laura Kyrke-Smith** (Aylesbury) (Lab): It was inspiring to meet Safran Electrical & Power and tour its site in Pitstone in my constituency earlier this month. Safran is celebrating a world first: it has obtained certification from the European Union Aviation Safety Agency for the first electric motor to power new air mobility. Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating Safran and, given the crucial need to decarbonise aviation, will he assure me of our commitment to innovation in this sector?

**Peter Kyle:** I was so happy to learn about Safran's work. It is leading the world in electric motors for the aviation sector, as the first to receive certification from the European Union Aviation Safety Agency for powering the future generation of air mobility. This is a Government who are supporting that kind of innovation and ensuring that this country is leading the world in innovation, job creation, wealth creation and solving the big challenges the world faces into the future.

T4. [903463] **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): I recently spoke at a United Nations event hosted by the French that looked at how pornography and extreme content are contributing to misogynistic and toxic behaviour towards women. Will the Secretary of State tell us what proposals this Government have to implement the recent recommendations of the report commissioned by the previous Government?

**Peter Kyle:** The hon. Lady raises a very important point. I have met Baroness Bertin, the author of the report, and I am seeking ways to ensure that the issues raised in it are acted upon.

T3. [903461] **Liam Conlon** (Beckenham and Penge) (Lab): Beckenham and Penge is where local lad David Bowie launched his music career, and today it is home to a vibrant, talented community of creatives whose work is increasingly sought after by AI companies. Our creatives deserve a just deal to provide fair pay for my constituents and the legal certainty required to encourage AI investment. What steps is the Minister taking to deliver that?

**The Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms (Chris Bryant):** This country is a creative content superpower, and we will do absolutely nothing to undermine that. We want to make sure that people are properly remunerated for their work and that AI companies have access to the high-quality data that they need to be able to deploy effectively in this country.

**Jeremy Hunt** (Godalming and Ash) (Con): The Minister can see that the whole House has filled up out of concern at the atrocious mobile phone signal in Godalming and Cranleigh high streets and in Bramley, Shamley Green and Peaslake. Now that spring is in the air, will he visit Cranleigh to see for himself just what a problem this is?

**Chris Bryant:** Well, I was in Pizza Express in Godalming only a couple of weeks ago, and the mobile signal was absolutely shocking. I could not find my way to Busbridge village hall. I am not sure whether it is the MP or the Telecoms Minister who is rubbish—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"].

**Mr Speaker:** In which case, we will move on to Prime Minister's questions.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [903467] **John Slinger** (Rugby) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 26 March.

**The Prime Minister (Keir Starmer):** Today's spring statement will showcase a Government going further and faster on the economy. We are greenlighting the lower Thames crossing, investing £2 billion in building 80,000 affordable homes for working families, training 60,000 young people—the next generation of construction workers—and fixing millions of potholes. We are undoing a decade of stagnation, bringing jobs and opportunities for working people and securing Britain's future.

Tomorrow, I shall meet President Macron in Paris to discuss further our efforts to secure a lasting peace in Ukraine. May I also welcome the delegation from the Bring Kids Back initiative who are in the Public Gallery? The abduction of Ukrainian children is grotesque, and the UK will play our full part to bring them home. It is a stark reminder that any peace settlement must see Russia held accountable for its deplorable actions.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

**John Slinger:** Under this Labour Government, NHS waiting lists are down for five months in a row. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] The Hospital of St Cross in my constituency of Rugby is playing its part, but many of my constituents remain concerned about long waits in A&E, which we inherited from the Conservatives—especially those constituents who have to travel to the general hospital in Coventry. Will the Prime Minister set out how our plan for change to bring the NHS back into the heart of Government will help us to support the frontline and deliver better emergency care closer to the community, which our constituents have long called for?

**The Prime Minister:** Our plan for change has already cut NHS waiting lists by almost 200,000. That has happened for five months in a row during the winter months. The local trust's waiting lists in my hon. Friend's area are down 93%, and he is doing great job for his community. We have already delivered 2 million extra appointments that we promised because of the record investment in the Budget. The Conservatives cannot have it both ways: if they welcome NHS investment, they cannot criticise raising the money to pay for it.

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

**Mrs Kemi Badenoch** (North West Essex) (Con): In 30 minutes, we will hear the Chancellor's emergency Budget—even the Home Secretary's husband calls it an emergency Budget—as she scrambles to fix the mess she made last October. But first, let us turn to another Government Minister who is making a mess of her brief: the Education Secretary—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Why did Labour MPs vote against banning phones in schools last week?

**The Prime Minister:** Because it is completely unnecessary. I have teenage children. Almost every school bans phones in school; they do it already. We need to concentrate on what is really important here, which is getting to the content that children should not be accessing. I would genuinely like to work across the House on that, because there is a huge amount of work to do. But the battle is not with schools already banning phones; the battle—an important, emerging battle—is to work together to ensure that the content that children are accessing, wherever they are, is suitable for their age.

**Mrs Badenoch:** We can look at the content, but if the ban is unnecessary, why have the Government started a review? Just last week, the Education Secretary described a ban as "a gimmick", yet teachers and headteachers say that the evidence already shows that schools that ban phones get better results. The Prime Minister is wrong: not all schools do this. Only one in 10 schools is smartphone free. Will he U-turn on this?

**The Prime Minister:** We need to ensure that all schools do this, but the vast majority do. It is really important that we focus on the battle we need to have with mobile phones, which is the content that children are able to access. We need to ensure that that content is controlled wherever they are. It is a question of having the right battle on the right issue, not wasting time on this when almost all schools are already banning mobile phones.

**Mrs Badenoch:** I am surprised that the Prime Minister would say that. His own Government's evidence says that phones disrupt nearly half of GCSE classes every single day. Discipline is the No. 1 issue in many schools. Under the Conservatives, schools became twice as likely to be good or outstanding after going through our behaviour programme, so why did the Education Secretary abolish that programme?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Lady talks about the record of the last Government. Under their watch, a third of children started school without appropriate-level development, such as not being able to use a knife and fork. A quarter left primary school without the required standard of reading, writing and maths, and one in five children was regularly absent. That is why we are pushing up standards, with more information from Ofsted, transparency for parents and more interventions where schools need it.

**Mrs Badenoch:** The Prime Minister is not answering the question about discipline in schools, because he does not care about discipline in schools. Everything he does is ideological, and his decisions are costing schools so much. The national insurance hike means that every state school in the country has to pay more for teachers. The Education Secretary promised to compensate schools in full for the jobs tax. Why has it not happened?

**The Prime Minister:** It was Labour that introduced academies and pushed up standards. This is not ideological. I am a parent of two teenage children, both of whom go to a state school, so I am invested in this, and it matters hugely to me. There is nothing ideological about it. That is why we are driving up standards, as we always have done.

**Mrs Badenoch:** The Prime Minister did not answer the question about compensating schools for the jobs tax, which is costing schools a lot of money. The CEO of the United Learning group says that the grant that they were given is 20% short. Some schools will face shortfalls of up to 35%. Can he guarantee that no teacher will lose their job as a result of his jobs tax?

**The Prime Minister:** It was this Government who put a record amount into our schools at the Budget, just as we put a record amount into our NHS and public services, which were utterly failed under the last Government. Yet again, the right hon. Lady wants all the benefits—the NHS—but she cannot say how she is going to pay for it. That is what got us into the mess in the first place.

**Mrs Badenoch:** The whole House will have heard that the Prime Minister could not guarantee that teachers' jobs are safe. Not only is he taxing schools, but he is lowering standards. He talks about our record, so I will tell him what our record was: under the Conservatives, English schools shot up the international league tables while standards fell at schools in Labour-run Wales. Academy freedoms led to the biggest improvement of standards in a generation, but the Education Secretary is attacking them with her reforms. Can the Prime Minister point to any evidence at all that these discredited academy reforms will improve school standards?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes. Take the example of schools going into academies. The vast majority of schools are already academies. Therefore, we need to think again about what we do about failing schools that are already academies. We need to go on to the next chapter. The Conservatives never take the big decisions. That is why we ended up with their record: open borders, which the right hon. Lady was a cheerleader for, a crashed economy, mortgages through the roof, the NHS on its knees, and hollowed-out armed forces. What have we got already under this Government? Two million extra NHS appointments, 750 breakfast clubs—including one in her constituency—record numbers of people who should not be here being returned, and a fully funded increase in defence spending. That is the difference a Labour Government makes.

Q2. [903468] **Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I recently visited Harlow college and saw the work it was doing training the bricklayers and electricians of the future. Does the Prime Minister agree that the work of further education colleges like Harlow's is vital for the house building that we need for future generations? What will his Government do to support Harlow's next generation?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is a great champion for his constituents. We are investing £600 million in training up to 60,000 more skilled house builders to support the next generation and deliver 1.5 million new



homes. We are creating technical excellence colleges and investing in Stansted airport, creating 5,000 jobs nearby, which will create more opportunities for young people in Harlow.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

**Ed Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): The British drama “Adolescence” has shone a much-needed spotlight on the enormous damage being done by social media to the minds of many of our young people, especially teenage boys. We have argued that social media giants should be much more toughly regulated and pay more tax, so that we can defend our young people from this harm. We have had disturbing reports that the Government are considering scrapping the digital services tax and watering down Britain’s online safety legislation to appease President Trump and his co-president, Elon Musk. Will the Prime Minister categorically rule out both those things, and make it clear that he will guarantee that British laws on tax and social media will be written in this House, and not the White House?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes of course, as the right hon. Gentleman well knows. Online safety is important, and important new measures are coming in the next few months under the Act. We need to see whether we can go further on this issue, because there are concerns about whether the measures go far enough. But will the laws be made in this place? Of course they will.

**Ed Davey:** I am grateful for the Prime Minister’s reply on the social media laws, but he did not answer the point on the digital services tax. We will come back to that. Moving on, after President Trump’s national security adviser accidentally added a journalist to a group chat that was discussing military action in Yemen, and given all the concerns that we share about President Trump’s relationship with Vladimir Putin and JD Vance’s insulting disdain for Britain and our armed forces, will the Prime Minister order an urgent review into the security of the intelligence that we share with the United States?

**The Prime Minister:** We work with the United States on a daily basis. I think that the right hon. Gentleman would like to think of himself as reasonable and, when he is not jumping in Windermere, quite serious, but unpicking our relations with the US on defence and security is neither responsible nor serious.

**Q4. [903470] Sojan Joseph** (Ashford) (Lab): Medina from Lyminge in my constituency is registered blind. She recently told me how she had been failed by the broken social security system left behind by the Conservatives. She faced great difficulties getting support from Access to Work, which is essential across my constituency, and was not helped to find paid employment. It is so important that disabled people who want to work are supported to do so. What is the Prime Minister’s message to Medina and others like her, who have been abandoned and shut out of employment for far too long?

**The Prime Minister:** Every person should have the right to work, and we will always protect the most severely disabled and those with lifelong health conditions. We need to support Medina and the 200,000 others like her who can and want to work. That is why we are

investing £1 billion in personalised and tailored employment programmes and introducing the right to try work guarantee. The Conservative party presided over a failed system that did not help them and then blamed them. We will never do that.

**Stephen Flynn** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Those who know me well know that I do not talk of this often, but for half of my adult life I was physically disabled. When I first walked through the doors of this Chamber, I did so with a crutch on my right arm to support my body weight. I know how it feels. Right now in Scotland, some 55% of children living in poverty have a disabled person in their household. Can the Prime Minister explain to me—actually, no, can he explain to those children how the Labour party making mum and dad poorer will lift them out of poverty?

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful to the right hon. Member for sharing his personal experience of this; he is right to do so. My family has lived with disability for many years as well, so I understand the human element. We need to give support to those who need it, we need to help those who want to work into work, and we need to be clear that those who can work should work.

In England, we inherited a failed system that could not be defended, but it is also failing in Scotland. The right hon. Member focuses on young people, and 84,000 young Scots—that is 15% of them—are not in employment, education or training. That is terrible. Almost 300,000 Scots are economically inactive due to temporary or long-term illness. What we are doing is taking the steps to help people into work with £1 billion of employment support. The Scottish Government have record funding under the Budget—what are they going to do to help the young Scots who are being failed by their Government?

**Q5. [903472] Andrew Ranger** (Wrexham) (Lab): The Wrexham and Flintshire investment zone is one of the flagship examples of how, when the Government talk about kick-starting economic growth, they mean it. This £160 million plan will breathe new life into the local economy and create 6,000 good local jobs, meaning that young people in Wrexham will be able to find more opportunities on their doorstep. Will the Prime Minister join me in welcoming this important development for north Wales and the potential that it will unlock?

**The Prime Minister:** It is really important that we unleash the economic potential of north Wales, including by kick-starting the investment zone, which is backed by major businesses like Airbus and JCB, to leverage £1 billion of private investment; investing £975 million to benefit aerospace workers at Broughton, where I met the fantastic young workers; and securing £1 billion of investment in Shotton Mill, securing 300 jobs on Deeside. We put a record amount of money into the Welsh Government at the Budget—a decision that was opposed by Plaid.

### Shale Gas Wells

**Q3. [903469] Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): For what reason the Government has ordered that the UK’s two shale gas wells be permanently sealed.

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Member asks about shale gas. There are very real economic and environmental consequences to fracking, and communities have clearly said no.

**Sir Julian Lewis:** I am sorry, but that answer had nothing to do with my question, which was to ask why the Government are ordering the permanent sealing of Britain's only two shale gas wells. The Government are perfectly entitled on environmental grounds not to exploit such wells in normal conditions, but does the Prime Minister not recognise that taking a decision now to concrete these things over so that a future Government cannot use them in a desperate situation, such as an international conflict where other sources of power were cut off from us, is an extremely irresponsible and reckless thing to do?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Member knows that there are real consequences of fracking, as I have set out. What we need to do to secure our independence and the next generation of jobs and to lower bills is move at speed to renewable energy. That is why I am pleased that record investment is coming into renewable energy so that a tyrant like Putin cannot put his boot on our throat. If the Conservative party do not want to support that investment, they should say so.

### Engagements

Q6. [903473] **Kim Leadbeater** (Spen Valley) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister join me in thanking colleagues from across the House and the excellent Clerks and staff who have spent the last few months working on the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill Committee? Does he agree that if the law is to change on assisted dying, it is extremely important to implement that change as soon as it is safe and practicable to do so?

**The Prime Minister:** I congratulate all colleagues working on the Bill and taking part in the debate. It is an important issue on which there are different views across the House and within parties. The Bill is a matter for the House, but it is the Government's role to ensure that every piece of legislation that passes through Parliament is effective and workable, so we will continue to work with my hon. Friend, as the Bill's promoter, to do that in the same way that we do for every private Member's Bill that passes Second Reading. If Parliament chooses to pass the Bill, the Government will implement it in a way that is safe and practicable.

Q8. [903475] **Bradley Thomas** (Bromsgrove) (Con): Acorns children's hospice provides compassionate care to very young cancer patients and their families across Bromsgrove and the villages, yet it faces a staggering £416,000 increase in national insurance contributions as a result of choices made by this Government. With no exemption for hospices and no uplift in non-capital funding, this means that the charity will have to draw on charitable donations made by the public, which will affect frontline services. This is not right, so will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to right that wrong and exempt hospices from this tax?

**The Prime Minister:** We are investing £100 million in adult and children's hospices to improve facilities, equipment and accommodation, as well as £26 million in funding

through the children's hospice grant. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members' cries and moaning would have a lot more value if they started their questions with an apology for crashing the economy in the first place.

Q7. [903474] **Jacob Collier** (Burton and Uttoxeter) (Lab): Roads in Burton and Uttoxeter and across Staffordshire are littered with potholes. Local people are forking out thousands because of the Conservatives' neglect and incompetence, despite this Labour Government giving Tory Staffordshire county council £39 million to get the job done. Does the Prime Minister agree that the people of Staffordshire deserve better than roads with more dimples than a Staffordshire oatcake?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is right. Potholes are a real nuisance; if somebody is using their car or van for work and they hit a pothole, they are looking at a bill of several hundred pounds, which for many working families is unbudgeted for. That is why we are handing the West Midlands combined authority an additional £8.6 million to help repair its roads, as part of a record £1.6 billion invested across the country. On top of that, every council must now publish how many potholes it has filled so that we can show that we are making progress and delivering—something that did not happen under the last Government.

Q9. [903476] **John Cooper** (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): When he was Director of Public Prosecutions, I do not think the right hon. and learned Gentleman would have sat comfortably in the Cabinet of Prime Minister Cameron, but incredibly in Scotland, we have a situation in which the head of prosecutions—the Lord Advocate—does sit in Cabinet. This situation has been thrown into sharp focus lately by a police probe into the finances of the SNP, and has been thrown further into focus because, although not personally involved, the Lord Advocate ultimately sits at the head of the investigation into former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, who faced potential criminal charges. This situation has been created by the SNP, who will not fix it. Does it sit with this House to amend the situation?

**The Prime Minister:** This is a really important issue, and Labour in Scotland has been clear that it would separate that role. That is the right thing to do, for the reasons that have just been articulated; it is the obvious thing to do, and obviously it is what we do in England and Wales. There have been calls for a review of this issue since 2021, but the SNP has not acted fast on those calls. It really does need to bring forward proposals now to deal with this problem, which has been sitting there for a very long time.

Q10. [903477] **Blair McDougall** (East Renfrewshire) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in welcoming the delegation from Bring Kids Back, which is trying to return the tens of thousands of children abducted by Vladimir Putin in an act of pure evil. The Prime Minister will be aware that that initiative has been working with Yale University's humanitarian lab, which was tracking thousands of those children inside Russia until recently—I say “until recently” because it has had its long-term funding removed. Will he consider using our existing contributions to the

partnership fund for a resilient Ukraine to resume that important work, and in doing so, restore the hope that those children can be returned to their anguished families?

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for emphasising this issue again. Russia's abduction of Ukrainian children is sickening—I think all of us across the House would agree on that. A peace settlement in Ukraine must see Russia held to account and those children reunited with their families. In specific reference to my hon. Friend's question, the UK is playing our full part in international efforts, including funding the Bring Kids Back initiative through the partnership fund for a resilient Ukraine. I want to reassure the whole House that we will do everything we can to see those children returned and reintegrated as safely and quickly as is possible.

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): The seven-year-old adopted daughter of my constituent Sarah suffered immense trauma in her early years. Thanks to support from the adoption and special guardianship support fund, she has been able to access much-needed therapy that has helped her to progress. However, she and thousands of others do not know whether they will be able to get more help, because in just five days that fund ends, and Ministers have repeatedly refused to confirm whether it will continue. Can the Prime Minister give a cast-iron guarantee to vulnerable children, adoptive parents and kinship carers that he will not cut that fund, so that Sarah—in her own words—can give her daughter

“the absolute best second chance in life she deserves”?

**The Prime Minister:** We will set out the details just as soon as we can, on the basis of the principles that I set out earlier. The welfare scheme overall is not defensible on terms, but it must be one that supports those who need it. The details will be set out.

Q11. [903478] **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): While our nation was being engulfed last year by racist riots, in Slough, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs and people of faith and of no faith openly declared that if anybody tried to attack a mosque in our town, we would stand in solidarity with our local Muslim community to protect it. Since then, however, many have become more fearful, with a rise in Islamophobic attacks, including at a mosque in Aberdeen this month. Will my right hon. and learned Friend the Prime Minister confirm for the country what steps the Government are taking to tackle such hate crime and promote community cohesion, so that those seeking to divide our British society are not allowed to succeed?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question; he does great work to bring our communities together, especially in Slough. Any form of racial or religious-based hatred is abhorrent and has no place in society. We have set aside over £50 million to protect faith communities and freedom of worship. That is the right thing to do; it is a shame that we have to do it. Our £15 million community recovery fund has been supporting communities affected by the disorder last summer—again, that is the right thing to do, but it is a shame that we have to do it.

**Sir Roger Gale** (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): The problems faced by Heathrow earlier in the week have highlighted again that since the closure of Manston airport in Kent, the south-east lacks a major diversion facility. Although such a facility would not, of course, have compensated for the closure of Heathrow, which is a major hub airport, does the Prime Minister agree that the reopening of Manston, planned for October 2028, will be a significant contribution to the resilience of aviation in the south-east?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman is right to raise the concern about the situation at Heathrow and I think everybody is very concerned by what happened last week. There are clearly questions that need to be answered on a number of fronts in relation to what happened, and an investigation is ongoing. I will not announce particular parts of our policy and strategy here, at this stage.

Q12. [903479] **Irene Campbell** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): In my constituency of North Ayrshire and Arran, the SNP ferry fiasco is having a devastating social and economic impact on Ardrossan and the Isle of Arran. As well as a CalMac ferry being built that does not fit into the existing harbour, the Fraser of Allander Institute estimates that the disrupted ferries cost the Isle of Arran £170,000 of lost revenue per day. Does the Prime Minister agree that the SNP Government need to find a rapid solution to swiftly address this serious situation?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for fighting SNP incompetence on behalf of her constituents. Yet again, the SNP is failing island communities. Hospital appointments are being missed and livelihoods destroyed. Scotland has a proud history of shipbuilding and engineering. The SNP should be supporting Scottish workers and focusing on delivering for our communities.

**Vikki Slade** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): Canford Magna in my constituency is proposed as a site for a new energy-from-waste incinerator, which will burn 260,000 tonnes of waste a year—more than the whole of Dorset's use. I am concerned that as we reduce our levels of waste with the brilliant new plans to recycle more, we will end up having to feed the monster. The area already has 95% of the capacity, so does the Prime Minister agree that we should not allow new plants where we already have sufficient capacity or where carbon capture will not be included?

**The Prime Minister:** I hope the hon. Lady will forgive me, but I do not know the details of the particular incinerator she speaks of and I am not across that. I will make sure, however, that she gets an answer to her question in written form as soon as possible.

Q13. [903480] **Chris McDonald** (Stockton North) (Lab): May I commend my right hon. and learned Friend for his leadership on Ukraine, showing that the UK is once again at the forefront of protecting democratic freedoms? Does he agree that as our defence spending increases, we need to support our supply chain companies to increase their capability, creating good jobs and apprenticeships in places such as Stockton North and across the country? Will he meet me and the Teesside defence and innovation cluster that I have established, which is helping to create that new defence capability for the UK?



**The Prime Minister:** This is a once-in-a-generation moment for the security of our country and our continent. We have set out the fully funded increase in defence spending to 2.5% in 2027, the biggest sustained boost since the cold war, but that must benefit British jobs and British businesses. That is why I will make sure that my hon. Friend gets the meeting that he wants with the relevant Minister.

**Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): In October last year the Chancellor delivered a massive tax, borrow and spend Budget. Now her plans have collapsed around her ears, with an emergency Budget to cut that spending, so has the time now come for the Prime Minister to state in public that he has full confidence in the Chancellor?

**The Prime Minister:** I have full confidence in the Chancellor—thank you.

Q14. [903481] **Frank McNally** (Coatbridge and Bellshill) (Lab): Albion Rovers has been a football institution in Coatbridge since 1882. However, following relegation and the lack of financial support for teams leaving professional leagues, it now faces a deeply perilous situation, and the very future of one of Scotland's oldest football clubs is at risk. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that clubs such as Albion Rovers are integral to the fabric of our communities? Will he join me in encouraging all parties to be solution-focused on this matter, and in encouraging football authorities to strengthen our clubs in the lower leagues to help protect their future?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is a superb local champion. Regardless of which club any of us supports, we share a love of the game and they are at the heart of our communities. Albion Rovers is exactly that—a huge point of local pride. I would encourage all efforts to secure the future of the club.

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): We are joined in Parliament today by Katie Brett, whose 16-year-old sister Sasha was raped and stabbed to death; by Ayse Hussain, whose cousin Jan was killed by a sex offender who stored her body in a freezer; by Paula Hudgell, whose adopted son Tony lost his lower legs as a result of childhood cruelty; and by Becky and Glenn Youens, whose daughter Violet-Grace was killed by a hit-and-run driver who spent barely more time in prison than she was alive. Supporting them are Jeremy and Susan Everard, who received justice for the murder of their daughter Sarah, but who know that too many others do not. They have come together to say with one voice that it is time for us to start ensuring that sentences truly deliver justice for victims and their families. Would the Prime Minister agree to meeting them to hear their stories at first hand?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. The courage of these campaigners, after simply appalling cases, is astounding and I find it humbling. I am pleased that the Minister for Victims my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) will be meeting the group—today, I think—and I look forward to meeting them in future, because we must prioritise victims and make sure that sentences punish offenders and protect the public. I thank him for raising that really important set of cases.



## Spring Statement

12.33 pm

### **The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves):**

This Labour Government were elected to bring change to our country, to provide security for working people and to deliver a decade of national renewal. That work began in July, and I am proud of what we have delivered in just nine months: restoring stability to our public finances, giving the Bank of England the foundation to cut interest rates three times since the general election, rebuilding our public services, with record investment in our NHS bringing waiting lists down for five months in a row, and increasing the national living wage to give 3 million people a pay rise from next week.

Now our task is to secure Britain's future in a world that is changing before our eyes. The threat facing our continent was transformed when Putin invaded Ukraine. It has since escalated further and continues to evolve rapidly. At the same time, the global economy has become more uncertain, bringing insecurity at home as trading patterns become more unstable and borrowing costs rise for many major economies. The job of a responsible Government is not simply to watch this change. This moment demands an active Government—a Government not stepping back but stepping up, a Government on the side of working people helping Britain reach its potential. We have the strengths to do just that as one of the world's largest economies, an ally to trading partners across the globe, and a hub for global innovation. These strengths and the progress we have made so far mean that we can act quickly and decisively in a more uncertain world to secure Britain's future and to deliver prosperity for working people.

As I set out at the Budget last year, I am today returning to the House to provide an update on our public finances, supported by a new forecast from the independent Office for Budget Responsibility, ahead of a full spending review in June. I will then return to the House in the autumn to deliver a Budget in line with our commitment to deliver just one major fiscal event a year.

Let me now turn to the OBR's forecasts; I want to thank Richard Hughes and his team for their dedicated work. The increased global uncertainty has had two consequences: first on our public finances and secondly on our economy. I will take each in turn.

In the autumn, I set out our new fiscal rules that would guide this Government. These fiscal rules are non-negotiable. They are the embodiment of this Government's unwavering commitment to bring stability to our economy and to ensure security for working people, because the British people have seen what happens when a Government borrow beyond their means. The mini-Budget delivered by the Conservatives resulted in higher bills, higher rents and higher mortgages, and it was not the wealthy who suffered most when they crashed the economy; it was ordinary working people. They continue to feel the effects two and a half years later of the damage that the Conservatives did.

Let me be clear: there is nothing progressive, there is nothing Labour, about working people paying the price for economic irresponsibility. The British people put their trust in this Labour Government because they knew that we—they knew that I—would never take

risks with the public finances and would never do anything to put household finances in danger. We must earn that trust every single day.

I set out two rules at the Budget. The first was our stability rule, which ensures that public spending is under control, balancing the current budget by 2029-30 so that day-to-day spending is met by tax receipts. The second was our investment rule to drive growth in the economy, ensuring that net financial debt falls by the end of the forecast period, while enabling us to invest alongside business.

Turning first to the stability rule, the OBR's forecast shows that before the steps that I will take in this statement, the current budget would have been in deficit by £4.1 billion in 2029-30, having been projected to be in surplus by £9.9 billion in the autumn, as the UK, alongside our international peers like France and Germany, has seen the cost of borrowing rise during this period of heightened uncertainty in global markets. As a result of the steps that I am taking today, I can confirm that I have restored in full our headroom against the stability rule, moving from a deficit of £36.1 billion in 2025-26 and £13.4 billion in 2026-27 to a surplus of £6 billion in 2027-28, £7.1 billion in 2028-29 and £9.9 billion in 2029-30. That compares with the headroom left by the previous Government of just £6.5 billion. That means that we are continuing to meet the stability rule two years early, building resilience to shocks in this, a more uncertain world.

The OBR forecast that the investment rule would also be met two years early, with net financial debt of 82.9% of GDP in '25-26 and 83.5% in '26-27, before falling to 83.4% in '27-28, to 83.2% in 2028-29 and then to 82.7% in 2029-30, providing headroom of £15.1 billion in the final year of the forecast, broadly unchanged from the autumn forecast.

After the last Government doubled the national debt—*[Interruption.]* After they doubled the national debt, debt interest payments now stand at £105.2 billion this year. That is more than we allocate to defence, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice combined. That is the legacy of the Conservative party. The responsible choice is to reduce our levels of debt and borrowing in the years ahead, so that we can spend more on the priorities of working people, and that is exactly what this Government will do. I said that our fiscal rules were non-negotiable and I meant it. I will always deliver economic stability and I will always put working people first. I said it at the election; I said it at the Budget; and I say it again today.

Let me now set out the steps that the Government have taken. At the Budget we protected working people by keeping our promise not to raise their rates of national insurance, income tax or VAT. At the same time, we began to rebuild our public services after the Conservatives left a £22 billion black hole in our public finances. Ours were the right choices: the right choices for stability and the right choices for renewal, funded by the decisions that we took on tax.

As I promised in the autumn, this statement does not contain any further tax increases, but when working people are paying their taxes while still struggling with the cost of living, it cannot be right that others are still evading what they rightly owe in tax. In the Budget, I delivered the most ambitious package of measures we have ever seen to cut down on tax evasion, raising

[Rachel Reeves]

£6.5 billion per year by the end of the forecast. Today I go further, continuing our investment in cutting-edge technology, investing in HMRC's capacity to crack down on tax avoidance, and setting out plans to increase the number of tax fraudsters charged every year by 20%. These changes raise a further £1 billion, taking the total revenue raised from reducing tax evasion, under this Labour Government, to £7.5 billion. These figures are verified by the Office for Budget Responsibility and I to thank my hon. Friend the Exchequer Secretary for his continued work in this area.

Last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions set out this Government's plans to reform the welfare system. The Labour party is the party of work: we believe that if you can work, you should work, but if you cannot work, you should be properly supported. This Government inherited a broken system: more than 1,000 people every day are qualifying for personal independence payments; one in eight young people are not in employment, education or training. If we do nothing, we are writing off an entire generation. That cannot be right and we will not stand for it. It is a waste of their potential and it is a waste of their futures, and we will change it.

As my right hon. Friend said in her statement last week, the final costings will be subject to the OBR's assessment. Today, the OBR has said that it estimates that the package will save £4.8 billion in the welfare budget, reflecting its judgments on behavioural effects and wider factors. This also reflects final adjustments to the overall package, consistent with the Secretary of State's statement last week and the Government's "Pathways to Work" Green Paper. The universal credit standard allowance will increase from £92 per week in 2025-26 to £106 per week by 2029-30, while the universal credit health element will be cut for new claimants by around 50% and then frozen.

On top of that, we are investing £1 billion to provide guaranteed, personalised employment support to help people back into work, and £400 million to support the Department for Work and Pensions and our jobcentres to deliver these changes effectively and fairly, taking total savings from the package to £3.4 billion. While spending on disability and sickness benefits will continue to rise, these plans mean that welfare spending as a share of GDP will fall between 2026 and the end of the forecast period, which is very different from what we inherited from the Conservative party. We are reforming our welfare system, making it more sustainable, protecting the most vulnerable and, most importantly, supporting more people back into secure work and lifting them out of poverty.

At the Budget, I fixed the foundations of our economy to deliver on the promise of change. That work has already begun. There are some 2 million extra appointments in our NHS; waiting lists are down; new breakfast clubs are opening across England; there have been the largest settlements in real terms for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the history of devolution; and asylum costs are falling—promises made, and promises kept, and every single one of them was opposed by Opposition parties.

At the Budget, alongside providing an increase in funding for this year and next, I set the envelope for the spending review, which we will deliver in June, led by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. That will set departmental budgets until 2028-29 for day-to-day spending, and until 2029-30 for capital spending.

Today's statement reflects two steps that we have taken on our spending plans. First, because we are living in an uncertain world, as the Prime Minister has set out, we will increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP and reduce overseas aid to 0.3% of gross national income. That means that we save £2.6 billion in day-to-day spending in 2029-30 to fund our more capital-intensive defence commitments. Secondly, in recent months, we have begun to fundamentally reform the British state, driving efficiency and productivity across Government to deliver tangible savings and improve services across our country.

Earlier this month, the Prime Minister set out our plans to abolish the arm's length body NHS England, and to ensure that money goes directly to improving the service for patients. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care is driving forward vital reforms to increase NHS productivity, and is bearing down on costly agency spend to save money so that we can improve patient care.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is taking forward work to reduce the cost of running Government significantly—by 15%. That will be worth £2 billion by the end of the decade. This work shows that we can make our state leaner and more agile, and deliver more resources to the frontline, while ensuring that we control day-to-day spending to meet our fiscal rules.

Today, I build on that work by bringing forward £3.25 billion of investment to deliver the reforms that our public services need through a new transformation fund. That is money brought forward now to bring down the cost of running Government by the end of the forecast period by making public services more efficient, more productive and more focused on the user. I can confirm today the first allocations from this fund, including funding for voluntary exit schemes to reduce the size of the civil service, and for pioneering artificial intelligence tools to modernise the state; investment in technology for the Ministry of Justice to deliver probation services more effectively; and up-front investment so that we can support more children in foster care, to give them the best possible start in life and reduce cost pressures in the future.

Our work to make Government leaner, more productive and more efficient will help deliver a further £3.5 billion of day-to-day savings by 2029-30. Overall, day-to-day spending will be reduced by £6.1 billion by 2029-30, and it will now grow by an average of 1.2% a year above inflation; for comparison, in the autumn, that figure was 1.3%. I can confirm to the House that day-to-day spending will increase in real terms above inflation in every single year of the forecast. In the spending review, apart from the reductions in overseas aid, day-to-day spending across Government has been fully protected.

I can also confirm our approach to capital investment. In the autumn Budget, I announced £100 billion of additional capital spending to crowd in investment from the private sector, in order to fix our crumbling infrastructure and create jobs in every corner of our country. Today, I am not cutting capital spending, as

the Conservative party did time and again, because that choked off growth and left our school roofs literally crumbling. That was the wrong choice. It was the irresponsible choice. It was the Tory choice. Today, I am instead increasing capital spending by an average of £2 billion per year, compared with in the autumn, to drive growth in our economy and to deliver in full our vital commitments on defence. This Government will ensure that every pound we spend will deliver for the British people by increasing productivity, driving growth in our economy and improving our frontline public services.

Let me turn to the impact of increased uncertainty on our economy. To deliver economic stability, we must work closely with the Bank of England, supporting the independent Monetary Policy Committee to meet the 2% inflation target. There have been three interest rate cuts since the general election, and today's data shows that inflation fell in February, having peaked at 11% under the previous Government. The Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts that consumer prices index inflation will average 3.2% this year, before falling rapidly to 2.1% in 2026 and meeting the 2% target from 2027 onwards, giving families and businesses the security that they need, and providing our economy with the stable platform that it needs to grow.

Earlier this month, the OECD downgraded this year's growth forecast for every G7 economy, including the UK, and the OBR has today revised down our growth forecast for 2025 from 2% in the autumn to 1% today. I am not satisfied with these numbers. We Labour Members are serious about taking the action needed to grow our economy; we are backing the builders, not the blockers, with a third runway at Heathrow airport and through the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. We are increasing investment with reforms to our pension system and a new national wealth fund, and tearing down regulatory barriers in every sector of our economy. That is a serious plan for growth. That is a serious plan to improve living standards. That is a serious plan to renew our country.

A changing world presents challenges, but also opportunities for new jobs and new contracts in our world-class defence industrial centres from Belfast to Deeside, and from Plymouth to Rosyth. In February, the Prime Minister set out our Government's commitment to increasing spending on defence to 2.5% of GDP from April 2027—the biggest sustained increase in defence spending since the end of the cold war—and an ambition to spend 3% of GDP on defence in the next Parliament. That was the right decision in a more insecure world—we are putting an extra £6.4 billion into defence spending by 2027—but we have to move quickly in this changing world, and that starts with investment. Today, I can confirm that I will provide an additional £2.2 billion for the Ministry of Defence in the next financial year—a further down payment on our plan to deliver 2.5% of GDP by 2027. This additional investment is about increasing not just our national security, but our economic security.

As defence spending rises, I want the whole country to feel its benefits, so I will now set out the immediate steps that we are taking to boost Britain's defence industry, and to make the UK a defence industrial superpower. We will spend a minimum of 10% of the Ministry of Defence's equipment budget on new, novel

technologies, including drones and artificial intelligence-enabled technology, driving forward advanced manufacturing production in places like Glasgow, Derby and Newport, creating demand for highly skilled engineers and scientists, and delivering new business opportunities for UK tech firms and start-ups. We will establish a protected budget of £400 million in the Ministry of Defence—a budget that will rise over time—for UK defence innovation, and a clear mandate to bring innovative technology to the frontline at speed.

We will reform our broken defence procurement system, making it quicker, more agile and more streamlined, and giving small businesses across the UK better access to Ministry of Defence contracts—something welcomed by the Federation of Small Businesses. We will take forward our plan for Barrow, a town at the heart of our nuclear security, working with my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Michelle Scrogg). We are providing £200 million to support the creation of thousands of jobs there. We will regenerate Portsmouth naval base, securing its future, as called for by my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan). We will secure better homes for thousands of military families—the homes that they deserve, which were denied to them by the previous Government—in the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth Moor View (Fred Thomas), for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) and for York Outer (Mr Charters) and in Aldershot. That is the difference that this Labour Government are making.

Finally, we will provide £2 billion of increased capacity for UK Export Finance to provide loans for overseas buyers of UK defence goods and services. I want to do more with our defence budget, so that we can buy, make and sell things here in Britain. I want to give our world-leading defence companies and those who work in them further opportunities to grow, and to create jobs in Britain, as military spending rightly increases all across Europe. To oversee all this vital work, my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary and I will establish a new defence growth board to maximise the benefits from every pound of taxpayers' money that we spend, and we will put defence at the heart of our modern industrial strategy to drive innovation, which can deliver huge benefits for the British economy. That is how we make our country a defence industrial superpower, so that the skills, jobs and opportunities of the future can be found right here in the United Kingdom.

As the previous Government learned to their detriment, there are no shortcuts to economic growth. It will take long-term decisions. It will take our putting in the hard yards. It will take time for the effect of the reforms that we are introducing to be felt in the everyday economy. It is right that the Office for Budget Responsibility should consider the evidence and look carefully at measures before recognising a growth impact in its forecast, but I can announce to the House that the OBR has considered and has scored one of the central planks of our plan for growth.

In my first week as Chancellor, I announced that we were pursuing the most ambitious set of planning reforms in decades to get Britain building again, and in December we published changes to the national planning policy framework, driven forward tirelessly by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. We are reintroducing mandatory housing targets, and bringing grey-belt land



[Rachel Reeves]

into scope. The OBR has today concluded that these reforms will permanently increase the level of real GDP by 0.2% in '29-30—an additional £6.8 billion for our economy—and by 0.4% of GDP within 10 years, which is an additional £15.1 billion in the British economy. That is the biggest positive growth impact that the OBR has ever reflected in its forecast, for a policy with no fiscal cost. Taken together with our plans to increase capital spending, which we set out in the Budget last year, this Government's policies will increase the level of real GDP by 0.6% in the next 10 years. That is the difference that this Labour Government are making. Those are policies to grow our economy promised by a Labour Government, delivered by a Labour Government and opposed by the parties opposite.

The planning system that we inherited was far too slow. The OBR has concluded that our reforms will lead to house building reaching a 40-year high, with 305,000 homes a year by the end of the forecast period. Changes to the national planning policy framework alone will help build over 1.3 million homes in the UK over the next five years, taking us within touching distance of delivering our manifesto promise to build 1.5 million homes in England in this Parliament. Those are homes promised by this Labour Government, homes built by this Labour Government and homes opposed by the parties opposite.

The impact on our economy goes further still. I said at the election that we could not simply tax and spend our way to prosperity. We need economic growth, so I can today confirm that the effect of our growth policies, including our planning reforms, means an additional £3.4 billion to support our public finances and our public services by 2029-30. Those are the proceeds of growth, promised by this Labour Government, delivered by this Labour Government and opposed by the parties opposite.

Earlier this week, we provided an additional £2 billion of investment in social and affordable homes next year, delivering up to 18,000 new homes, and allowing local areas to bid for new development across our country, including sites in Thanet, Sunderland and Swindon. That is more security for families across the country, promised by this Labour Government, delivered by this Labour Government and opposed by the parties opposite.

To build these new homes, we need people with the right skills. Earlier this week, my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary announced more than £600 million to train up 60,000 more construction workers, including through 10 new technical excellence colleges across every region of the country, giving working people the chance to fulfil their potential. Those are new opportunities for our young people, promised by this Labour Government, delivered by this Labour Government and opposed by the parties opposite.

All this is just the start. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill passed its Second Reading on Monday. That was no thanks to the parties opposite. Once that Bill completes its passage, it will help deliver the homes and infrastructure our country badly needs. I say to the parties opposite: the British people will be watching. If the parties opposite do not support these reforms, let us be clear about what that would mean: they are opposing economic growth,

they are opposing more homes for families and they are opposing good jobs across our country. We on the Government Benches are clear about whose side we are on; the parties opposite must decide, too.

This Labour Government are taking the right decisions now to secure Britain's future. Today, I can confirm to the House that the OBR has upgraded its growth forecast next year and every single year thereafter, with GDP growth of 1.9% in 2026, 1.8% in 2027, 1.7% in 2028, and 1.8% in 2029. By the end of the forecast, our economy will be larger compared with the OBR's forecast at the time of the Budget. That is the difference that this Labour Government are making.

This is not just about lines on a graph; it is about improving people's lives. Working people are still feeling the pinch after a cost of living crisis caused by the Conservatives that caused interest rates and inflation to go through the roof, so I am pleased that the OBR confirms today that real household disposable income will now grow this year at almost twice the rate expected in the autumn. Compared with the forecast in the final Budget delivered by the Conservatives, and after taking inflation into account, the OBR says today that households will be on average more than £500 a year better off under this Labour Government. That will mean more money in the pockets of working people and higher living standards—promised by this Labour Government, delivered by this Labour Government and opposed by the parties opposite.

The world is changing. We can see that, and we can feel it. A changing world demands a Government who are on the side of working people, acting in their interest, acting in the national interest, not retreating from challenges, and not stepping back. It demands a Government with the courage to step up to secure Britain's future and to seize the opportunities that are out there and before us. I am impatient for change. The British people are impatient for change after 14 years of failure, and we are beginning to see change happen. Our plan for change is working. Defence spending is rising. Waiting lists are falling. Wages are up and interest rates are cut. That is the difference that this Labour Government are making.

Today, the OBR confirms that our plan to get Britain building will drive growth in our economy and put more money in people's pockets. There are no quick fixes, but we have taken the right choices: returning stability to our economy after years of mismanagement by the party opposite, and delivering security for our country and security for working people. That is what drives this Government; that is what drives me as Chancellor; and, that is what drives the choices I have set out today. I commend this statement to the House.

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

1.6 pm

**Mel Stride** (Central Devon) (Con): At the last Budget, the right hon. Lady said that she would bring stability to the public finances, but this statement, more appropriately referred to as an emergency Budget, has brought her to a cold—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Rightly, I wanted to hear the Chancellor, and I now want to hear the shadow Chancellor. [*Interruption.*] I do not need any help.



**Mel Stride:** This emergency Budget has brought the right hon. Lady to a cold hard reckoning. She has become fond recently of talking about the world having changed, and indeed it has. This country was growing at the fastest rate in the G7 only about a year ago. Just as the OECD, the Bank of England and other forecasters—including, we learn today, the OBR—have stated, growth has been halved for this year. It has been cut in two as a consequence of the decisions and the choices that the right hon. Lady has made on her watch. Inflation was down to 2%—bang on target—under a Conservative Government on the very day of the last general election. We are now told that this year we will be running at twice the level as was forecast under us in 2024. That will mean prices bearing down on households and on businesses right across the country, because of her choices.

The OBR also says that unemployment will be rising this year, next year and the year after. In fact, across the forecast period it will not decline at all. So much for the right hon. Lady's back to work plans. We have already seen what it means when it comes to controlling borrowing under this Chancellor. She has come forward now with a plan to squeeze spending later on in the forecast period, and she has of course told the OBR that these are the elements of spending restraint to which she will stick, but what do the markets think? Given her track record, and the fact that she has failed to control spending and borrowing to date, what does the right hon. Lady think the markets will make of her latest promises?

Of course, the right hon. Lady says that none of this is her fault. It is the war in Ukraine, it is President Trump; it is tariffs; it is President Putin; it is the Conservatives; it is her legacy; it is anyone but her. What the British people know, however, is that this is a consequence of her choices. She is the architect of her own misfortune. It was the right hon. Lady who talked down the economy so that business surveys and confidence crashed through the floor. It was the right hon. Lady who confected the £22 billion black hole, a smokescreen that was only ever there to cover up for the fact that she and the Prime Minister reneged on their promises to the British people during the last general election, and a black hole that the Office for Budget Responsibility itself—ironically, at the Government's behest—has said it will not legitimise. She chose to be reckless with a sliver of headroom against her fiddled targets. She borrowed and spent and taxed as if it were the 1970s. Little wonder that the Chancellor has tanked the economy, little wonder that we have an emergency Budget, all because of her choices.

The Chancellor likes to tour the television studios and tell everyone that they should be thankful that she will not be ramping up taxes in this emergency Budget as she did before, but that will be cold comfort to the millions up and down the country who are waiting in fear and trepidation for the start of the new tax year, buckling under the burden of tax that will rise to the highest tax burden—on her watch—in the history of our country. May I ask the right hon. Lady whether, when she replies, she will give that much-needed reassurance, particularly to businesses, that she will not be ramping up taxes still further in the autumn? Even a basic economist knows that if you tax something, you get less of it. You do not need to have worked at the Bank of England for 10 years to know that.

So what did the Chancellor tax? She taxed jobs and wealth creation. She has destroyed livelihoods. Businesses have been clobbered, big and small—small companies, the backbone of our economy—and enterprise has been crushed on the altar of her ineptitude. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development has told us that a third of the businesses affected will shed labour, with Morrisons losing 200 jobs, Tesco 400, and Sainsbury's 3,000. No wonder the Federation of Small Businesses has said that outside the pandemic, business confidence has been left at its lowest level on record. However, it is not just businesses. It is charities, it is GPs, it is pharmacies, it is those who transport children with special educational needs, and it is hospices caring for the sick and the dying. In this House, the Labour party had the opportunity, yesterday and last week, to stop that, but they voted our amendments down, and we will never let their constituents forget it.

If you ramp up taxes, Mr Speaker, and if you ramp up borrowing and spending without any commensurate improvement in productivity, it leads to growing inflation, and inflation has been increasing on this Government's watch. It means that interest rates stay higher for longer. The Chancellor has just trumpeted the fact that there have been three interest rate cuts since the Labour party came to office. She knows full well that there would have been more than that had she managed—*[Interruption.]* She knows full well that interest rates are higher for longer because of the choices that she made. This has led to servicing costs for our national debt running at twice the defence budget, and today we have learnt from the OBR that debt interest is to increase still further—and none of this money will be spent on public services. It will be going down the drain.

The real black hole is not the one that the Chancellor invented; it is the one that the Chancellor created. Is not the central problem that this Chancellor is a gambler? Even with her fiddled fiscal targets, she left way too little headroom. Is not the truth that while the right hon. Lady said of the last Budget that it was a “once-in-a-parliament reset”,

she rolled the dice on a wafer-thin margin, and she lost? Reckless, with her fingers crossed, she fiddled the targets and she missed them. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am not sure about the language being used. I think there are better and more constructive words that the shadow Chancellor would prefer to use in future.

**Mel Stride:** May I just point out that all the Chancellor's fiscal headroom disappeared, not just some of it? In fact, she went underwater to the tune of £4.1 billion. Reeling from one fiscal event to the next is not a way to run the public finances, and breaking your fiscal rules to the extent that the right hon. Lady has in just six months is a public humiliation.

May I now focus briefly on defence spending? We on this side of the House welcome the fact that the Government will reach 2.5% of GDP by 2027, as we pressed them to do, and we note the stepping stone along the way that the right hon. Lady has just announced, but we should go further than that. The 3% target should be brought forward to this Parliament. So may I ask the right hon. Lady: given the geopolitical tensions that she has raised, what provision she has made in her headroom, in her

[*Mel Stride*]

fiscal plans, for increasing defence spending more quickly in this Parliament, if that proves necessary? May I also ask her this: would she scrap the absurd Chagos deal, and put that money behind our armed forces?

The economy is in a perilous state, but there was a different way. There were different choices on taxing and spending and borrowing, and on productivity, and on welfare. Let me just say a few words about welfare. It was the privilege of my life to serve as the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, and when it came to welfare reform, with that privilege came a deep responsibility: the responsibility for welfare reform to be properly thought through, with a very clear plan—[*Interruption*]  
—I know that Labour Members do not like it, because it is an alien idea to their party—so that we could be fair to the taxpayer, but equally fair to the many people up and down the country, some of whom are highly vulnerable. That was an approach, on our watch, that led to £5 million of savings across the forecast period, and 450,000 fewer people going on to long-term sickness and disability benefits as a direct consequence.

We would have gone further—much further—and we set out a clear plan in our manifesto to do exactly that, but those in the party opposite rushed their changes. They had no plan. There was not a single mention of the personal independence payment in the Labour party manifesto, and when they got into office, the Labour Government pussyfooted around and dithered. Why? Because it is deeply divisive within their rank and file. Then suddenly, when the Chancellor decided that she had run out of money, out went the word to find some savings in welfare, to scrabble around, to yank every lever possible.

Then there was the spectacle, frankly, of what the OBR has said about the simply shambolic changes that were announced only last week by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. We have gone from incompetence to chaos. There have been more changes to this policy than there were at the last minute to the right hon. Lady's LinkedIn profile. The result is the worst of all worlds: a wholly inadequate level of savings on welfare, with welfare costs spiralling ever higher, and changes that are likely to harm many vulnerable people. May I ask the right hon. Lady: when the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions came to the House last week with these changes, she did not provide an impact assessment, but was this because the OBR had not signed off the numbers, was it because the Department did not have enough time to produce one, or was it only provided today, as many of us suspect, because this was thought to be a good time to bury bad news?

The forecast for growth is down, the forecasts for borrowing costs and inflation are up, and business confidence has been smashed into a million pieces. This Chancellor is constantly trying to blame forces beyond her control. The right response is not to duck responsibility, but to build a resilient economy. The right hon. Lady would have us believe that that is what she is doing, but how can we believe this Chancellor? How can we trust this Chancellor? She is the Chancellor who said she would not increase borrowing, but she did. She said she would not change her fiscal rules, but she did. She said she would not put up national insurance, but she did.

She said she would not cut the winter fuel payment, but she did. She said she would not tax farmers, but she did, and she said she would not move to more than one fiscal event a year, and she just has. Now we are all paying the price of her broken promises. Today's numbers confirm it. We are poorer and we are weaker. To govern is to choose, and this Chancellor has made all the wrong choices.

**Rachel Reeves:** I know that the shadow Chancellor has not been in his role for very long, but at least he is not misquoting Shakespeare today. If this was a Budget, it would be the Leader of the Opposition responding. I am glad that she is still in her place, but I know she will want to get back to her office for a lunchtime steak soon.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about Budgets. Let me remind the Conservative party that the only emergency Budget we have seen in recent years was in response to their party's disastrous mini-Budget—a mini-Budget that crashed the economy, sent mortgage bills spiralling and left a £22 billion black hole in our nation's finances. Conservative Members may have forgotten about the damage that they did to our country, but the British people never will.

As always, the shadow Chancellor talked a lot, but he did not offer a single alternative. He says he opposes our tax rises, but he cannot tell us whether he would cut the NHS to reverse them. He says he wants economic growth, but Conservative Members abstained on the very planning reforms that the OBR has said will kick-start growth. Mr Speaker, you do not change the country by abstaining or by sitting on the fence; you change the country by leading and by taking action, and that is what this Government are doing. The shadow Chancellor says he wants businesses to trade, but he does not want us to talk to the second largest economy in the world or, indeed, our biggest trading partners in the European Union. He simply is not serious. Four months into the job, and he has got no clue.

The right hon. Gentleman wants to talk about growth, but he does not say anything about the fact that the OBR has upgraded growth next year and every single year after. He talks about pensioners, but he forgets that it is his party's policy to scrap the triple lock, which we are protecting and which will mean the state pension rising next month by over £400. He talks about wages, but he forgets the fact that we are boosting wages by boosting the national living wage from next month. The shadow Chancellor says nothing about living standards or this morning's fall in inflation, because the last Parliament was the worst on record, and the OBR has today revised up its forecast for family finances. Working people are always better off with Labour.

The right hon. Gentleman is learning something, because at least this time he has asked a couple of questions, so let me respond to them. He asked what the markets should make of this. What the markets should see is that, when I have been tested with a deterioration in the headroom, we have restored that headroom in full. That is one of the choices that I made. He says that it is a sliver of a headroom. Well, it is 50% more headroom than I inherited from the Conservative party. When I was left with a sliver of headroom, I rebuilt it after the last Government eroded it. That is the difference that we have made. While they left the public finances and the public services in a mess, we wiped the slate

clean, which means that we have the flexibility now to increase defence spending, as the leader of the Labour party has done. The Conservatives had 14 years to increase defence spending, and now they lately come to the party.

The shadow Chancellor mentions welfare reform and his time at the Department for Work and Pensions. What a legacy: one in eight young people not in education, employment or training, and 1,000 people a day going on to personal independence payments. The OBR says today that welfare spending as a share of GDP will now start falling—a far cry from what we had under the Conservative party. The shadow Chancellor speaks about employment. The OBR says that employment will increase, that wages will increase and that living standards will increase. What a change, after 14 years of the Conservative party.

The world is changing, and no one can be in any doubt about it, but the Conservative party is stuck in the past—divided, out of touch and carping from the sidelines. Conservative Members have no plan: no plan to kick-start growth, no plan to fix our public services and no plan to keep our country safe. The only plan for change they are working on is a plan to change their party leader, and we cannot blame them for that.

If the Opposition have no plan, let me remind them about ours. The minimum wage up, real wages up, house building up, NHS investment up, investment in our schools up, investment in our roads up, defence spending up—and every single one of those policies is opposed by the party opposite. They are opposed by the Conservatives, opposed by Reform, opposed by the SNP, opposed by the Liberal Democrats and opposed by the Greens. It is the anti-growth coalition in action. They are the blockers. We are the builders—securing Britain's future, protecting working people and delivering change.

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

**Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend inherited a very difficult challenge when she became Chancellor of the Exchequer last July, and she is absolutely right that the books need to balance. This is not other people's money we are spending, but taxpayers' money—our constituents' hard-earned money—and she is right to be tough as Chancellor. We look forward to quizzing her at the Treasury Committee next week, and I am sure she is looking forward to it just as much.

The Chancellor announced an extra £2 billion a year in capital spending, and she talked about extra defence spending. Could she give some more detail about where she hopes that extra £2 billion a year will go?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question, and I do indeed look forward to attending the Treasury Committee next week. I was pleased to serve on the Treasury Committee in the past, and it is a pleasure to give evidence to it.

We will set out in the spending review—my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary will set out in the spending review—the allocation of the additional capital money. However, I was able to announce today the £2.2 billion for defence from next year, as well as the £2 billion as a downpayment to build the affordable and social housing

that we need. Those are two examples of the priorities of this Government to get Britain building and to secure our national security.

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

**Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD): The people of this country are crying out for change, but they feel they are just getting more of the same. Of course, it was the Conservative party that wrecked the public finances, but we are eight months into the new Government and people are left wondering, “Where is the change that was promised?” The Chancellor says that the world is changing, so why will she not change course with it? The Chancellor said she wanted a dash for growth, but with her national insurance jobs tax she shot herself in the foot before she even crossed the start line.

After the Government's disastrous Budget, the Government had the chance today to change direction, fix our finances, kick-start growth and deliver a small business Budget. The Government could have scrapped the jobs tax, which will hammer our high streets, and instead ask the big banks, social media giants and online gambling companies to pay their fair share instead. The Government could have changed their approach to trade, launching talks to boost growth through a new trading deal with our European neighbours. Instead, the Government have made the wrong decisions to cut public services, hit disabled people and inflict more pain on our small businesses and high streets. In doing so, they have delivered no change and almost no growth at all.

After years of Conservative mismanagement, people can see just how broken our public services are. They cannot see a GP, they cannot see a dentist, they are fighting for an education plan and, they are picking up the pieces of a broken social care system. Everything is broken. Nothing works. That is why people are impatient for the change they were promised.

We have to bring the welfare bill down and support more people into work. That is right for people and our economy, but cutting support for someone who needs help getting dressed and washed in the morning is not just wrong; it does absolutely nothing to support that person into work. If anything, it does the exact opposite. It will also have knock-on impacts for the entitlements of their family carers, too. Will the Chancellor come clean about this? If the Government are serious about cutting welfare spending, they must get serious about fixing health and social care. Will the Chancellor speed up the social care review and ensure that it concludes no later than the end of this year?

In the Chancellor's quest to slim down the civil service, I wonder why she has not looked at the mountain of red tape created by the previous Government's terrible trade deal with Europe. A whopping 2 billion extra pieces of paper have had to be completed by businesses since Brexit, enough to wrap around the world 15 times. If we manage to cut the red tape, we can give British businesses a tailwind, deliver far more growth than is currently predicted, increase the fiscal headroom to deal with global headwinds, and free up precious time and money in our civil service. That would be real change.

Business was promised change too. Today's statement should have been a small business Budget. We Liberal Democrats have repeatedly raised the alarm about the



[Daisy Cooper]

impending damage of the national insurance jobs tax, bigger business rates bills and changes to reliefs for family farms and family businesses. Those changes will be a hammer blow to small and family businesses, leaving communities facing the prospect of an epidemic of boarded-up shopfronts. They will be a hammer blow to community health and care providers who stop our NHS from falling over. This is not the change that was promised. Instead, I say again that the Chancellor should look again at much fairer ways to raise the tax revenue our public services desperately need by reforming capital gains tax more fairly and asking the big banks, the social media giants and the online gambling companies to pay their fair share.

I know the Chancellor must contend with President Trump's trade war, which is causing global economic turmoil, but our response to Trump's bullying cannot be to cower in the corner and just hope that he is nice to us. We cannot sit on our hands while British steel is hit with Trump's tariffs. We Liberal Democrats warmly welcome the Chancellor's move to raise defence spending to 2.5% of GDP, but instead of cutting the aid budget, which abandons the world's poor and damages our soft power, she should be covering the cost by raising the digital services tax, handing the tab to Elon Musk and Trump's other billionaire backers. At the very least, can the Chancellor categorically rule out any reduction in the tech tax in an attempt to appease the White House, especially when disabled people in Britain face eye-watering cuts?

To conclude, I have a series of questions. Will the Chancellor recognise that cutting public services that are already stretched is a false economy? Will she accept that trying to bring down the welfare bill without fixing health and social care is a road to nowhere? Will she listen to the warnings of small and family businesses that her jobs tax will do more harm than good? Will she look at the fairer ways of raising revenue that we Liberal Democrats have put forward? And will she take the bold action we need to grow our economy by rebuilding our broken trading relationship with Europe? The public were promised change. Where on earth is it?

**Rachel Reeves:** The hon. Lady says, "Where is the change?" Let me tell her: more money into our NHS, with 2 million additional appointments and waiting lists falling five months in a row; rolling out breakfast clubs in primary schools from April this year; increasing defence spending to protect us in a more uncertain world; additional support for carers, the living wage up, the Employment Rights Bill and so much more. That is the difference we have made in nine months, and we have only just got started.

The hon. Lady talks about trade. We believe in free trade. We are an open trading economy and we benefit from trade links around the world, including with our single biggest trading partner, the United States of America. It is right that we work with our allies in the United States to ensure that that free and open trade continues. That is in our national interest and this Government will always act in our national interest. At the same time, there will, as the hon. Lady knows, be a summit between the UK and the EU in May, where we will look to re-set our relationship, so we can see

more free trade and the better flow of trade, especially for our smaller businesses to be able to export around Europe.

The hon. Lady talks about welfare. She has not admitted that there is a single problem in the welfare system as it exists today. I am not willing, and this party is not willing, to write off one in eight young people who are not in education, employment or training. It is why, for example, we announced this week, with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education, an additional 60,000 training places to train people up in the construction industries of the future, and a £1 billion package of personalised targeted support because there are many disabled people—the hon. Lady knows this—who are desperate to work but are not getting the support and were denied support by the previous Government. That is why we have said there will be additional support for the most sick and disabled, and that personal support for getting people back into work. That is the right approach, so that we have protections for those who need it, work for those who can, and a sustainable system that is here for generations into the future.

I want to take on the hon. Lady's main point. She wants all the money for public services, but she does not want to raise the taxes to pay for them. At the moment, we spend £105 billion a year in interest on Government debt. It seems that she would just like more of that debt. She says that people cannot see a GP or a dentist. How does she and the Opposition parties think that we pay for those things? They cannot object to the tax increases and support the money we have invested in our public services. To say otherwise, I am afraid, is fairytales and the magic money tree—it just does not add up. The difference on the Labour Benches is that we will put money into our public services, explain where it comes from, and ensure that the public finances are on a firm footing. That is the difference between our party and the Opposition parties.

**Dr Jeevun Sandher** (Loughborough) (Lab): Young people in my constituency, and indeed across the country, have had an incredibly difficult time growing up: austerity saw their further education budgets cut by 14%, then there was a pandemic and now war in Europe. Will the Chancellor please set out how her plans to get Britain building again will help my young constituents get the good, non-graduate jobs they need in Loughborough, Shepshed and the villages?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend speaks powerfully on behalf of his constituents in Loughborough. The 1.5 million additional homes the Government are building will ensure that families in Loughborough have a chance of getting on the housing ladder and that young people in Loughborough will have the opportunities to help build those homes. That is the difference we are making: more jobs, paying decent wages, and more homes for our families.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): I hope the Chancellor, next Wednesday in front of the Treasury Committee, will reiterate her commitment not to come back with more tax increases. On page five of the OBR report, paragraph 1.2 states:



“While the Government’s planning reforms deliver a modest boost to the level of potential output of 0.2 per cent in 2029, its cumulative growth between 2023 and 2029 is still ½ a percentage point lower than we projected in October, and the level of productivity is over 1 per cent lower.”

I would like to know what the Chancellor thinks about that, and can she confirm that the Employment Rights Bill has not been evaluated by the OBR?

**Rachel Reeves:** The key point in what the right hon. Gentleman says is that cumulative growth is lower from 2023 to the end of the forecast. Of course, this Government did not come into power in 2023; we came into power in July 2024. The OBR numbers show that the economy is bigger because of the changes we have made—it is just a difference in the dates. I look forward to coming to the Treasury Committee next week, and I am sure I will take more questions from the right hon. Gentleman then.

**Yuan Yang** (Earley and Woodley) (Lab): The Chancellor has rightly championed economic stability, in stark contrast to the previous Government—indeed, in stark contrast to the previous five Chancellors. Yet, as she has said, the world is becoming more unstable, and that global instability feeds through to rapid changes in official projections, which can constrain our room for action. Can the Chancellor reaffirm to us that she will keep her focus on fiscal stability, despite these challenges, to meet the long-term missions of this Government: to defend our country, improve living standards and protect the most vulnerable in our society?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that her constituents—all our constituents—depend on economic stability. It ensures that they know how much they will pay on their rent and mortgages; it ensures that they are not caught out, when they go to the shops, by prices constantly rising. That is why, as a Government, we have said that the No. 1 thing we need to achieve in order to grow our economy is economic stability, which is why I am so pleased that the Bank of England has been able to cut interest rates three times since the general election and the OBR has forecast that inflation will fall rapidly to 2.1% next year, and then 2% in the years after that.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Schools face a huge rise in costs imminently due to the rise in national insurance contributions. Headteachers had been reassured by the Government that schools would be recompensed with money to cover these costs, yet Sir Robert Pattinson academy in my constituency—a great school—finds itself £33,000 short. Will the Chancellor commit to ensuring that Sir Robert Pattinson, and indeed all the schools in my constituency, is given enough money to cover her jobs tax?

**Rachel Reeves:** Public services, including schools, have been compensated for the increase in national insurance, but I am happy for the hon. Lady to get in touch with me or the Education Secretary to set out the case of that school.

The only reason we have been able to put record investment into our schools is because of the stability we have returned to the economy, including the tax increases that we had to bring forward last year in order to provide that extra money for our public services, including the schools in the hon. Lady’s constituency.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I recognise the difficulties that my right hon. Friend is facing, with the fiscal challenges and so on that she inherited. I also support the reforms that my right hon. Friend the Work and Pensions Secretary has set out. However, all the evidence points to the fact that the cuts to health and disability benefits will lead to increased poverty, including severe poverty, and worsened health conditions. How will making people sicker and poorer help to drive our economy up and get people into jobs?

**Rachel Reeves:** As my hon. Friend knows, we set out in the Green Paper that we are consulting on a premium payment for the most severely sick and disabled, because, as a Government, we believe that those who need support should get it. Like my hon. Friend, I recognise that there are many people who are sick and disabled. However, there are also many young people who could be working, but were written off by the previous Government, and that is why we are putting record investment into helping those people to get back into work with guaranteed personalised, targeted support. Someone is half as likely to be in poverty if they move from welfare into work. We are determined to lift people out of poverty by ensuring that there are good jobs that pay decent wages and with security guaranteed through the Employment Rights Bill.

**Bobby Dean** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The OBR said that the information it received on the package of welfare cuts was late, contained insufficient detail and that the estimates are highly uncertain, and it will now have to certify them in the next forecast. Can the Chancellor confirm whether that means the Government will have to go further, with even deeper cuts to welfare than they have so far announced?

**Rachel Reeves:** The OBR has not taken into account any of the package of measures to get people back into work or looked at any behavioural effects of people making that switch into work. It said in that document that it will spend the summer looking at the entirety of the package, including the efforts we are making with a huge package to get people back into work. I am confident that that personalised, targeted support will get more people into work and lift them out of poverty, so that they can support their families and so that the economy can benefit from their contribution.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Fiscal responsibility under this Government, unlike the previous Administration, ensures that people are paying less and keeps the cost of living down. However, as the Labour party, we have an additional social responsibility, so can we look at those DWP changes again? Of course we have to protect the most vulnerable, but we are really worried about the people just above that band who are set to lose out.

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question, and I share the deep concern felt by everyone on the Government Benches—in fact, everyone in this Chamber—about the most sick and disabled, who need support. That is why we have set out in the Green Paper that we are consulting on an additional premium payment to the most severely disabled. It is also why, instead of writing people off and not providing the support that

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they need to do a job that matches their abilities and needs, we are providing that personalised, targeted support. I was at a jobcentre last week in Pudsey, in my constituency, where I heard amazing stories of work coaches helping people into work who are far from the labour market. We want to see more of that. We want to lift people out of poverty and help them to achieve their potential.

**Dame Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): At the general election, the Chancellor promised growth and no increase in taxes, but as Chancellor, she has delivered no growth and a record increase in taxes. Now, the Office for Budget Responsibility is halving her growth forecast this year, with cumulatively half a percent less over the forecast period. More worryingly, it is forecasting a more than 1% reduction in productivity growth. Why does she think that is?

**Rachel Reeves:** I have huge respect for the hon. Lady, but that question does not do her justice. As I said to the right hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen) earlier, with the starting point of 2023, cumulative growth is lower. However, the general election did not take place in 2023—it took place in 2024. The economy is bigger at the end of this Parliament than the OBR forecast previously. Those are the numbers and the facts, and that is the difference that this Labour Government are making.

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I also congratulate the Chancellor on her excellent statement, which addresses the challenge the previous Government left her with. In order to drive growth across the UK, new heavy and light rail infrastructure is badly needed. What work is the Chancellor doing to develop new models of funding to deliver those important projects?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question. One of the reasons we have put an additional £13 billion into capital spending over the forecast period is to invest in the infrastructure that our country needs, including transport infrastructure, which I know my hon. Friend, as Chair of the Transport Committee, has a keen interest in. She is absolutely right: we do need to look more at how we can leverage in private sector funding for a whole range of projects, including the lower Thames crossing.

**Chris Coghlan** (Dorking and Horley) (LD): I declare an interest as an alumnus of London Business School. The Chancellor will recall that in November, when she came to the Treasury Committee, I asked her to look at a London Business School paper on using specific public R&D on defence spending to boost economic growth. I was delighted to hear that the Treasury did evaluate that paper by Professor Paolo Surico as part of the spring statement, and has listened to me and the Liberal Democrats. Does the Chancellor agree that using defence spending focused on public R&D is one way to not only keep us safe, but raise productivity and boost economic growth?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and look forward to taking more questions from him at the Treasury Committee next week. When I visit defence companies or meet our armed forces,

they tell me about the amazing abilities of new technology and innovation to help them to better do their jobs and keep our country safe. As we invest more in defence and get to 2.5% of GDP, it is absolutely right, as I have set out today, that more of that money is used for innovation, R&D and new technologies.

**Dr Zubir Ahmed** (Glasgow South West) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on grasping the challenges and opportunities that this new world presents us with. Those opportunities will mean that, in my constituency of Glasgow South West, there will be more investment in the defence sector, which is timely, because after 18 years of SNP Government, one in six people in my constituency is economically inactive. Does she agree that this investment will finally raise their ambitions and their pay packets?

**Rachel Reeves:** Unlike the SNP, Labour supports investment and jobs in the defence sector in Scotland, which, in turn, supports people in Glasgow South West and across Scotland. There will be more good jobs for young people—more jobs paying decent wages—that will keep our country safe. That is what this party believes in. It is a shame that the SNP believes in something entirely different.

**Martin Vickers** (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): A cloud hangs over the economy in northern Lincolnshire at the moment with potentially significant job losses at the Scunthorpe steelworks. In view of that, can the Chancellor assure us that funding will be available not only to look after any redundant workers, but to attract new business and provide retraining for existing workers?

**Rachel Reeves:** At the general election, we set out our plan for a steel fund as part of the National Wealth Fund. I understand the concern of hon. Members across the House about the future of the steel industry in this country. We were able to improve the deal for Tata, to protect more jobs in south Wales. We want a thriving steel sector right across the UK, and we will continue to work with the company and the trade unions to achieve just that.

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab): Making cuts instead of taxing wealth is a political choice, and taking away the personal independence payments from so many disabled people is an especially cruel choice. A disabled person who cannot cut up their own food without assistance, cannot go to the toilet without assistance and cannot wash themselves without assistance will lose their personal independence payment. Have not the Government taken the easy option of cutting support for disabled people rather than the braver option, which would be to tax the wealthiest through a wealth tax?

**Rachel Reeves:** There is nothing progressive, nothing Labour, about not supporting people who are disabled or sick or who are young to do jobs that are commensurate with what they are able to do. One in eight young people has been effectively written off by the Conservative party, and we are not willing to leave them in that position. We are consulting in the Green Paper on an additional premium to pay to the most sick and disabled people, because we recognise that they need support from the state, but too many people are not given the

opportunities to fulfil their potential, and we are not willing to carry on like that. In the Budget last year, we got rid of the non-dom tax status, increased capital gains tax, introduced VAT on private schools and changed the rules on inheritance tax, so I do not recognise what my hon. Friend says.

**Dave Doogan** (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): The Chancellor tells us that the world has changed. If that is true and it allows her to stick the boot into disabled people, it must also be true to allow her to review her income tax rates, perhaps making them commensurate with those in Scotland, which saw the Scottish economy grow in January by 0.3%, while the UK economy contracted by 0.1%. She could also choose to revise the Government's position on re-accessing the European Union single market, which would allow a £30 billion recurring return with no compensation required. She could impose a 1% tax on assets over £10 million—a wealth tax, as the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) has just highlighted—which would allow a £40 billion recurring return every year with no need for compensation. If she has the disabled, the WASPI women, pensioners and hospices in her cross hairs, why can she not tap up multi-millionaires for a few quid?

**Rachel Reeves:** The world has changed, and we can see that all around us, which is why our defence is more important than other things. That is why it is so astonishing that the SNP continues to oppose the nuclear deterrent.

**Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): I commend the Chancellor for her statement. Does she agree that the Conservative party does not understand the link between its total failure to build houses and infrastructure, which our constituents desperately want, and the economic constraints that we face today?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend speaks powerfully on behalf of her constituents in Birmingham. We need to build the homes that all our constituents are crying out for. The level of home ownership declined under the previous Government and we are determined to turn that around, as well as to build the affordable and social houses that our country needs. As we build those homes, there will be more good jobs for young people who take pride in their work. Those good jobs, which will pay decent wages, will be backed by the increase in the national living wage and by our Employment Rights Bill.

**Mr James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): The Transport Secretary failed to stand up to the transport unions, the Health and Social Care Secretary failed to stand up to the health unions, and the Work and Pensions Secretary failed to stand up to the Back Benchers of her own party. The Chancellor's savings are predicated on getting rid of a whole tranche of civil servants. How can we have any confidence that she or the Prime Minister will stand up to the civil service unions?

**Rachel Reeves:** Today, as part of the transformation fund, we have set aside £150 million next year for redundancy costs for a voluntary exit settlement, which shows how serious we are about reducing the size of the civil service, after it increased to record levels under the Conservative party.

**Michelle Scrogham** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab): Communities such as mine in Barrow and Furness feel very acutely the failures of the previous Government, as they left us in a dreadful state. Does the Chancellor agree that it is through this Government's commitment to, and funding in, Barrow and Furness and our defence sector that we can transform things on the ground, which will mean that Barrow can be a blueprint for how the defence pound can be better spent across our constituencies?

**Rachel Reeves:** I know that my hon. Friend is incredibly proud to represent Barrow and Furness and that her constituents are incredibly proud to work on our nuclear deterrent. This Government will always stand with them, putting in place our new plan for Barrow for new jobs and new investment in the town, so that we get value for money for taxpayers and, critically, ensure our country's national security.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The Chancellor was right to highlight productivity as an issue, and right, too, to focus on skills shortages, although she did not explicitly note the implicit link between them. She failed, however, to say that her productivity ambitions have been scaled back and that the number of young people not in education, employment or training is growing. Will she set out—perhaps in a note in the Library of the House or in a statement—by how much she expects apprenticeships to grow year on year? When I was a Minister, we reached the highest level in modern times, and the numbers are much lower now. We need to grow apprenticeships to build our skills and to grow productivity. If she does not do that, we will feel that hope exceeds expectation.

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that question. He speaks powerfully about something that he knows a huge amount about. Let me answer three parts of that question. First, the OBR has revised up our productivity in its forecast. Secondly, we have a massive problem with young people not in education, employment or training—it involves one in eight young people. However, as I said in answer to a previous question, the OBR has not taken into account the impact of our back to work programme. It will work on that over the summer with the DWP and the Treasury, because we want to make sure that we design that in a way that gets as many young people back into work, contributing to the economy and contributing to our society.

We were able to announce, just a couple of weeks ago in National Apprenticeship Week, an expansion of the apprenticeship programme, particularly through foundation apprenticeships and by relaxing some of the maths and English requirements. If we want to build the homes that our country needs, we need to get people into construction jobs and not say, "I'm sorry, you didn't get a grade C in maths and English, so you're not welcome on the construction site." That makes no sense at all, which is why we are reforming how apprenticeship works, to get more people with the skills they need so that they can contribute to their families and the economy. We want those numbers going up.

**Johanna Baxter** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Our fiscal rules were designed to ensure that we did not repeat the damaging austerity of the Conservative



[Johanna Baxter]

party, which harmed my constituents so much. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is only because of those fiscal rules that the OBR has today confirmed that people in Paisley and Renfrewshire South will be, on average, £500 a year better off with this Labour Government?

**Rachel Reeves:** To ensure that people are better off, we need to control inflation, which is why stability is so important; bring interest rates down, and the Bank of England has had the confidence to cut interest rates three times since the election; and boost wages, which we are beginning to see, with real wages growing at twice the rate of inflation. That benefits my hon. Friend's constituents and people up and down the country. That is why we welcome the fact that, today, the OBR has revised up real household disposable income per person by £500.

**Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD):** Today and last week the Chancellor rushed through severe cuts to the benefits system that will hit some of the most vulnerable in our society. Although we should have considered benefit reform, this is ill conceived. Can the Chancellor explain to the Chamber why she is choosing to balance the books of the nation on the backs of some of the most vulnerable in our society?

**Rachel Reeves:** I have huge respect for the hon. Gentleman, but everybody in this House and across the country can see that the welfare system is just not working. One in eight young people are not in education, employment or training and 1,000 people are going on to personal independence payments every single day, and we cannot carry on like that. The basic principles of this Government are that people who need support should be protected; that those who can work should work and will be supported with personalised, targeted support; and that we need a system that is sustainable. That is what the reforms set out by my right hon. Friend the Work and Pensions Secretary last week deliver. Alongside that, there will be further consultation on the Green Paper to make sure that those with the most severe need get the additional support that they are rightly entitled to.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Order. We have another 45 minutes on the statement. If questions are short, more Members will get in.

**Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab):** It is absolutely right that the Opposition devastated our communities and left us with billions of pounds' worth of debt, but it is not right that disabled people and the most vulnerable in our society should pay for it. Thousands of my constituents continue to be fearful about the announced welfare cuts, and disability organisations have warned that hundreds of thousands of people will be pushed into poverty. So I say to the Chancellor: we must make the right political choice. We must protect the most vulnerable in society and introduce a wealth tax so that multimillionaires and billionaires can pay their fair share.

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend represents the constituency that neighbours mine. He knows as I do that there are far too many people in both our constituencies in Leeds and Bradford who are written off. There are people who are not working who are quite capable of working if they are given support. People may be disabled, but it does not mean that they cannot work and contribute if they are given the proper support. That is what the Conservative party failed to do, and that is what our Government are determined to deliver. We will work with disabled groups and jobcentres, including the one in Pudsey, where I was last week, to make sure that we support people to fulfil their potential and do not just write them off like the Conservatives did.

**Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con):** I welcome the Chancellor's emphasis on defence expenditure and her support for the nuclear deterrent, but does she agree that, by his actions in Ukraine, Putin has restarted the cold war? Will she bear in mind that during the 1980s, up to the end of the cold war, we were regularly spending between 4.5% and 5% of GDP on defence? That is the sort of scale that is required.

**Rachel Reeves:** The right hon. Gentleman has long been an advocate of spending properly on defence. We have set out a fully funded and costed plan to get to 2.5% of GDP in the next two years and to 3% in the next Parliament. The world has changed. We can see that all around us. This Government will always put our national security and defence first, and as the situation evolves, of course so will we.

**Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab):** I thank the Chancellor for her statement. She is absolutely right to highlight the stimulus that the Employment Rights Bill will bring to our economy, but I respectfully say that the impact of the cuts to welfare payments will be reduced incomes for some of my poorest constituents. That contrasts with the easy ride that the very wealthy get from lower margins of tax on their assets and gains than my constituents face through income tax. The world indeed has changed since the Chancellor set her fiscal rules, so will she consider putting capital gains tax on an equal footing with income tax or implementing a wealth tax of 2% on assets worth over £10 million in order to improve the country's finances?

**Rachel Reeves:** At the Budget last autumn, we increased taxes by £40 billion without asking working people to pay more. We did that by abolishing the non-dom tax status, increasing the rates of capital gains tax, tightening the rules around inheritance tax and, yes, by asking businesses to pay more as well. We have already raised taxes to put more money into our health service, reduce NHS waiting lists and provide free breakfast clubs at primary schools. Today's spring statement shows that we can grow the size of our economy through planning reforms and therefore ensure more money for our public services. The Government's No. 1 priority is growth, so I am so pleased that the OBR has said that by the end of this Parliament the economy will be bigger than that we inherited it from the Conservatives.

**Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP):** The Chancellor has claimed today that she is building foundations for the economy, but sadly those foundations are built on



sand—increased borrowing, higher inflation, lower growth, jobs taxes and so on. How will such structures stand against the economic forces that will be affecting the United Kingdom, as she has described today? Specifically, what proportion of the transformation fund will be available to the Northern Ireland Executive for the important transformation of public services in Northern Ireland?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. The OBR is clear that the economy at the end of this Parliament will be bigger than it previously envisaged—bigger than the plans we inherited from the previous Government—and the average person with real household disposable income will see their income rise by £500. We are already beginning to deliver the change that we promised. At the Budget last year I was able to announce the biggest ever settlements for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. That continues to be the case after today's spring statement.

**John Grady (Glasgow East) (Lab):** Reckless management of public finances leads to higher costs of Government borrowing. As any economist will say, that increases the cost of capital across the British economy, putting at risk and increasing the cost of the essential investments in housing and infrastructure that my constituents desperately need. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a very important reason why it is essential to manage public finances carefully, unlike the last Conservative Government, and unlike the Government in Scotland, who are overfamiliar with emergency Budgets?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the importance of robust fiscal rules which, even in difficult economic circumstances, we will continue to meet through the decisions that I have set out today. The reason that economic stability is so important can be seen in what happened in the last Parliament, where a Government borrowed beyond their means. The people who lost out were not the wealthy but ordinary working people, who paid more in the shops and more on their mortgages and rents. This Government will never repeat the mistakes of Liz Truss and the Conservatives.

**Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con):** The Chancellor has created a storm and is now complaining about the rain. She increased spending to £70 billion, she increased borrowing by £30 billion, and she increased tax by £40 billion, yet the economy shrank in January. She talked about change and the abolition of NHS England. In a written question I asked the Department how much that would cost, and it said that there would be some up-front costs but could not specify what they would be. Could she tell me the estimated cost of this top-down change to abolish NHS England?

**Rachel Reeves:** It is really difficult to understand what the Conservative party want. Do they want to reduce the cost of admin and bureaucracy, or do they want to carry on with everything the way it was? We want to change things. That is why the transformation fund that I set out today includes £150 million for a voluntary exit scheme. We want more money on the frontline, not in the back office in a bloated bureaucracy that was left by the Conservatives.

**Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford) (Lab):** There is so much to welcome in today's statement, but the Chancellor will be aware of serious concerns regarding welfare reform. A constituent told me last week:

"I'm terrified of what will happen to me if I can't work. I'm already having thoughts of suicide at the prospect of these changes and what they will mean for disabled people."

Today's impact assessment shows a 250,000 increase in the number of people living in relative poverty and a 50,000 increase in children living in relative poverty. What will the Chancellor do to stop this from happening?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend speaks about a constituent who is in work. I am sure that she and others will welcome the work that Charlie Mayfield has done on ensuring that people with sickness and disability can stay in work. We know that the best place for people is in work—for both their physical and mental health—and that too often when people drop out of the labour market they really struggle to get back into it. Alongside the targeted support to get people back into work, we are determined to work with businesses and ensure that more people with sickness and disability can stay in work, contributing to their family finances and to the wider economy.

**Nigel Farage (Clacton) (Reform):** Does the Chancellor agree that GDP as a measure of growth and relative wealth is not the most relevant number to our constituents? As we are living in an age of mass immigration and a rising population, surely, what matters to our constituents is GDP per capita, which has fallen consistently for the past two years and is falling still. Should we not tell people that, actually, they are getting poorer?

**Rachel Reeves:** The OBR forecast that GDP per capita will increase by 5.6% during this Parliament, having fallen under the previous Government. If the hon. Gentleman ever gets to Clacton, he can tell his constituents that.

**Matthew Patrick (Wirral West) (Lab):** I welcome the Chancellor's £3 billion investment into a transformation fund to sort out how government is run. Does the Chancellor agree that the Tories ducked that reform—they should have done it but did not—and their failure to address it put pressure on frontline services and stretched the public finances?

**Rachel Reeves:** The transformation fund, worth £3.25 billion, is about trying to reduce further the costs of failure. We are putting more money into recruiting foster carers, because we want to ensure that more children get the best possible start in life. We also know that children ending up in poor-quality children's homes has consequences not just at the start of their life but later on. We are also putting more money into technology in the Probation Service so that probation works better to rehabilitate offenders and ensure that people pay for the crimes that they commit.

**Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con):** The Chancellor rightly reminded the House that the British public are watching. Among them are tens of thousands of the most vulnerable pensioners in our society. Will she please explain what is Labour about removing the winter fuel payment from those on £13,500 a year?

**Rachel Reeves:** As a result of the triple lock, which we have been able to protect, next month the basic state pension will increase by more than £400. By the end of this Parliament, the triple lock, which the shadow Chancellor opposes, will cost an additional £31 billion. That is the protection that we are giving to pensioners, as well as record investment in our NHS, which older people use with greater frequency than anyone else.

**Zarah Sultana** (Coventry South) (Ind): The UK is the 6th richest country in the world, yet more than one in three children and 25% of adults live in poverty. Since Labour came into power, 25,000 more children have been pushed into poverty due to the two-child benefit cap. Now, according to the Government's own impact assessment, more than 250,000 people will be pushed into poverty as a result of these cuts, including 50,000 children. I ask the Chancellor, who earns over £150,000 annually, who has accepted £7,500-worth of free clothing and who recently took freebie tickets to see Sabrina Carpenter, does she think that austerity 2.0 is the change that people really voted for?

**Rachel Reeves:** There is nothing progressive and nothing Labour about pouring more money into a broken system. The changes that we are making will help young people who are not in education, employment or training, through targeted support. As I set out, the OBR has not scored any of our back to work programme—the biggest programme for many years—and it will do so in the autumn. The best way to lift people out of poverty is to get them into good, secure work that pays a decent wage. From next month we are increasing the national living wage by £1,400 for someone working full time. The Employment Rights Bill will ensure that people have security at work. That is the difference that this Labour Government are making.

**Adrian Ramsay** (Waveney Valley) (Green): The Chancellor knows that our economy has been driven to the edge over the past 15 years, with ordinary people forced to bear the burden while a small minority have amassed extreme wealth. She could change that. Her own Back Benchers are lining up to argue for a wealth tax. Why will she not do the fair and right thing and introduce a tax on the very wealthiest, rather than launching austerity 2.0 and removing vital support from disabled and ill people?

**Rachel Reeves:** The best thing that we can do for our constituents is build the homes that they desperately need. I have no understanding of why Green party Members voted against the Planning and Infrastructure Bill this week. What do they have against families getting homes and young people getting jobs?

**Amanda Martin** (Portsmouth North) (Lab): Today's defence announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is fantastic news for my city. It delivers security for working people across the country and cements Portsmouth's reputation as not just the historic home but the future home of the Royal Navy. After 14 years in which the Conservative party decimated all areas of our armed services, imposed three Portsmouth Ministers on my city and axed shipbuilding, it has fallen to this Government to once again fix the mess inherited from you—the people over there. Sorry, I almost said

“you lot”. Does she agree that the announcement will secure the future of the naval base and those serving our country?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend is a proud advocate for her city, and this Government are a proud advocate for the people of Portsmouth. That is why we have put investment in the Portsmouth naval base in today's statement. As we grow our defence spending to keep our country safe and secure, we want to ensure more good jobs that pay decent wages, to make Britain a defence industrial superpower, and to support those who serve on the frontline.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): Today, the Chancellor could have taken action to reverse the damage that she has done to people and businesses in my constituency and beyond, but she failed; she chose not to. What does she say to all the pensioners, farmers, businesses, charities, hospices and hard-working people who face her huge tax rises?

**Rachel Reeves:** When I became Chancellor, I inherited from the Conservative party a £22 billion black hole, which we have taken action to address. I would say to the right hon. Lady's constituents that they will now see a doctor or nurse more quickly than under the last Government, because NHS waiting lists have fallen for five months in a row.

**John Slinger** (Rugby) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the main contrast between this Government and the last one is strength versus weakness? They were too weak to crack down on wasteful spending, to address the tax breaks and loopholes for the wealthy, and to take on the blockers in the planning system. Does she further agree that while the Conservatives—the party of vested interests—seek to conserve what has failed, this Labour Government have the strength to take the tough, long-term decisions to build a better and much fairer Britain?

**Rachel Reeves:** Today, the OBR has scored some of our planning measures, which will make the economy £6.8 billion bigger by the end of the Parliament, contributing £3.4 billion to our public finances and services. That is possible only because we are taking on the vested interests, and are getting Britain building by backing the builders, not the blockers. We are the Government increasing defence spending to 2.5% of GDP. The Tories had 14 years to do that, but they failed. This Labour Government have done that in our first year.

**Josh Babarinde** (Eastbourne) (LD): Heartbreakingly, last week St Wilfrid's Hospice in Eastbourne announced many redundancies, citing the national insurance increase as a reason. I have just received a message from Mrs Robinson at Motcombe school, which faces increased costs due to a catering supplier passing on the cost of the NIC hike. If the Chancellor will not increase the digital services tax to fund a reversal of that hike, how will these organisations be supported to keep doing their great work?

**Rachel Reeves:** At the Budget, we set out tax increases on the wealthiest and on businesses to properly fund our public services. Constituents in Eastbourne will get to see a doctor or nurse a little more quickly, and will benefit from the breakfast clubs that we are rolling out

because we had the money to. Hon. Members cannot back increased investment in our public services, including the settlement for hospices, if they oppose raising the money to pay for it.

**Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): I understand that this Government inherited from the Conservative party a huge financial mess, caused by over a decade of austerity. However, what is the justification for cutting disability benefits—a third of disabled people are already in poverty—instead of taxing the growing wealth of the super-rich? A 2% tax on assets over £10 million could raise £24 billion a year.

**Rachel Reeves:** At the Budget, we set out £40 billion-worth of tax increases; we got rid of the non-dom tax status, increased capital gains tax, put VAT on private schools and tightened the rules around inheritance tax. We made those decisions so that we could invest more in our public services, including in our schools and our hospitals. Indeed, we have now committed to lifting defence spending within the next two years to 2.5% of GDP. On welfare spending, there is nothing progressive about writing off a generation of young people, so our targeted, personalised support will help people get back into work, lift them out of poverty, and help them to contribute both to their family finances and to our nation's finances.

**Katie Lam** (Weald of Kent) (Con): The right hon. Lady talks of financial responsibility, but will she please tell us when Government bond yields hit their highest levels since the global financial crisis, and who was the Chancellor of the Exchequer then? If she needs a clue, we can bring her a mirror.

**Rachel Reeves:** If we look at financial markets and follow them closely, we can see that the increases in bond yields in the UK, France and Germany have closely tracked each other. Global financial instability has affected countries around the world, and that is why it is so important that we continue to meet our fiscal rules, as I have set out today.

**Sam Rushworth** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): A moment ago, the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage) mentioned GDP per capita; I see that he asked his question and ran away. The truth is that GDP per capita increased by only 4.3% in the past 16 years, compared with 46% in the years prior. What matters to my constituents in the left-behind towns and villages of Bishop Auckland is not just growth, but growth that they can feel, and which has an impact for their pockets. What will the Chancellor do to ensure that working people feel the growth?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government want people in Bishop Auckland and constituents in all parts of our country to feel the benefits of growth through good jobs paying decent wages. That is why we are increasing the national living wage; making work pay; and backing the builders—not the blockers—who are creating new jobs, new homes for families, new transport infrastructure and new energy infrastructure. The OBR has said today that, compared with the plans we inherited, real household disposable

income per person is set to rise by £500 by the end of this Parliament. That shows the difference that the Government are making.

**Llinos Medi** (Ynys Môn) (PC): Wales has a higher percentage of disabled people and a larger public sector workforce than the UK, so we will be hit hardest by these cruel cuts. All that damage for self-imposed fiscal rules. There have been five major changes to fiscal rules since 1997. Will the Chancellor change the fiscal rules now, so that she does not impose further austerity?

**Rachel Reeves:** Last year in the Budget, we provided the biggest ever settlement for the Welsh Government, yet Plaid voted against that. I do not understand why the hon. Member does not want money to go to Wales and to her constituents.

**Ms Polly Billington** (East Thanet) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement, and in particular her recognition of the excellent work of Labour-run Thanet district council, which is building more social homes with local firms and employing local people, including local apprentices. The Government's recent planning changes mean not only council homes for local people, but growth. Will she confirm that the Office for Budget Responsibility has scored only the effect of the national planning policy framework changes, and not the effect of the upcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill?

**Rachel Reeves:** I was pleased to note in my statement that Thanet has already come forward with plans to build affordable housing under the affordable housing plan, for which I set out more money. Opposition parties that abstain or vote against the Planning and Infrastructure Bill are voting against homes for our constituents and jobs for our young people. On the Government side of the House, we back the builders, not the blockers. We back opportunities for young people and housing for our constituents. It is a shame that those parties do not do the same.

**Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): The Chancellor claimed that growth was her top priority, yet she has taken the fastest-growing economy in the G7 and brought it to a shuddering halt. She promised that there would be no tax rises, but next week's jobs tax will put tax rises on ordinary working people. Today, she has cut the housing numbers by 200,000 and put up borrowing by £18 billion in the next two years. Is it not time that the Prime Minister invited the Chancellor next door and said, "Rachel, you're fired"?

**Rachel Reeves:** The plans that we inherited from the previous Government saw the OECD forecast that the UK would have the slowest growth in the G7 this year. It is now forecasting us to have the second-highest growth. That is the difference that this Labour Government are making, moving us up the league tables.

**David Burton-Sampson** (Southend West and Leigh) (Lab): I thank the Chancellor and her team for the prudent work that they are doing to restore stability to our economy. Figures show that wages are already increasing in my constituency under this Labour Government, and inflation is falling. Does my right



[David Burton-Sampson]

hon. Friend agree that that, alongside the new living wage, worth £1,400 a year, will make work pay and start to lift more people out of poverty?

**Rachel Reeves:** I was pleased to be able to announce in the Budget last year a 6.7% increase in the national living wage, as well as a record increase in the youth rate of the minimum wage. That will help lift working people—working families—out of poverty. That comes alongside our Employment Rights Bill, which will ensure greater security for those who go out to work.

**Sarah Dyke** (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): Growth is not the word on the lips of farmers, whose confidence in the Government is at a low ebb following the family farm tax, the abrupt closure of the sustainable farming incentive, and now possible departmental cuts, which could reduce the farming budget further. Charlie from Upton Bridge farm in Long Sutton told me that he is contemplating leaving his ground fallow due to the risk of a failed crop putting his farm further into debt. Will the Chancellor assure farmers in Glastonbury and Somerton, and across the country, that following the spending review, the Government are still committed to championing British farming while protecting the environment?

**Rachel Reeves:** At the Budget, we put record investment into our farming sector, after being left plans by the previous Government that did not even involve their using all their farming budget. We are determined to give farmers the support that they need.

**Nesil Caliskan** (Barking) (Lab): I thank the Chancellor for her statement. I represent Barking, which she will know has some of the highest deprivation figures in the country, and where 20% of working adults have no qualifications whatsoever. Does she agree that it is only by our creating jobs and those people getting the qualifications that they need that those people can ever improve their life chances?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend speaks passionately about expanding opportunities for her constituents in Barking. The changes to the apprenticeship levy and the growth and skills levy are about ensuring that more people, including her constituents, can access apprenticeship courses and foundation courses. Just this weekend, we were able to announce an additional 60,000 places on construction courses to help people get jobs that pay a decent wage and offer security. That is what the Government are all about.

**David Reed** (Exmouth and Exeter East) (Con): Given that the Chancellor chose not to mention Chagos in her statement, and that she chose not to answer the shadow Chancellor's question on Chagos, can the House assume that this disastrous deal will not be going ahead, and that, more importantly, the UK taxpayer will not be footing the bill?

**Rachel Reeves:** As the hon. Gentleman will know, our Prime Minister and President Trump discussed these issues when our Prime Minister was at the White House recently. We continue to work on those plans.

The most important thing is that we protect our national security and can continue to operate out of that important base.

**Neil Duncan-Jordan** (Poole) (Lab): Paragraph 1.14 of the OBR report outlines that the planned cuts to disability benefits will reduce personal independence payments for 800,000 claimants, and cut health-related universal credit for 3 million families. Is it not time that we asked those with the broadest shoulders to carry the heaviest burden, rather than the poorest in our society?

**Rachel Reeves:** As I have set out, the Office for Budget Responsibility does not assume in its numbers any changes in people going back to work. That is what we are going to work on, between the OBR, the DWP and the Treasury, over the summer, so that we develop those plans to ensure that people are not worse off but better off because they can progress into jobs that suit their abilities and needs. We want more people to have the fulfilment of a good job, with security, that pays a decent wage.

**Alex Brewer** (North East Hampshire) (LD): In a statement with significant problems, I welcome the Chancellor's commitment to better military homes, which the Liberal Democrats have been calling for. Will she clarify how much and by when, and will that commitment include RAF Odiham in my constituency—or is it just for the constituencies that she listed, which happen to have Labour MPs?

**Rachel Reeves:** We support military families wherever they are based in the United Kingdom. We will set out more detail in the spending review in June. In the past few months, we have already taken back into the public sector homes that were previously contracted out to the private sector so that we can make improvements to military accommodation, which I know will be welcomed in the hon. Lady's constituency and by military families across our country.

**Sarah Coombes** (West Bromwich) (Lab): My West Brom constituents work hard and pay their taxes, and they want to know that the Government treat that money with respect. I am glad that we finally have a Chancellor who is being careful with every pound of taxpayers' money so that we can invest in the NHS, which has seen a 10% cut to the waiting list in my area. How is she drawing a line under the waste and chaos of the previous Government and finally putting our public finances back on a stable footing?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend speaks powerfully on behalf of her constituents, ensuring that the people of West Bromwich get a good deal from their public services and value for money when they pay their taxes. There was too much waste under the previous Government. That was exemplified during the pandemic, when so many contracts went to friends and donors. We have appointed a covid corruption commissioner because we want that money back in our public services, not in the hands of Tory friends and donors.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Ind): There are 4.3 million children living in poverty in our society, and 1.2 million people in receipt of PIP are about to lose it following the statement last week. The Chancellor

has put a huge amount of money into defence. Could she not think for a moment of reversing the decision last week to take £5 billion out of the welfare budget, and of ending the two-child benefit cap, which has driven so many children and families into really desperate poverty?

**Rachel Reeves:** I will not make any apologies for putting more money in defence. This Labour Government take the defence of our country seriously, and so we should. We are the party that created NATO, and the leadership of the Labour party today will always defend our country.

**David Pinto-Duschinsky** (Hendon) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her statement and on her action to end austerity by investing £26 billion in the NHS and £3 billion in education, raising defence budgets, and unleashing over £100 billion of additional capital investment to build the foundations of our economy. On the day after this Government voted through a pay rise for 3 million working people by raising the minimum wage, does she agree that it is only by making the tough decisions to restore stability and push ahead with our bold plans for reform that the Government can repair the terrible damage done by the Conservative party, deliver strong public services and get more money in people's pockets?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question and for all his work to back growth and improve living standards for working people. I was pleased to announce in the spring statement £13 billion extra for capital spending during the course of this Parliament. We know that the previous Government always made the easy choice to cut capital spending, and the deterioration of infrastructure is why we are in the mess that we are today. We will not make those short-term decisions; we will invest to grow our economy, working with business to do so.

**Nick Timothy** (West Suffolk) (Con): The Chancellor's trouble is that although her manifesto promised to limit spending increases to £9.5 billion a year, her Budget increased spending by £76 billion a year—eight times as much. She has previously said that she will not come back asking for more tax rises or more borrowing. Will she rule out both in the Budget later this year?

**Rachel Reeves:** The Budget in autumn last year wiped the slate clean after 14 years of economic mismanagement by the Conservative party. We will not have to repeat a Budget like that because we are not going to inherit anything like that ever again. We have changed the rules so that the OBR always gets information now, rather than the information being hidden as it was by the previous Government.

**Clive Jones** (Wokingham) (LD): My hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) gave examples of alternative taxes to Labour's national insurance increases, asking that big banks, social media giants and online gambling companies pay their fair share of tax. Can the Chancellor confirm that she has heard those Liberal Democrat alternatives, and will she explain why she is not listening to those fair and sensible proposals?

**Rachel Reeves:** One thing that is scored in the OBR document today is the gambling levy that the Government have introduced. That money will be used to ensure that we regulate gambling properly in our country, and rightly so.

**Gregor Poynton** (Livingston) (Lab): For defence companies in Scotland, UK Export Finance plays a crucial role in financing sales to our allies around the world, including Ukraine. Will the Chancellor outline how the increase in capacity for UK Export Finance will help defence companies in Scotland to create jobs in my Livingston constituency and strengthen our national defence?

**Rachel Reeves:** Just two weeks ago, I was able to announce £2 billion extra for UK Export Finance specifically to help defence companies in the UK to export. As countries around the world, particularly in Europe, increase defence spending, I want to ensure that we get those contracts here in Britain to support our proud defence industry, including in places such as Livingston and Rosyth, where I met Babcock just a couple of weeks ago.

**Robin Swann** (South Antrim) (UUP): The Chancellor's statement referred to people who were listening. The president of the Ulster Farmers Union was in the Public Gallery to hear her statement, which did not reference agriculture or farming at all. It talked about the country's security and safety, but there was nothing on food safety. It spoke of not writing off a generation of young people, but her family farm tax will write off a generation of young farmers. What confidence can she give our agricultural sector?

**Rachel Reeves:** With specific reference to agricultural property relief, people will not pay extra tax unless they have a farm worth around £3 million. More than two thirds of farms are not affected at all by the changes in that relief. For those who do pay the tax, it is at half the rate that anybody else pays, and they can pay it, interest-free, over a period of 10 years. That is very different from the inheritance tax bills that anybody else pays.

**Mark Ferguson** (Gateshead Central and Whickham) (Lab): I welcome the Chancellor's reference to the £13 billion of additional capital expenditure announced today. Will she put today's statement into the context of the significant investments that have already been made and those that are forthcoming, and contrast that with the previous Government, who did not have a plan for long-term growth and abandoned communities like mine?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend speaks powerfully on behalf of his constituents in Gateshead, who rely on the infrastructure that our country needs, be it energy, digital or transport infrastructure, or the houses that all our constituents need. In the Budget last year I put £100 billion extra into capital spending during the course of this Parliament, and I have been able to announce an additional £13 billion today. Unlike the Conservative party, I am not willing to cut capital investment, because it is absolutely crucial to grow the economy and leverage the private sector investment that we need.

**Ben Obese-Jecty** (Huntingdon) (Con): The Chancellor has made much of the Government's investment in defence and desire to make the country a defence industrial superpower. I am keen to pitch for a slice of the protected £400 million for UK defence innovation. Huntingdon is the home of our defence intelligence capability, the US air force's joint intelligence operations centre Europe, and the NATO Intelligence Fusion Centre. There is huge investment in sites such as the Alconbury Weald enterprise campus and Brampton Cross, and the potential redevelopment of Ministry of Defence land around RAF Wyton. It is the perfect location for defence start-ups, and with the arrival of several already in flight, the US Government are investing north of £500 million in Huntingdon alone. Will she make a similar commitment to Huntingdon and include it in her list of defence sites?

**Rachel Reeves:** What a great pitch! I am sure that one of the Ministers from the Ministry of Defence will be pleased to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss those opportunities. As we move to 2.5% of GDP spent on defence and 3% in the next Parliament, I am determined that that money benefits our troops in the UK but also supports us becoming a defence industrial superpower. I am sure that we can work with the hon. Gentleman to realise those ambitions for Huntingdon.

**Rosie Wrighting** (Kettering) (Lab): The Conservatives left a £22 billion hole in our public finances and they continue to oppose every decision made by the Chancellor to clean up their mess. Can the Chancellor tell us how things would look now if the Conservatives had their way?

**Rachel Reeves:** What it would mean for people in Kettering and around the country if we had continued under the plans of the previous Government is that interest rates would have remained high, inflation would have remained high and growth would continue to flatline, whereas the OBR today has forecast that real household disposable incomes will rise, growth will be higher and living standards will be higher because we have returned stability to the economy and we are backing the builders, not the blockers. *[Interruption.]*

**Max Wilkinson** (Cheltenham) (LD): I do not wish to interrupt the discussion on the Front Benches. I have another opportunity for the Chancellor. In Cheltenham, we have a scheme that can produce jobs and growth and will support the defence industry: the Golden Valley development next to GCHQ, which will be a key part of this country's defence investment over the coming years. Will the Chancellor take it upon herself to work with Ministers in other Departments who already know about that to ensure that we get the investment that we deserve and that GCHQ workers deserve too?

**Rachel Reeves:** I am proud of what GCHQ does to keep our country safe. Part of what we are doing around the defence budget, above the lift to 2.5%, is including some of the work of the Security Service that, increasingly, is crucial for our national security and defence. That is on top of the 2.5%. As we protect defence spending, it is right that we take into account GCHQ and other security agencies as well. I am very

happy to work with the hon. Gentleman to ensure that we maximise the benefits for so many constituencies, including Cheltenham.

**Graeme Downie** (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): May I thank the Chancellor for her statement and welcome the increase in defence spending, which represents a huge opportunity for Scottish workers? I was delighted to have her visit Rosyth in my constituency recently. Will she work to ensure a continuous shipbuilding programme in this country to maximise the opportunities for Scottish workers? Does she agree that it is utterly shameful that those workers have been ignored by the SNP for the past 18 years? Also, will she confirm that this Labour Government will always value the role of shipbuilding for our economy and our national defence?

**Rachel Reeves:** I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. It is just a shame that there are no SNP members in the Chamber—although there are so few of them—to hear what he said. Perhaps my hon. Friend would write to the SNP and ask them why they refuse to back the defence sector in the United Kingdom and specifically in Scotland.

**Mr Adnan Hussain** (Blackburn) (Ind): It is estimated that in under five years there will be more than 3 million families in receipt of disability benefits who will lose financially as a result of today's announcement, with an average loss of £1,720 per year compared to inflation. Is the Chancellor comfortable knowing that she has brought despair and horror to disabled people and their families across the country?

**Rachel Reeves:** We have a very basic principle that people who deserve to be protected should be, that those who can work should and that we need a system that is sustainable. We do not have any of those three things today. That is why we are reforming our welfare system to give additional support for those with the highest needs, to give personalised, targeted and guaranteed support to help people back into work and to ensure that we have a system that is sustainable so that it is there for generations to come.

**Louise Jones** (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): As the Chancellor will know, the east midlands is often at the bottom of investment league tables and we suffer through a lack of transport planning. Will the Chancellor outline how the extra public investment and the national wealth fund will change that and deliver for people in North East Derbyshire?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question. People in North East Derbyshire will benefit from the additional homes, whether they are able to buy those homes, rent those homes or, indeed, build those homes, as we expand the number of construction apprenticeships and construct 10 new technical excellence colleges. They will also benefit from the increases in real household disposable income. When the economy grows, we want to have more money in people's pockets and that is what the OBR today confirms will happen.

**Helen Morgan** (North Shropshire) (LD): Pharmacies such as Green End pharmacy in Whitchurch in my constituency are struggling with the impending hike in employer national insurance and business rates. In fact, they do not know what they are being paid for NHS services



this financial year, let alone next. Will the Chancellor confirm whether Pharmacy First will continue beyond the end of next week?

**Rachel Reeves:** I am sure that the relevant Health Minister will be willing to meet with the hon. Lady to talk about that. Because of the investment that we put into our national health service at the Budget last year—more than £20 billion of additional funding—we are able to start to rebuild our NHS and reduce waiting lists. Indeed, we have done that now for five months in a row.

**Alex Baker** (Aldershot) (Lab): As we secure Britain's role in a changing world, I welcome the Chancellor's focus on defence innovation and I thank her for referencing my community, Aldershot and Farnborough. We are ready to serve.

When it comes to defence innovation, too many small and medium defence businesses in my community struggle to get access to the banking and finance facilities they need, often on the basis of self-imposed environmental, social and governance criteria. Will the Chancellor join me in welcoming the investors and financial institutions that have responded to the campaign that I am leading with my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Mr Charters), calling on our banks and our fund managers to broaden their approach so that we can defend our country, support Ukraine and fire up our industrial base?

**Rachel Reeves:** I was pleased to mention my hon. Friend's constituency in my statement. As the home of the British Army, on behalf of this Government, we thank the people of Aldershot and Farnborough for the service that they give our country every single day.

My hon. Friend is right to mention the importance of companies in the defence sector, whether big or small, being able to access finance. That has never been more important than it is today, when the threats posed by Putin continue to grow. I therefore urge everyone in financial services to do their part to make sure that our fantastic defence start-ups have the money that they need to grow and help defend our country and our values.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** For the final question, I call Jim Allister.

**Jim Allister** (North Antrim) (TUV): Will the Chancellor better explain how the civil service cuts will translate into the devolved regions and the impact on future block grant allocations? Are there lessons to be learnt from the fact that in 2015, the Northern Ireland Executive had a voluntary exit scheme, upon which it spent £700 million, and then proceeded to re-engage hundreds of civil servants as agency workers?

**Rachel Reeves:** The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point. That is why we have not set a number for the reduction in the size of the civil service and instead have made it an admin target. We do not want the number of civil servants to fall and then the number of agency workers and consultancies to increase. Absolutely, this Government will learn from failed efforts, both of the UK Government under the Conservatives and other Administrations in the past.

## Cornish Language and Heritage (Education and Recognition)

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

2.48 pm

**Anna Gelderd** (South East Cornwall) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the teaching and promotion of the Cornish language in educational institutions; to make provision about the recognition of the Cornish language and Cornish heritage; and for connected purposes.

Today is not just about preserving the Cornish language, or Kernewek in Cornish; it is about protecting a cultural identity that is woven into the fabric of Cornwall's past, present and our future. Cornish can be traced back 4,000 years. Over that time, Cornish speakers were driven further west due to conflicts and invasions from Europe, but it was our fishermen who kept the language alive until it faded in the 18th century. Despite this, Cornish was officially recognised as a regional language by the UK Government in 2002 under part 2 of the European charter for regional or minority languages.

This was a landmark moment, affirming that Cornish—alongside Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, Irish, Scots and Ulster Scots—is a language to be protected and promoted. The UK Government have committed to supporting those languages, yet Cornish remains at part 2 status while four of the other five Celtic languages have part 3 protection, which offers stronger commitments in areas such as education, public life and the media. In November 2024, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages issued recommendations urging the UK Government to take stronger measures to support minority languages, including enhancing educational provision and promoting language awareness. This Bill would work in lockstep with those recommendations and strengthen the UK's commitment to linguistic diversity.

Recognition of Kernewek is growing, but it needs sustained support. Cornwall council and the Cornish National Minority Working Group have championed its survival through initiatives such as Go Cornish, which now reaches over 8,000 primary school children in 51 schools, including Dobwalls community primary and Menheniot primary school in South East Cornwall, yet Cornish is still not formally embedded in secondary or higher education. A GCSE in Cornish once existed, but was discontinued in 1996. The option to learn should always be available, and the Government's own charter commitments state that minority language education should be strengthened, and we must ensure that learning Cornish is a viable, accessible option—not a requirement, but a choice for those who wish to engage with their cultural heritage.

Teaching Cornish should not be an added burden for overstretched schools, but rather an exciting opportunity for students who wish to learn. The Go Cornish programme proves that effective teaching can be done without increasing teacher workload, as it provides structured resources, sound files and low administration learning models. It aligns with Ofsted's cultural capital framework, which encourages schools to celebrate cultural traditions and histories. Beyond schools, there must be provision to provide lifelong learning opportunities. At present, hundreds of people sign up for Kernewek classes each year, and universities such as Exeter and Cambridge

have previously offered Kernewek courses. If Welsh and Gaelic can be successfully integrated into higher education, why not Cornish?

Language visibility in public life is crucial for its survival. Currently, Cornish does not have official status in Cornwall, nor is there any legislative requirement for its promotion. However, Cornwall council has worked hard since 2013 to implement a strategy promoting the language. I want to see this work and local efforts strengthened by increasing the use of Cornish in road signs, place names and public services. Kernewek is a beautiful and expressive language, reflected in the meanings behind some of the names of our towns and villages. Menheniot means “sanctuary of St Neot”. Cargreen translates to “seal rock”. Looe means “sea lake” and Luxulyan signifies the “holy place of a saint”.

Understanding these meanings not only improves our knowledge of the language but deepens our sense of belonging and connection to Cornwall's history, landscape and identity. The Media Act 2024 now ensures that public service broadcasters must consider content in regional and minority languages, including Cornish, yet obstacles remain to efforts to enhance visibility and normalise everyday use of the language in media such as local radio, television and online platforms.

Cornwall's distinct culture is not just historical; it is living and evolving. Supporting Cornish in public life is not about excluding English but about embracing bilingualism as a strength. We have seen this work successfully in Wales and Scotland, and Cornwall should not be left behind. Supporting Cornish language and heritage is not just a cultural necessity; it also makes economic sense. Research commissioned by Glasgow city council in 2022 found that Gaelic contributed £21.6 million to Glasgow's economy through tourism, cultural events and branding. Cornwall has its own recognised identity and we have the same potential.

Tourism is a cornerstone of Cornwall's economy but it must be sustainable and beneficial for local communities. Research published in 2021, has shown that technological advancements leading to globalisation have resulted in an increased trend of tourists looking for a unique, authentic experiences, and cultural tourism is a growing market. Kernewek events, heritage experiences and bilingual signage can enhance visitors' experience while reinforcing our local identity. This is not about selling our identity; it is about strengthening it. The commercialisation of linguistic heritage must be done responsibly to ensure it benefits Cornish people first and foremost.

Cornwall's language and culture are deeply connected to our natural environment, and it is not just aesthetic; it is part of our identity. Cornwall and its people have always lived in partnership with nature. We are of the sea and the land, working in harmony in the environment to grow and thrive. This is demonstrated in Cornwall that we see today. Our landscape and coastlines are beautiful, drawing tourism from across the UK and internationally and serving as the backdrop for brilliant movies and TV shows, such as “Beyond Paradise”. Although the show is set in Devon, it is actually filmed in Looe, Whitsand bay and other beautiful locations across South East Cornwall. Clearly Devon recognises the beauty of Cornwall.

Even our wildlife carries Cornish identity, and none more so than the Cornish chough, our iconic red-billed black-feathered crow. Once lost in Cornwall in the

mid-20th century, it was successfully reintroduced in 2001, a symbol of resilience and revival. And just as the chough has returned, so too can Kernewek flourish with the right protection and support. The Duchy is also visited by iconic species such as humpback whales, basking sharks and blue sharks, while our land nurtures unique flora such as the Cornish heath, a vibrant purple flower that thrives on our specific rugged cliffs. In Cornwall, we are proudly unique and distinct.

The revival of Cornish has come through grassroots efforts, supported by Cornwall council and cultural organisations such as Golden Tree Productions, the Cornish Language Board and the Institute of Cornish Studies, but national support is needed to secure its future. Cornish is more than just words. It is a link to our history, our stories, our identity and our future. The promotion of Cornish language and heritage is about ensuring that Cornwall's culture and language have the recognition they deserve, and the support to flourish for generations to come. My a generth pubonan dhe dhyski nebes Kernewek. I encourage everyone to learn some Cornish. Meur ras. Thank you.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Anna Gelderd, Jayne Kirkham, Noah Law, Perran Moon, Andrew George and Ben Maguire present the Bill.

Anna Gelderd accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 June, and to be printed (Bill 211).*

## Tobacco and Vapes Bill

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

### New Clause 11

#### AGE VERIFICATION IN RELATION TO TOBACCO AND VAPING PRODUCTS ETC

“(1) The Tobacco and Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Act 2010 (asp 3) is amended as follows.

(2) In section 4 (age restrictions on sale of tobacco products etc)—

(a) in subsection (2), for paragraph (b) substitute—

‘(b) the accused had taken such steps as may be prescribed to establish the customer's age.’;

(b) omit subsections (3) and (4).

(3) In section 4A (age restrictions on sale of vaping products etc)—

(a) in subsection (2), for paragraph (b) substitute—

‘(b) the accused had taken such steps as may be prescribed to establish the customer's age.’;

(b) omit subsections (3) and (4).

(4) In section 4B (age verification policy), in subsection (5) omit paragraph (b).”—(Ashley Dalton.)

*Someone accused of selling things contrary to the age of sale restrictions in Scotland has a defence if they checked the customer's age on certain documents. The clause allows other steps to be specified to establish a person's age. The purpose is to accommodate digital methods of verification.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

2.58 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Ashley Dalton):** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

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

New clause 1—*Review of contaminated e-liquid*—

“(1) Within six months of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must conduct a review into the prevalence of contaminated e-liquid in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

(2) The review required under subsection (1), must include, but is not limited to an assessment of—

(a) the awareness of the issue of contaminated e-liquid,

(b) the extent of e-liquids found spiked with illegal substances,

(c) the measures in place to tackle the importation of contaminated e-liquid,

(d) measures used by other jurisdictions to combat the importation and prevalence of contaminated e-liquid, and

(e) options for further regulating e-liquid to limit the dangers of contamination.

(3) In conducting the review required under subsection (1), the Secretary of State may consult with whoever they see fit.

(4) The Secretary of State must report to Parliament following the conclusion of the review.

(5) The Secretary of State has the power to make regulations under this section including the power to make—

(a) offences relating to the contamination of e-liquid, including the distribution, importation, supply and merchandising or tampering of such products,



- (b) offences relating to the online sale of e-liquid containing illegal substances,
- (c) provisions to improve the ability to identify, test and intercept contaminated e-liquid, and
- (d) provisions recommended in the review implemented by subsection (1).

(6) For the purposes of this section,

‘contaminated e-liquid’ means e-liquid which has been mixed with or includes an illegal substance.”

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State to conduct a review and publish a report on the impact of contaminated e-liquid and ways to reduce its prevalence. It would give the Secretary of State the powers to make regulations in relation to curbing the harm caused by contaminated e-liquid.*

**New clause 2—Ban on the supply of plastic cigarette filters—**

“(1) The Secretary of State must make regulations under section 140 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 having the effect of prohibiting the supply of relevant cigarette filters or cigarettes containing relevant cigarette filters, whether by way of sale or not, in the course of a business.

(2) The notice required under section 140(6)(b) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to the regulations mentioned in subsection (1) must be published no later than the end of the period of 12 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(3) In this section,

‘relevant cigarette filter’ means a filter which contains plastic and which is intended for use in a cigarette, whether as part of a ready made cigarette or to be used with hand rolling tobacco or other substances to be smoked in a cigarette.”

*This new clause requires the Secretary of State to make regulations, within two years, which would prohibit the supply of cigarette filters which contain plastic or cigarettes containing cigarette filters which contain plastic. The regulations would be made under section 140 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.*

**New clause 3—Amendment of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018—**

“(1) The European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 7A of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, after subsection (4), insert—

‘(4A) This section does not apply in relation to Directive 2014/40/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014 on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States concerning the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco and related products and repealing Directive 2001/37/EC.’”

*This new clause asserts the primacy of the regulations made in this Bill which affect Northern Ireland in relation to the EU tobacco directive 2014/40/EU.*

**New clause 4—Ban on manufacture and sales of high-strength nicotine pouches—**

“(1) It is an offence to manufacture a high-strength nicotine pouch.

(2) It is an offence to—

- (a) sell or expose for sale a high-strength nicotine pouch, or
- (b) offer or expose a high-strength nicotine pouch for sale.

(3) It is an offence for a person to have a high-strength nicotine pouch in their possession with intent to supply it to another in the course of business.

(4) In this section ‘high-strength nicotine pouch’ means a nicotine pouch that—

- (a) is intended for oral use,
- (b) is not intended to be inhaled,

(c) does not contain tobacco, and

(d) contains more than 20 milligrams of nicotine per pouch.

(5) It is a defence for a person charged with an offence under subsection (2) to prove that they took all reasonable steps to avoid the commission of the offence.

(6) A person who commits an offence under this section is liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding the general limit in a magistrates’ court, or a fine, or both;
- (b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years, or a fine, or both.”

*This new clause provides for a ban on the manufacture and sale of high-strength nicotine pouches.*

**New clause 5—Report on sale of vaping products to facilitate child sexual exploitation—**

“(1) Within six months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must produce a report on—

- (a) the potential prevalence of retailers with a personal or premises licence selling vaping products which facilitate child sexual exploitation; and
- (b) whether licensing authorities have adequate powers to investigate retailers which may be connected to the sale of vaping products to facilitate child sexual exploitation.

(2) A copy of this report must be laid before both Houses of Parliament.

(3) In this section—

- ‘vaping’ has the same meaning as in Part 1 (see section 48),
- ‘licensing authority’ has the same meaning as in Part 1 (see section 16),
- ‘personal licence’ has the same meaning as in Part 1 (see section 16),
- ‘premises licence’ has the same meaning as in Part 1 (see section 16).”

**New clause 6—Requirement for retailers of vapes in England to include age-verification technology—**

“(1) The Secretary of State may make regulations making it an offence for a tobacco retailer who sells vapes on premises in England to sell vapes that do not contain approved age-gating technology.

(2) The Secretary of State may by regulations specify the requirements with which any age-gating technology must comply, which must include (but need not be limited to)—

- (a) the information, including biometric information, that a user must provide to the age-gating technology in order to be able to use the vape;
- (b) the steps that the age-gating technology must require the user to take in order to verify their identity and that they are aged 18 or over before first activating the vape for use;
- (c) the steps which the age-gating technology must require the user to take in order to verify their identity following activation of the vape, and the frequency with, and circumstances in, which the age-gating technology must require these steps to be taken;
- (d) the requirements with which the age-gating technology must comply in order to ensure the security of the information, including personal data, provided to it by users;
- (e) the technical specifications which the age-gating technology must meet in order to ensure that it is compatible with vapes made by different manufacturers.

(3) The Secretary of State may by regulations under this section make further provision about requirements with which tobacco retailers must comply.

(4) In this section, ‘age-gating technology’ means technology designed to prevent the use of vaping products by persons aged under 18.

(5) Before making regulations under this section the Secretary of State must consult any persons the Secretary of State considers it appropriate to consult.

(6) Regulations under this section are subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.”

*This new clause would introduce a requirement for retailers of vapes in England to include age-verification technology.*

**New clause 7—Requirement for retailers of vapes in Wales to include age-verification technology—**

“(1) The Welsh Ministers may make regulations making it an offence for a tobacco retailer who sells vapes on premises in Wales to sell vapes that do not contain approved age-gating technology.

(2) The Welsh Ministers may by regulations specify the requirements, with which any age-gating technology must comply, which must include (but need not be limited to)—

- (a) the information, including biometric information, that a user must provide to the age-gating technology in order to be able to use the vape;
- (b) the steps that the age-gating technology must require the user to take in order to verify their identity and that they are aged 18 or over before first activating the vape for use;
- (c) the steps which the age-gating technology must require the user to take in order to verify their identity following activation of the vape, and the frequency with, and circumstances in, which the age-gating technology must require these steps to be taken;
- (d) the requirements with which the age-gating technology must comply in order to ensure the security of the information, including personal data, provided to it by users;
- (e) the technical specifications which the age-gating technology must meet in order to ensure that it is compatible with vapes made by different manufacturers.

(3) The Welsh Ministers may by regulations under subsection (2) make further provision about requirements with which tobacco retailers must comply.

(4) In this section, “age-gating technology” means technology designed to prevent the use of vaping products by persons aged under 18.

(5) Before making regulations under this section the Welsh Ministers must consult any persons that the Welsh Ministers consider it appropriate to consult.

(6) Regulations under this section are subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.”

*This new clause would introduce a requirement for retailers of vapes in Wales to include age-verification technology.*

**New clause 8—Prohibition of advertising of vaping, nicotine and heated tobacco products—**

“(1) The Secretary of State must within six months of this Act being passed make provisions by regulations for the prohibition of advertising of—

- (a) a vaping product; or
- (b) a nicotine product; or
- (c) a heated tobacco product.

(2) Before making regulations under this section the Secretary of State must consult any persons the Secretary of State considers it appropriate to consult.

(3) Regulations under this section may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.”

*This new clause commits the government to consult on proposals for prohibiting the advertising of vaping, nicotine or heated tobacco products.*

**New clause 9—Marketing of products to existing smokers—**

“(1) The Secretary of State, or a person authorised by the Secretary of State, may make provision about the nature and inclusion of health warnings or disclaimers relating to a relevant product to ensure that the product is marketed exclusively to existing smokers as an alternative to smoking.

(2) In this section, ‘relevant product’ refers to—

- (a) a vape, or
- (b) a nicotine product.

(3) Compliance with this section is considered a defence to a charge in relation to an offence under Part 6.”

*This new clause will allow the Secretary of State to place an additional disclaimer or warning on products.*

**New clause 10—Displays of products or prices in England—**

“(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations impose limitations or requirements on retailers in relation to the display, in the course of business, of—

- (a) relevant products in a place in England where the products are offered for sale,
- (b) empty retail packaging of relevant products in a place in England where the products are offered for sale,
- (c) prices of relevant products in a place in England where the products are offered for sale, or
- (d) advertisements for relevant products.

(2) In subsection (1), reference to a product includes anything that represents the product.

(3) Regulations under this section—

- (a) must make provision—
  - (i) for ensuring that an adult is able to be informed that a premises sells a related product,
  - (ii) for ensuring that a consenting adult is able to view the related products and information relating to them,
  - (iii) relating to the appropriateness of a display to ensure that it does not appeal to children, and
  - (iv) relating to the location of a display in a place in England where the products are offered for sale;
- (b) may create offences for a failure to comply with the regulations;
- (c) must provide for any offence to be punishable—
  - (i) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding the general limit in a magistrates’ court, or a fine, or both;
  - (ii) on conviction or indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years, or a fine, or both;
- (d) are subject to public consultation;
- (e) are subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

(4) Compliance with regulations made under subsection (3) is considered a defence to a charge in relation to an offence under Part 6.

(5) For the purposes of this section—

‘consenting adult’ means an adult who has entered any licensed premises that sells nicotine, vapes, and tobacco products;

‘relevant products’ mean—

- (a) tobacco products,
- (b) vaping products, or
- (c) nicotine products.”

*This new clause will allow for the Secretary of State to restrict how vapes and nicotine products are advertised in store windows and in store, while ensuring that adult smokers are still able to determine that a premises sells a product.*

**New clause 12—Review of provisions—**

“(1) The Secretary of State must, in consultation with the appropriate ministers in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland—

- (a) carry out a review of the provisions for relevant products in—
  - (i) sections 1 to 6 (sale of tobacco etc);
  - (ii) sections 50 to 55 (Part 2 Sale and Distribution: Scotland: sale of tobacco etc);
  - (iii) sections 68 to 72 (Part 2 Sale and Distribution Northern Ireland sale of tobacco etc);
  - (iv) sections 90 to 93 (Product requirements etc);
  - (v) section 94 (Non-compliant images);
  - (vi) sections 101 and 102 (Matters dealt with by 2016 Regulations);
  - (vii) Part 6 (Advertising and Sponsorship);
- (b) prepare and publish a report setting out the conclusions of the review;
- (c) lay the report before Parliament.

(2) The review in subsection (1) must—

- (a) set out the objectives intended to be achieved by the provisions as set out under subsection (1)(a),
- (b) assess the extent to which those objectives have been achieved, and
- (c) make a recommendation on whether the provisions as set out under subsection (1)(a) remain appropriate and necessary.

(3) The first review under this section must be published and laid before Parliament before the end of the period of five years beginning with the day on which the Tobacco and Vapes Act 2025 is passed.

(4) If the review recommends under subsection (2)(c) that one or more of the provisions set out under subsection (1)(a) are no longer appropriate or necessary, the Secretary of State must make arrangements for the motion mentioned in subsection (5) to be tabled in both Houses of Parliament within a period of 28 sitting days beginning immediately after the review is laid before Parliament under subsection (3).

(5) The form of the motion in subsection (4) is—

‘That the provisions of sections 1 to 6, 50 to 55, 68 to 72, 90 to 94, 101 and 102 and Part 6 (Advertising and Sponsorship) of the Tobacco and Vapes Act 2025 should expire.’

(6) If both Houses of Parliament approve the motion in the form set out in subsection (5) (or in such form as may be subsequently amended by the House to specify one or more of the provisions of sections 1 to 6, 50 to 55, 68 to 72, 90 to 94, 101 and 102 and Part 6), moved by the Secretary of State in accordance with subsection (4), the provisions specified in the motion shall expire at the end of the period of 21 days beginning with the day on which the second House approves the motion.

(7) Subsequent reports must be published at intervals not exceeding five years.

(8) In this subsection, ‘Relevant products’ refers to—

- (a) tobacco products;
- (b) nicotine products.”

*This new clause requires a review of the necessity of provisions relating to the sale restrictions for tobacco products and nicotine products. Published every 5 years, the review could recommend that certain provisions are no longer required, and Parliament would have an opportunity to expire them.*

**New clause 13—Reports on roadmap to a smoke-free United Kingdom—**

“(1) The Secretary of State must, on or before the relevant day and at least once every five years after that day, prepare and lay before Parliament a report setting out—

- (a) how the Secretary of State expects the smoke-free target will be achieved;
- (b) the steps proposed to achieve that target (which may include the setting of interim targets);

(c) an analysis of statistical data relating to the achievement of the smoke-free target.

(2) The reports must set out targets and proposed steps relating to geographical areas or categories of people in respect of which there are higher than average rates of smoking.

(3) The Secretary of State must consult the appropriate national authorities when preparing the reports.

(4) In this section—

(a) ‘appropriate national authority’ means—

- (i) Welsh Ministers,
- (ii) Scottish Ministers, and
- (iii) Executive Ministers in Northern Ireland.

(b) ‘relevant day’ means the last day before 25 December 2026 which is a sitting day for both Houses of Parliament;

(c) ‘the smoke-free target’ means the end of the smoking of tobacco products in the United Kingdom.”

*This new clause requires the Secretary of State to prepare and lay before Parliament five-yearly reports containing a roadmap to a smoke-free country including targets and specific interventions for populations with high prevalence rates.*

**New clause 14—Prohibition on supply of cigarette filters—**

“(1) The Secretary of State must make regulations having the effect of prohibiting the supply of cigarette filters or cigarettes containing cigarette filters, whether by way of sale or not, in the course of a business.

(2) Subsections (6), (8), (9), (10), (10A), (10B), (10C) and (10D) of section 140 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 apply to regulations under this section as they apply to regulations under those sections.

(3) The notice required under section 140(6)(b) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 as applied by subsection (2) in relation to the regulations mentioned in subsection (1) must be published no later than the end of the period of 12 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(4) In this section, ‘cigarette filter’ means a filter which is intended for use in a cigarette, whether as part of a ready-made cigarette or to be used with hand rolling tobacco or other substances to be smoked in a cigarette.

(5) Regulations under this section are subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.”

*This new clause requires the Secretary of State to make regulations which would prohibit the supply of cigarette filters or cigarettes containing cigarette filters.*

**New clause 15—Advertising exemptions for specialist vaping retailers—**

“(1) A person does not commit an offence under any of the sections 114 to 118 in relation to an advertisement whose purpose or effect is to promote a vaping product if the advertisement—

- (a) Is in a specialist vaping shop
- (b) Is not visible from outside the specialist vaping shop
- (c) Complies with the requirements (if any) specified by the appropriate national authority in regulations as to the inclusion of health warnings and information.

(2) Regulations under subsection (1) are subject to the negative resolution procedure.

(3) In this section—

‘appropriate national authority’ —

- (a) In relation to specialist vaping shops in England, means the Secretary of State,
- (b) In relation to specialist vaping shops in Wales, means Welsh Ministers,
- (c) In relation to specialist vaping shops in Scotland, means Scottish Ministers, and



(d) In relation to specialist vaping shops in Northern Ireland, means the Department of Health for Northern Ireland;

‘shop’ includes a self-contained part of a shop (and, in relation to a self-contained part of a shop,

‘premises’ means that self-contained part);

‘specialist vaping shop’ means a shop selling vaping products by retail (whether or not it sells other things) more than 90% of whose sales on the premises in question derive from the sale of vaping products and vaping accessories.

(4) For the purposes of determining whether a shop is a specialist vaping shop the sales are to be measured by the sale price—

(a) During the most recent period of 12 months for which accounts are available, or

(b) During the period for which the shop has been established, if it has not been established long enough for 12 months’ accounts to be available.”

*This new clause would enable specialist vaping retailers to operate and provide free advice and consultations to smokers who are trying to find the right product for them to quit.*

#### New clause 16—*Online sale of tobacco products—*

“(1) It is an offence to supply a tobacco product through an internet service, whether by way of sale or not.

(2) It is a defence for a person charged with an offence under this section to prove that they took all reasonable steps to avoid the commission of the offence.

(3) A person who commits an offence under this section is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale.

(4) For the purposes of this section—

‘internet service’ means a service that is made available by means of the internet, even if it’s made available using a combination of the internet and an electronic communications service as defined in Section 32(2) of the Communications Act 2003.”

*This new clause creates an offence of selling tobacco products online.*

#### New clause 17—*Tobacco products statutory scheme: consultation—*

“(1) The Secretary of State must consult and report on the desirability of making a scheme with one or more of the following purposes—

(a) regulating, for the purposes of improving public health, the prices which may be charged by any producer or importer of tobacco products for the supply of any tobacco products,

(b) limiting the profits which may accrue to any producer or importer in connection with the manufacture or supply of tobacco products,

(c) providing for any producer or importer of tobacco products to pay to the Secretary of State an amount calculated by reference to sales or estimated sales of those products (whether on the basis of net prices, average selling prices or otherwise) to be used for the purposes of reducing smoking prevalence and improving public health.

(2) In this section—

‘importer’ in relation to tobacco products, and “tobacco products” have the meaning as in Part 5 (see section 112),

‘producer’ in relation to tobacco products, is to be construed in accordance with the meaning of ‘production’ in Part 5 (see section 112).”

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to consult on proposals for regulating the prices and profits of, and to raise funds from, tobacco manufacturers and importers.*

#### New clause 18—*Consultation on licensing regulations—*

“(1) Within two months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must publish draft regulations for the licensing of retail sale of tobacco products etc in England.

(2) Following the publication of the draft regulation as set out in subsection (1) the Secretary of State must publish a call for evidence seeking views on the efficacy and suitability of the draft regulations and invite the House of Commons Business and Trade Committee to scrutinise the draft regulations.

(3) After six months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before both Houses of Parliament a report setting out the Government’s formal response to evidence submitted in response to the call for evidence required by subsection (2) and any recommendations of the House of Commons Business and Trade Committee.

(4) The Secretary of State may not make an order under section 168(4) bringing sections 16 to 18 and Schedules 1 and 2 into force until the report specified in subsection (3) has been laid before both Houses of Parliament.”

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State to publish draft regulations for the licensing of retail sale of tobacco products etc in England and ensure they receive parliamentary scrutiny.*

#### New clause 19—*Reports on illegal sale of tobacco and vaping products—*

“(1) The Secretary of State must—

(a) prepare an annual report on the scale of the illegal sale and availability of tobacco and vaping products in the United Kingdom; and

(b) lay a copy of each report before both Houses of Parliament.

(2) Each report must provide details in the United Kingdom of—

(a) the estimated amount and value of illegal, counterfeit and contraband cigarettes and other tobacco products available for sale;

(b) the estimated amount and value of illegal or non-compliant vapes available for sale;

(c) the action taken to tackle the illicit trade of tobacco, tobacco products, vaping devices and vaping products; and

(d) an assessment of the impact of the illicit trade of tobacco, vapes and nicotine products on public health and safety.

(3) The first report must be laid within the period of 12 months of the passing of this Act.

(4) Each subsequent report must be laid annually beginning with the day on which the previous report was laid.”

*This new clause would require that the Government produce annual reports on the rate of sale and availability of illegal tobacco and vaping products and their impact on public health and safety.*

#### New clause 20—*Age verification requirement for online sales of vaping devices and products—*

“(1) A person commits an offence if the person—

(a) continues to operate an online vaping product business, and

(b) fails to operate an age verification policy in respect of online sales of vaping products and devices.

(2) An ‘age verification policy’ is a policy that steps are to be taken to establish and ensure the age of a person attempting to buy a vaping product (the ‘customer’) is not under 18 years of age.

(3) The appropriate national authority may by regulations amend the age specified in subsection (2).

(4) The appropriate national authority may publish guidance on matters relating to age verification policies, including, in particular, guidance about—

- (a) steps that should be taken to establish a customer's age,
- (b) documents that may be used as evidence of a customer's age,
- (c) training that should be undertaken by the person selling vaping products,
- (d) the form and content of notices that should be displayed on websites; and
- (e) the form and content of records that should be maintained in relation to an age verification policy.

(5) A person guilty of an offence under subsection (1) is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 2 on the standard scale.

(6) Regulations under subsection (3) are subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

(7) In this section—

‘the appropriate national authority’ means—

- (a) in relation to England, the Secretary of State, and
- (b) in relation to Wales, the Welsh Ministers,

‘online vaping product business’ means a business involving the sale of vaping products by retail online.”

*This new clause introduces a requirement on online vaping product businesses to operate an age verification policy covering steps to be taken to establish the age of persons attempting to buy vaping products online. It reflects provisions in place in Scotland.*

**New clause 21—Prohibition on manufacture and retail of high-capacity count vaping devices—**

“(1) The Secretary of State must produce regulations relating to the design, manufacture and sale of vaping devices and products that ensure—

- (a) Vaping devices must not be designed or manufactured in a way that allows refill containers, modular attachments, or third-party modifications that increase e-liquid capacity beyond the limit of 2ml per tank or pod, which includes, but is not limited to detachable extensions, multi-pod configurations, and external refill reservoirs.
- (b) Any vaping device must contain a fixed, non-modifiable single-use tank or pod with a maximum capacity of 2ml.
- (c) Refill e-liquid containers must be limited to a maximum of 10ml per bottle and must not be sold in forms that enable direct integration with a vaping device as an extended tank or automated refill mechanism.
- (d) No manufacturer or retailer shall promote, sell, or advertise modification kits, refill systems, or accessory attachments designed to contravene the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016 restrictions on vaping device capacity.

(2) A person commits an offence if they—

- (a) Manufacture, import, distribute, or sell a vaping device or accessory that does not comply with the regulatory requirements set out in subsection (1).
- (b) Advertise, market, or sell components that facilitate increasing a device's effective e-liquid capacity beyond the legal limit.

(3) A person who is guilty of an offence under subsection (2)(a) shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine of £20,000 per violation or a ban on further sales within the UK market.

(4) A person who is guilty of an offence under subsection (2)(b) shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine of £10,000 per violation and may be subject to further regulatory action, including product recall or withdrawal from sale.”

*This new clause would seek the introduction of regulations and new offences to prohibit the manufacture, design and retail sale of high-capacity count vaping devices.*

Amendment 103, page 1, line 4, leave out clause 1.

*This amendment removes the generational ban on selling tobacco products to people born on or after 1 January 2009.*

Amendment 4, in clause 1, page 1, line 5, leave out “born on or after 1 January 2009” and insert

“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment makes it an offence to sell tobacco products, herbal smoking products and cigarette papers to a person under the age of 21, rather than to people born on or after 1 January 2009.*

Amendment 38, page 1, line 7, leave out “a tobacco product” and insert

“cigarettes or hand rolling tobacco within the meaning of the Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015 (S.I. 2015/829)”.

Government amendment 47.

Amendment 5, in clause 1, page 1, line 13, leave out “shown that document was before 1 January 2009”

and insert

“showed that the purchaser was not under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Government amendments 48 and 49.

Amendment 104, page 2, line 10, leave out clause 2.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 103.*

Amendment 6, in clause 2, page 2, line 11, leave out “18” and insert “21”.

*This amendment makes it an offence to purchase tobacco products, herbal smoking products and cigarette papers on behalf of a person under the age of 25, rather than a person born on or after 1 January 2009.*

Amendment 7, page 2, line 12, leave out “born on or after 1 January 2009”

and insert

“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 6.*

Amendment 39, page 2, line 13, leave out “a tobacco product” and insert

“cigarettes or hand rolling tobacco within the meaning of the Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015 (S.I. 2015/829)”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 38.*

Amendment 8, page 2, line 18, leave out “born on or after 1 January 2009”

and insert

“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 6.*

Government amendment 50.

Amendment 105, page 3, line 3, leave out clause 5.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 103.*

Amendment 9, in clause 5, page 3, line 8, leave out “born on or after 1 January 2009”

and insert

“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 106, page 3, line 25, leave out clause 6.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 103.*

Amendment 10, in clause 6, page 3, line 30, leave out “born on or after 1 January 2009”

and insert

“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 11, page 3, line 32, leave out  
“a anwyd ar neu ar ôl 1 Ionawr 2009”  
and insert “dan 21 oed”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Government amendments 51 to 59.

Amendment 1, in clause 38, page 20, line 19, leave out  
from “be” to the end of line and insert  
“be allocated by the relevant Local Authority to public health  
projects.”

*This amendment would direct funds from Fixed Penalty Notice  
fines to public health initiatives as determined by Local Authorities.*

Amendment 2, page 20, line 20, leave out from “before”  
to the second “the” and insert  
“such sums are allocated by the relevant Local Authorities”.

*This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 1.*

Government amendments 60 to 63.

Amendment 107, page 25, line 26, leave out clause 50.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 103.*

Amendment 40, in clause 50, page 25, line 30, after  
“subsection (1)” insert—

“(i) for ‘a tobacco product’ substitute ‘cigarettes or hand  
rolling tobacco within the meaning of the Standardised  
Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015  
(S.I. 2015/829)’, and”.

*This amendment exempts tobacco products other than cigarettes  
and hand rolling tobacco from the offence of selling tobacco  
products to a person born on or after 1 January 2009.*

Amendment 12, page 25, line 30, leave out ““born on  
or after 1 January 2009”” and insert ““under the age  
of 21””.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 13, page 25, line 33, leave out  
““born on or after 1 January 2009 (“the customer) to have been  
born before that date”””  
and insert  
““under the age of 21 (“the customer”) to be aged 21 or over””.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 14, page 25, line 37, leave out  
“born on or after 1 January 2009”  
and insert “under 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 15, page 26, line 1, leave out subsection  
(3).

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 41, page 26, line 6, leave out “a tobacco  
product” and insert  
“cigarettes or hand rolling tobacco within the meaning of the  
Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015  
(S.I. 2015/829)”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 40.*

Amendment 42, page 26, line 28, after “subsection  
(1)” insert—

“(i) for “a tobacco product” substitute “cigarettes or hand  
rolling tobacco within the meaning of the Standardised  
Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015  
(S.I. 2015/829)”, and”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 40.*

Amendment 16, page 26, line 28, leave out  
““born on or after 1 January 2009””

and insert

““under the age of 21””.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 17, page 26, line 30, leave out  
““born on or after 1 January 2009””  
and insert ““under 21””.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 18, page 26, line 33, leave out  
““born on or after 1 January 2009””  
and insert  
““under the age of 21””.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Government amendment 64.

Amendment 108, page 35, line 24, leave out clause 68.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 103.*

Amendment 19, page 35, line 28, leave out  
“born on or after 1 January 2009”  
and insert  
“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 43, page 35, line 30, leave out “a tobacco  
product” and insert

“cigarettes or hand rolling tobacco within the meaning of the  
Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015  
(S.I. 2015/829)”.

*This amendment exempts tobacco products other than cigarettes  
and hand rolling tobacco from the offence of selling tobacco  
products to a person born on or after 1 January 2009.*

Government amendment 65.

Amendment 20, page 35, line 37, leave out  
“shown on that document was before 1 January 2009”  
and insert  
“showed that the purchaser was not under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Government amendments 66 and 67.

Amendment 109, page 36, line 13, leave out clause 69.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 103.*

Amendment 21, page 36, line 16, leave out  
“born on or after 1 January 2009”  
and insert  
“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 6.*

Amendment 22, page 36, line 18, leave out “18” and  
insert “21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 6.*

Amendment 23, page 36, line 19, leave out  
“born on or after 1 January 2009”  
and insert  
“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 6.*

Amendment 44, page 36, line 21, leave out “a tobacco  
product” and insert

“cigarettes or hand rolling tobacco within the meaning of the  
Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015  
(S.I. 2015/829)”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 43.*

Amendment 24, page 36, line 26, leave out  
“born on or after 1 January 2009”



and insert

“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 6.*

Government amendment 68.

Amendment 110, page 37, line 19, leave out clause 72.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 103.*

Amendment 25, in clause 72, page 37, line 27, leave out

“born on or after 1 January 2009”

and insert

“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Government amendments 69 to 79.

Amendment 86, in clause 90, page 50, line 32, at end insert—

“(da) cigarette filters;”.

*This amendment enables the Secretary of State to make provisions about the retail packaging of cigarette filters and the composition of individual products contained in an individual pack of products outlined in Clause 90(1).*

Amendment 87, page 51, line 13, at end insert—

“(ja) the composition of individual products contained in an individual pack;”.

*This amendment enables the Secretary of State to make provisions about the retail packaging of cigarette filters and the composition of individual products contained in an individual pack of products outlined in Clause 90(1).*

Amendment 36, page 51, line 30, delete “shape” and insert “design, shape or interoperability”.

*This amendment empowers ministers to regulate the design and interoperability of products in order to prohibit the sale of very high-puff count vaping devices.*

Amendment 37, in clause 92, page 52, line 3, after “flavour” insert “descriptors”.

*This amendment would give the Secretary of State powers to make provisions about the flavour descriptors of relevant products.*

Amendment 88, in clause 110, page 60, line 35, leave out from “consult” to end of line 36 and insert

“any persons or bodies as appear to him or her representative of the interests concerned.”

*This amendment would ensure that the Secretary of State has to consult all relevant parties before making regulations, rather than just those that they deem appropriate.*

Government amendment 80.

Amendment 90, in clause 114, page 63, line 16, after “product,” insert

“except for the public health purpose of promoting vaping as a cessation tool for existing tobacco smokers,”.

*This amendment would allow vapes to be promoted as a quit-aid/public health measure.*

Amendment 46, in clause 120, page 68, line 22, at end insert—

“(ca) it is, when in relation to the advertising of vaping products or nicotine products, in a location in which it would be reasonable to expect that everyone present is aged 18 or over.”

*This amendment would allow for the advertising of vaping or nicotine products within locations where it is reasonable to expect that everyone present is over 18.*

Amendment 91, in clause 125, page 73, line 2, at end insert—

“(4) No offence is committed under this Part if—

(a) it is for the purposes of an interaction between a representative for the product and a member of the public, and

(b) the representative for the product has taken reasonable measures to ensure that the member of the public is aged over 18 and is an existing tobacco or nicotine user.”

*This amendment will allow for vapes and nicotine products to be promoted through one-to-one interaction between individuals representing the product and adults who are already existing smokers or nicotine users.*

Amendment 85, in clause 136, page 77, line 8, leave out from “smoke-free” to end of line 15 and insert

“a place in England that is—

(a) an NHS property or hospital building,

(b) a children’s playground, or

(c) a nursery, school, college or higher education premises.”

*This amendment restricts the Secretary of State to only being able to designate open or unenclosed spaces outside a hospital, children’s playground, nursery, school, college or higher education premises as smoke-free areas.*

Amendment 84, page 77, line 9, leave out from “place” to the end of line 12 and insert

“or description of place in England that is not smoke-free under section 2.

(1A) The place, or places falling within the description, need not be enclosed or substantially enclosed.

(1B) The Secretary of State may designate a place or description of place under this section only if they are advised by the Department for Health and Social Care’s Chief Scientific Adviser that there is a significant risk that, without a designation, persons present there would be exposed to significant quantities of smoke or, if said place is—

(a) an NHS property or hospital building,

(b) a children’s playground, or

(c) a nursery, school, college or higher education premises.”

*This amendment would restrict the Secretary of State to only being able to designate open or unenclosed spaces outside a hospital, children’s playground, nursery, school, college or higher education premises, or places with significant risk of second-hand smoke as smoke-free areas.*

Amendment 92, page 77, line 12, at end insert—

“(1A) The Secretary of State may designate a place or description of place under this section only if, in the Secretary of State’s opinion, there is a significant risk that, without a designation, persons present there would be exposed to significant quantities of smoke.”

*This amendment provides that regulations to designate places as smoke-free may only be made if the Secretary of State is satisfied that they are necessary to avoid persons being exposed to significant quantities of smoke.*

Amendment 82, in clause 137, page 78, leave out lines 5 to 12.

*This amendment removes the proposed power for the Secretary of State to create defences for performances. This protects the health of actors in the workplace and prevents the promotion of smoking through artistic means.*

Amendment 83, page 78, leave out lines 15 to 21.

*This amendment removes the proposed power for the Secretary of State to create defences for performances. This protects the health of actors in the workplace and prevents the promotion of smoking through artistic means.*

Amendment 93, in clause 139, page 79, line 13, at end insert—

“(1A) The Secretary of State may designate a place or description of place under this section only if, in the Secretary of State’s opinion, there is a significant risk that, without a designation, the use of vapes may have adverse effects on the health of persons present there who are not using vapes.”

*This amendment provides that regulations to designate places as vape-free may only be made if the Secretary of State is satisfied that they are necessary to avoid persons present there being exposed to adverse health effects.*

Amendment 94, in clause 140, page 82, line 24, at end insert—

“(1A) The Secretary of State may designate a place or description of place under this section only if, in the Secretary of State’s opinion, there is a significant risk that, without a designation, the use of heated tobacco devices may have adverse effects on the health of persons present there who are not using heated tobacco devices.”

*This amendment provides that regulations to designate places as heated tobacco-free may only be made if the Secretary of State is satisfied that they are necessary to avoid persons present there being exposed to adverse health effects.*

Amendment 95, in clause 142, page 85, line 33, at end insert—

“(2A) Premises may be prescribed as no-smoking premises only if in the Scottish Ministers’ opinion there is a significant risk that, without prescribing them, persons present there would be exposed to significant quantities of smoke.”

*This amendment provides that regulations to prescribe premises as smoke-free may only be made if the Scottish Ministers are satisfied that they are necessary to avoid persons being exposed to significant quantities of smoke.*

Amendment 96, in clause 144, page 90, line 4, at end insert—

“(2A) Premises may be prescribed as vape-free premises only if in the Scottish Ministers’ opinion there is a significant risk that, without prescribing them, the use of vapes may have adverse effects on the health of persons present there who are not using vapes.”

*This amendment provides that regulations to prescribe premises as vape-free may only be made if the Scottish Ministers are satisfied that they are necessary to avoid persons present there being exposed to a significant risk of adverse health effects.*

Amendment 97, in clause 145, page 92, line 22, at end insert—

“(2A) Premises may be prescribed as heated tobacco-free premises only if in the Scottish Ministers’ opinion there is a significant risk that, without prescribing them, the use of heated tobacco devices may have adverse effects on the health of persons present there who are not using heated tobacco devices.”

*This amendment provides that regulations to prescribe premises as heated tobacco-free may only be made if the Scottish Ministers are satisfied that they are necessary to avoid persons present there being exposed to a significant risk of adverse health effects.*

Amendment 98, in clause 150, page 98, line 40, at end insert—

“(2A) The regulations may designate a place or vehicle as vape-free only if the Welsh Ministers are satisfied that doing so is likely to contribute towards the promotion of public health.”

*This amendment provides that regulations to designate a place or vehicle as vape-free may only be made if the Welsh Ministers are satisfied that this is likely to contribute towards the promotion of public health.*

Amendment 99, in clause 151, page 105, line 22, at end insert—

“(2A) The regulations may designate a place or vehicle as heated tobacco-free only if the Welsh Ministers are satisfied that doing so is likely to contribute towards the promotion of public health.”

*This amendment provides that regulations to designate a place or vehicle as heated tobacco-free may only be made if the Welsh Ministers are satisfied that this is likely to contribute towards the promotion of the health of the people of Wales.*

Amendment 100, in clause 153, page 108, line 25, at end insert—

“(1A) The Department may designate a place or description of place under this Article only if satisfied that, without the designation, persons present there would be likely to be exposed to significant quantities of smoke.”

*This amendment provides that regulations to designate places as smoke-free may only be made if the Northern Ireland Department is satisfied that they are necessary to avoid persons being exposed to significant quantities of smoke.*

Amendment 101, in clause 155, page 110, line 6, at end insert—

“(1A) The Department may designate a place or vehicle under this Article only if the Department is satisfied there is a significant risk that, without a designation, the use of vapes may have adverse effects on the health of persons present there who are not using vapes.”

*This amendment provides that regulations to designate places as vape-free may only be made if the Northern Ireland Department is satisfied that they are necessary to avoid persons present there being exposed to adverse health effects.*

Amendment 102, in clause 156, page 113, line 15, at end insert—

“(1A) The Department may designate a place or vehicle under this Article only if the Department is satisfied there is a significant risk that, without a designation, the use of heated tobacco devices may have adverse effects on the health of persons present there who are not using heated tobacco devices.”

*This amendment provides that regulations to designate places as heated tobacco-free may only be made if the Northern Ireland Department is satisfied that they are necessary to avoid persons present there being exposed to adverse health effects.*

Amendment 89, in clause 168, page 120, line 39, leave out from “force” to end of line 41 and insert

“on such a date as the Secretary of State may by regulation appoint following the consultation on licensing regulations (see section (Consultation on licensing regulations)).”

*See explanatory statement for NC18.*

Government amendment 81.

Amendment 26, in schedule 5, page 132, line 2, leave out

“a anwyd ar neu ar ôl 1 Ionawr 2009”

and insert “dan 21 oed”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 27, page 132, line 7, leave out

“a anwyd ar neu ar ôl 1 Ionawr 2009”

and insert “dan 21 oed (“B”)”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 28, page 132, line 12, leave out

“a anwyd ar neu ar ôl 1 Ionawr 2009”

and insert “dan 21 oed”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 29, page 132, line 38, leave out  
“wedi cael ei eni cyn 1 Ionawr 2009”

and insert

“yn 21 oed neu drosodd”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 30, page 133, line 2, leave out  
“wedi cael ei eni ar neu ar ôl 1 Ionawr 2009”

and insert “dan 21 oed”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 111, page 133, line 15, leave out paragraph 5.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 103.*

Amendment 31, page 133, line 16, leave out  
“born on or after 1 January 2009”

and insert

“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 32, page 133, line 21, leave out  
“born on or after 1 January 2009”

and insert

“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 33, page 133, line 26, leave out  
“born on or after 1 January 2009”

and insert

“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 45, page 133, line 37, at end insert—

“(1A) In this section, “tobacco products” means cigarettes or hand rolling tobacco within the meaning of the Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015 (S.I. 2015/829).”

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 38.*

Amendment 34, page 134, line 9, leave out  
“born on or after 1 January 2009”

and insert

“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

Amendment 35, page 134, line 14, leave out  
“born on or after 1 January 2009”

and insert

“under the age of 21”.

*This amendment is linked to Amendment 4.*

**Ashley Dalton:** I would like to start by thanking all right hon. and hon. Members for their invaluable contributions during the passage of the Bill to date, and in particular, members of the Public Bill Committee for providing insight, scrutiny and debate. I am honoured to have taken on responsibility for this Bill. It is a watershed piece of legislation and the most significant public health intervention since the ban on smoking in public places in 2007. It will establish a smokefree generation by gradually ending the sale of tobacco products across the UK so that a child turning 16 this year will never be able to be legally sold tobacco, saving countless lives in the process. It will strengthen existing powers to reduce the harms of second-hand smoke in public spaces. In keeping with our manifesto commitment to the British people, it will outlaw the manipulative promotion of vapes to children to protect the next

generation from becoming hooked on nicotine. Finally, it will implement robust measures to strengthen enforcement activity.

I do not need to tell anyone in this Chamber that tobacco kills—we all know that. What hon. Members may not know is just how much it kills, the rate at which it kills, and the devastation it causes for individuals, families and communities across the country. Let me remind hon. Members that tobacco kills more people than any other preventable cause of death. Around 80,000 people in the UK lose their lives to tobacco every year. It robs an average of 10 years off the life expectancy of smokers. It substantially increases the risk of many major health conditions throughout people's lives, such as stroke, diabetes, heart disease, stillbirth, dementia and asthma. This daily tragedy continues unabated, with someone being admitted to hospital because of smoking almost every minute, day in, day out, with no end in sight.

Tobacco harms are not felt equally either. Our most disadvantaged communities suffer most, with 230,000 households living in smoking-induced poverty. In Blackpool, 17.5% of pregnant women still smoke at the time of delivery compared with 2.8% in Kensington and Chelsea. Over a quarter of people with a long-term mental health condition smoke.

Beyond the immeasurable cost to lives in the UK, the staggering economic impact of tobacco on our NHS cannot be ignored. The treatment of smoking-related diseases consumes approximately £3 billion a year of vital NHS and social care resources. The cost of smoking to our economy is even greater: £18 billion is lost in productivity every year, far outweighing the tax receipts it brings in of around £9 billion. The Bill is a vital step to break the devastating cycle of tobacco addiction and safeguard future generations from a lifetime of ill health.

But the world moves forward, and we cannot ignore the alarming rise of youth vaping. While vaping is less harmful than smoking and can be an effective quit aid for adult smokers, children should never vape. However, in the past five years, youth vaping has more than doubled. One in four 11 to 15-year-olds tried vaping in 2023, and that is no accident. It is in part due to the deliberate branding and advertisement of vapes to our children, with brightly coloured packaging and enticing sweet-like flavours—a calculated strategy to hook young people on nicotine. We cannot afford to wait to act.

I turn to the Government amendments, which seek to strengthen the Bill and ensure greater clarity. As we create the first smokefree generation and strengthen age restrictions on vapes and nicotine products, we want to support retailers in taking appropriate steps to ensure they do not sell to customers under the age of sale. New clause 11 and Government amendments 47 to 49, 51 to 53, 61, 63, 65 to 67, 69 to 71, 75, 77, 79 and 81 are a package of amendments and consequential amendments to the Bill. They seek to remove potential ambiguity for retailers regarding the use of digital identity for verifying the age of prospective customers when selling tobacco, vaping and nicotine products.

In Committee, Members raised concerns that the list of identity documents to satisfy the defence for a person charged with selling products to someone under the age of sale was limited, and queried the inclusion of other forms of physical and digital identity. These amendments remove the lists of physical ID from the Bill and instead



provide powers for the Secretary of State and the Department of Health in Northern Ireland to specify in regulations the steps that may be taken to verify a customer's age to meet the requirements for the defence. This revised approach better future-proofs the defence against developments in identification processes and provides the potential to recognise digital ID, as well as physical ID, in the context of the defence, supporting the widespread use of digital ID.

The amendments provide the opportunity for effective interaction with part 2 of the Data (Use and Access) Bill that is currently going through Parliament, which includes provisions relating to digital verification services. Digital verification services provide an opportunity to securely verify age for in-person and online sales. We will continue to work closely with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and other Departments when developing the regulations.

New clause 11 provides a similar power for Scottish Ministers to prescribe in regulations the steps that should be taken to establish a customer's age as a defence to an age of sale offence. That will enable Scottish Ministers to respond to changes in technology and consumer behaviours, which may move away from the presentation of a physical document.

The last Labour Government took bold action to prohibit displays of tobacco products to protect children and young people from being enticed into addiction and to create a more supportive environment for adults seeking to quit. The Bill goes further and gives powers to limit the display of a wider range of products, including herbal smoking products, cigarette papers, vapes and nicotine products. Government amendments 56, 57, 60, 62, 74, 76, 78 and 80 will alter the powers in the Bill for England, Wales and Northern Ireland that regulate displays of products and their prices, so that they also cover tobacco-related devices. As was discussed in Committee, pipes, heated tobacco devices and bongs are currently displayed in shops and can have the effect of promoting tobacco usage. The amendments will ensure that we can make regulations to stop products that facilitate the consumption of tobacco being openly displayed by retailers.

The Bill bans the sale of vapes, nicotine products and cigarette papers from vending machines in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and restates the existing ban on tobacco vending machines. We know that vending machines are used to bypass age of sale restrictions and to undertake proxy purchases on behalf of people under the age of sale. Government amendments 50, 54, 55, 64, 68, 72 and 73 are clarifying amendments that make the scope of the prohibition on vending machines absolutely clear, as was discussed in Committee. The Government's position is that the Protection from Tobacco (Sales from Vending Machines) (England) Regulations 2010 already apply where a customer has a coupon, receipt or token purchased elsewhere that can be redeemed at a machine. We are amending the clauses so that all machines that dispense products in connection with a sale are clearly captured by the ban.

The Bill strengthens the enforcement regime to support law-abiding retailers while taking action against those who break the rules. Along with introducing new fixed penalty notices and new powers to create a licensing system, the Bill re-enacts provisions on restricted premises orders and restricted sale orders. Those are existing

measures that local authority trading standards in England and Wales can use when dealing with a retailer that persistently breaches restrictions. That ensures there is a range of tools in the enforcement armoury, so that trading standards officers can act quickly and effectively against rogue retailers.

Government amendments 58 and 59 clarify a point raised in Committee by removing a duplicative and unnecessary provision that would prevent a business or individual from operating a vending machine for the sale of tobacco, vaping or nicotine products following the issuing of a restricted premises order or a restricted sale order. Given that the Bill already prohibits the use of vending machines for tobacco, vaping or nicotine products, there is no need for restricted premises orders and restricted sale orders to expressly prohibit the use of vending machines. Together, the Government amendments will improve the implementation and enforceability of measures in the Bill to ensure the most effective protection for the public, and I commend them to the House.

Turning to the other amendments in the group, I thank hon. Members for their scrutiny of the Bill so far. When I wind up, I will try to cover the key themes that are touched on. On the amendment that seeks to undermine the smokefree generation, I am sure we will hear arguments from some hon. Members who have been listening to the tobacco industry's arguments and myths about how people should be free to make their own choices. I would say to them that smoking kills two thirds of its users. Three quarters of people wish they had never started smoking, and the majority want to quit—that is not freedom of choice. The tobacco industry took away that choice with addiction, usually at a young age.

On smokefree places, we have been clear: in England, we intend to consult on extending smokefree outdoor places to outside schools, children's playgrounds and hospitals, but not to outdoor hospitality settings at this time. No smoker wants to harm people, but with second-hand smoke, they do. If people can smell smoke, they are inhaling it. This is particularly important for children, pregnant women and people with pre-existing health conditions such as asthma or heart disease. The only way to stop this harm is to stop people smoking around others. While I understand hon. Members' proposals to list specific places in the Bill or to add additional limits to the use of the powers, it is right that we consult on the detail before making regulations and have the necessary powers to protect children and vulnerable people from the harms of second-hand smoking.

I am grateful to the co-chairs of the all-party parliamentary group on smoking and health, my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy) and the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), for their long-standing support for the Bill. Through their amendments, they highlight the importance of retaining a focus on support for current smokers. That is why we are investing an extra £70 million for local stop smoking services this year and working to ensure that all NHS hospitals offer opt-out smoking cessation services into routine care. I hope they will be pleased that we have been able to confirm the extension of the swap to stop scheme for the coming year, with up to £90 million of funding to provide free vape starter kits for smokers to use as quit aids.

[Ashley Dalton]

On the group of amendments relating to vape advertising, we realise that products being deliberately marketed at children is unacceptable, which is why we have included a commitment to stop vapes being branded and advertised to children. The Government are also investing £10 million of new funding for the coming year for National Trading Standards to tackle underage illicit tobacco and vapes and to boost the trading standards workforce by recruiting 80 new apprentices, providing additional boots on the ground.

**Mr Joshua Reynolds** (Maidenhead) (LD): Trading standards are really important and obviously, therefore, so are fixed penalty notices, so will the Minister support amendment 1, which would mean that any fixed penalty notice sums will be retained by local authorities to spend on public health, thus saving the NHS money, as she mentioned earlier?

**Ashley Dalton:** As the hon. Member will know, there are already measures in the Bill that allow some of the fines to be retained—they can certainly be retained to make it cost-neutral for local authorities—but I am sure we will explore that issue later on.

The Bill contains regulation-making powers on a range of aspects of product requirements that already allow us to do many things that hon. Members seek to achieve, but I look forward to listening to the contributions to today's debate on the wider list of amendments and to responding to the points that are made.

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

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): It is now a truth universally acknowledged that smoking is bad for one's health. It is the leading cause of preventable death in this country, responsible for over 80,000 deaths every year. When we say that number, it is easy to allow it to trip off the tongue as another statistic without really realising just how many people it represents. For each of them—such as my Nana Burton, who was a smoker and who died of lung cancer—there is a personal story of damaged health and often an early and preventable death.

The Conservative party introduced a Bill based on a similar premise to this one in the last Parliament, although the Government have made significant changes since to the legislation, including taking a power that could be used to ban smoking and vaping in pub gardens, as well as a licensing scheme for tobacco products.

On amendment 85, while we have received repeated assurances that the Secretary of State intends to use the measures in the Bill only to improve public health, we must still examine whether the legislation is proportionate and reasonable. As far as I can see, it gives the Secretary of State enormous powers to extend the smokefree legislation to any place with minimal oversight and without needing to provide a reason. There were whispers last summer that the Government were considering banning smoking in pub gardens, before they hastily withdrew this provision in the face of public backlash. If only they would withdraw more of their policies in the face of public backlash, because perhaps then we would not be in the situation we are in now.

The Bill empowers the Secretary of State to extend smokefree and vape-free regulations to more places—essentially, to any place—with the aim of reducing exposure to second-hand smoke and promoting public health. However, on Second Reading the Government did not accept our amendment that it should apply only to places that have a provable significant risk to public health to justify such a ban. For that reason, I commend amendment 85 once again, which would restrict the Secretary of State to being able to designate only open or unenclosed spaces outside a hospital, a children's playground, a nursery school, a college or a higher education premises as a smokefree area. Those are the areas the Secretary of State has said he wants to target, and the amendment would prevent any targeting of other areas, such as pub gardens, by the back door. While he claims that that is not his intention now, that may not remain the case for the rest of this Government's time in office, nor indeed for any future Government. That is the risk in allowing these measures to stand, and for those reasons I encourage the House to support amendment 85.

3.15 pm

On new clause 18 and amendment 89, the new Bill also gives powers to the Secretary of State to introduce a new licensing scheme for retailers selling tobacco, vaping or nicotine products. However, we know that licensing schemes will come at a cost, to businesses and local authorities that will administer them, and in enforcement. That does not make it the wrong thing to do, but we would need to make sure that any licensing scheme is not excessively burdensome or expensive. New clause 18 and amendment 89 would therefore require the Government to consult on the new licensing scheme for tobacco sales before it came into force. That would mean that the views and impact on businesses including small businesses are heard, and ensure that councils and trading standards have the capacity to deliver such a scheme. Ultimately, there is a balance to strike between the requirements on business and public health, and a public consultation would ensure that the Government are more likely to get that balance right.

On new clause 19, another concern we have heard from those who oppose the Bill is about the impact that the legislation would have on the black market. His Majesty's Revenue and Customs estimates that the illicit market in tobacco duty and related VAT was £2.8 billion in 2021-22, with the tobacco duty tax gap remaining broadly unchanged since 2015, while in 2023 the Chartered Trading Standards Institute estimated that a staggering one in three vape products were non-compliant. Given warnings that increasing the age requirement for tobacco products and prohibiting more vaping could expand the black market economy further, it is sensible to take precautions to tackle the issue.

**Sir Ashley Fox** (Bridgwater) (Con): Specifically on new clause 19, does my hon. Friend agree that it is inevitable that the generational smoking ban will lead to an increase in the illegal tobacco market and that that is a highly regrettable consequence of the Bill?

**Dr Johnson:** That is certainly a significant possibility, and that is the reason for moving the amendment, as my hon. Friend will understand.

Illegal products can include smuggled and counterfeit cigarettes, vapes with nicotine levels way above the legal limits, and products containing illegal and potentially dangerous ingredients. They can be more harmful and may not include the appropriate labelling requirements and health warnings that genuine products have to carry. Regardless of whether colleagues support or oppose this Bill as a whole, I am sure we all agree that a black market is unacceptable. We have therefore put forward an amendment that would require the Government to produce annual reports on the rate of sale and availability of illegal tobacco and vaping products and their impact on public health and safety.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): My hon. Friend has rightly taken a fierce line on illegal tobacco sales in Lincolnshire. Does she acknowledge that those illegal tobacco sales are often linked to serious and organised crime? The shops that sell them are often linked to money laundering—and are usually foreign owned, by the way—and the damage they do is extreme. Will she join me in urging further action by Government to support trading standards and the local police, who are doing such a fine job in trying to clamp down on this industrial-scale crime?

**Dr Johnson:** As is usually the case, I find myself agreeing with my right hon. Friend, and that is of course why we have tabled the amendment: it will give us the evidence that we and the enforcement authorities require to make sure that the black market is reduced.

**Jack Rankin** (Windsor) (Con): Does my hon. Friend accept that there is not a risk that a black market will open, because a significant black market in tobacco already exists? In 2021, some 23.6 billion cigarettes were sold under duty, whereas in 2024 the figure was 13.2 billion, a 44% reduction. Yet an Action on Smoking and Health survey has found that smoking has reduced by only 0.5%. The black market is already here—it is not a new thing that will be created—so the Bill presents an even greater risk.

**Dr Johnson:** My hon. Friend makes a fair point. We know the black market exists, but the amendment would enable the Government to understand the scale of that black market and the changes in it, so that regulation could be enforced more robustly.

On amendment 90, as currently drafted the legislation will ban all forms of advertising of nicotine and non-nicotine vapes, nicotine products and sponsorship that promotes those products. Adverts will no longer be permitted on posters, billboards or the sides of buses, and sports teams will be prevented from being sponsored by a vaping company. As a Member of Parliament and a children's doctor, I have been very concerned by the sharp increase in children addicted to vaping and, more recently, the other nicotine products such as pouches that have begun to flood the market. Schoolteachers have reported that children are unable to concentrate or even to complete a whole lesson without visiting the bathroom to vape.

Action to tackle the rise in vaping is welcome, and I support steps that restrict the appeal of vapes to young people, including through flavours and packaging. However, as the Minister mentioned in her opening

speech, vaping can be a useful smoking cessation tool for adult smokers trying to quit; in my view, that should be their only purpose. Within the context of proposed advertising restrictions, amendment 90 would ensure that vapes that are targeted solely as a quit aid, to help adults stop smoking, can continue, in recognition of their role in bringing down smoking rates.

Finally, new clause 20 would introduce a requirement on online vaping products to operate an age verification policy, as is currently the case in Scotland. Whether someone is buying vaping products online or in store, robust provisions must be in place to ensure that the purchaser is of legal age, and businesses must have a robust policy in place. As we have seen through recent tragedies, the age verification process for online sales on age-restricted products has not always been effective. The new clause would be an important step towards protecting children from accessing products online that they should not be able to buy.

In closing, the Conservative party has a strong record of action on tobacco control. It was under a Conservative Government that plain packaging was introduced for all tobacco products and that minimum pack sizes for cigarettes and rolling tobacco were introduced—policies that have been demonstrably effective at reducing smoking rates. I have personally campaigned passionately on the issue of tobacco and vapes for over two years, and I am pleased that some of my original amendments to the Bill have made it beyond Committee stage and are with us today. I was also glad to see some of the new Government amendments introduced on Report that were born of debates we had in Committee, which have strengthened the Bill.

Our amendments are designed to highlight some of the difficulties in the Bill. We oppose the Government's power-grab—creating powers to ban smoking and vaping wherever they choose by regulation, but without consultation or enough notice. We have concerns about how the Bill will operate in practice, especially the burden on small businesses, and the potential for unintended consequences, such as a growth in the black market for tobacco products, so we ask that the Government seriously consider our amendments today.

**Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Ashley Dalton), to her role. It is a great pleasure to speak in the debate and to support this genuinely world-leading piece of public health legislation, which will help to consign smoking to the history books.

Unless we act to help people to stay healthy, the rising tide of ill health in our society threatens to overwhelm our NHS. Paring back public health, as the last Government did, was the definition of penny wise, pound foolish. It is vital that we tackle the causes of ill health, not just the symptoms, so that we can save the taxpayer billions of pounds and, most importantly, save lives.

We know that prevention is better than cure. As we have heard today, smoking remains the single biggest preventable cause of ill health in our country, causing 80,000 deaths a year. It is responsible for one in four cancer deaths, and it is a factor in over 70% of lung cancer cases. In my own constituency alone, nearly 12,000 people smoke. They are more likely to leave the



[Preet Kaur Gill]

workforce due to ill health. Many will suffer strokes, heart attacks and conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. On average, they will lose 10 years of life expectancy.

However, the real tragedy is how many thousands of those smokers will have started when they were children, when they did not know any better, and have simply never been able to quit. Most smokers report wishing that they had never started, which is why it is incumbent on us all to support this legislation to help stop the start. According to ASH, in my constituency alone the cost of smoking exceeds £90 million every year, including £56 million in lost productivity, £4 million drained from the NHS and £30.7 million in social care. The costs of smoking to our society are enormous, and that is why it is time to stub it out.

Even today, in 2025, hundreds of young people a day take the first drag of a habit they will never manage to kick, and will regret for the rest of their lives. I was proud to lead the Opposition's response to the last Government's Bill through Committee in the last Parliament and, as I said then, there is no freedom in addiction. It is a shame that the leader of the Conservative party allowed her ideology to blind her from that fact when she voted against the legislation in the last Parliament, and against this Bill in this one. Where the last Government failed to get their Tobacco and Vapes Bill over the line, this Government will get the job done.

I am proud that the Government have vastly improved on the legislation that the previous Government drew up. First, the introduction of a new licensing regime to cover tobacco and nicotine products, including vapes, is hugely welcome. That was a key recommendation of the Khan review in 2022, which the last Government largely ignored and which retailers and the public overwhelmingly support, according to surveys conducted by ASH. The status quo, where there was no requirement to obtain a licence to sell those products, is a major gap in enforcement, particularly when we consider that the sale of alcohol is licensed, while nicotine and tobacco are not.

Secondly, I am pleased that the Government are taking forward an amendment I tabled in Committee during the last Parliament, for the introduction of £200 on-the-spot fines for retailers selling products to under-age people. In 2019 to 2020, 50% of the councils that undertook test purchasing reported that cigarettes or tobacco products were sold to children who were under 18 in at least one of their premises. That proves that the current regime is not enough of a deterrent. The introduction of new on-the-spot fines, which are double the amount proposed by the previous Government, will be much easier to issue and much harder to ignore. Does the Minister agree with me that double the fine is double the deterrent?

Thirdly, I commend Ministers on the action they are taking on vapes. Under the last Government, youth vaping trebled in two years. An estimated one in three vapes on the market were illicit, and products often contained harmful chemicals, heavy metals or even drugs. Gaping loopholes were left to sit on the statute book for years, putting children at risk. The promulgation of dangerous illicit vapes in shops, schools and on our streets is a real concern. Recently, in Birmingham, trading standards officers and the police led raids on

retailers under Operation Cloud, when they seized nearly £6 million-worth of illicit vapes, tobacco and drugs. One raid alone, the biggest ever in Birmingham, clawed £1 million-worth of goods out of criminals' hands. That shows the extent of the problem of the illicit market and the incredible job that council trading standards teams do to keep the public safe.

I thank the Government for getting behind trading standards with a £10 million boost to support their work next year. In particular, I welcome the new Government's introduction of clauses to this Bill to set up a testing regime for vapes, a proposal that I championed in the last Parliament. It is shocking that under the current rules, unlike with tobacco, there is no testing regime for vaping products. That means that dodgy products can be rubber-stamped by the British regulator and wind up on our shelves, undermining the valuable enforcement work that trading standards do to identify and seize un-notified products.

As testing of vapes marketed at young people has shown, a significant proportion of vaping products are not what they say they are. Some market themselves as 0% nicotine when they are not, leading to accidental addictions; others contain harmful substances, such as heavy metals and even anti-freeze, as evidenced by research undertaken by Inter Scientific. That is why during the last Parliament I tabled amendments that would have established a new testing regime for vapes. Unfortunately, the Conservatives voted them down. I commend Ministers for introducing powers that the previous Government snubbed. Nearly 3 million people have quit smoking using vapes. Clearly vapes have a role to play in the transition to a smokefree future, but if they are to be used as stop-smoking aids, we need confidence that the products people buy are safe, which is what routine testing would do.

Finally, I commend the Government on the amendments that have strengthened this Bill; they close the loopholes on vape vending machines and ban vape advertising, promotions and sponsorships. The new clauses will ensure that these products are kept away from the impressionable eyes of young people, so that the next generation are not simply substituting one nicotine addiction for another. There were significant holes in the last Government's plan, and I am glad that the new Government are slamming them shut.

The health crisis facing our country has never been confined to the running of its hospital wards, doctors' surgeries and dental practices. We are a sicker nation, and that public health challenge needs confronting. Life expectancy was extended by three and a half years over the course of the last Labour Government, but in the 14 years under the Tories, it grew by just four months. In this Bill, we see the epitome of the future-facing approach that only a Labour Government can deliver. By stopping the start and ensuring that the next generation never develop an addiction to nicotine, we can protect their health and wellbeing and protect our NHS for many years to come.

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

3.30 pm

**Helen Morgan** (North Shropshire) (LD): I thank the Minister for her opening remarks and add my broad support for the improvements that the Government

have made to the Bill. I will restrict my comments mainly to amendments 1 and 2, which have been tabled in my name and the names of my hon. Friends the Members for Winchester (Dr Chambers), for Eastleigh (Liz Jarvis), for Chichester (Jess Brown-Fuller) and for Mid Sussex (Alison Bennett). I will also comment on new clause 1, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), to which I have added my name.

Amendments 1 and 2 would direct the moneys raised from fixed penalty notices to public health initiatives chosen by the relevant local authority. The Liberal Democrats agree with the Secretary of State and the Government that prevention is better than sickness and cure, and that public health initiatives are crucial in making those key shifts in healthcare that we all hope to achieve. The Secretary of State hopes to create a smokefree generation for those born after 1 January 2009, but there will be existing smokers who may well wish to stop, and who may need help from a public health initiative or a smoking cessation programme to do so. The Conservatives cut public health budgets by a quarter since 2015, meaning that fewer people have had help to quit. That is not what anybody hopes to achieve through this legislation or, more broadly, the reforms to the NHS.

Research by University College London showed that in parts of England, smoking rates have begun to rise again, and they have been flatlining as a whole since 2020. Between 2020 and 2024, the rates rose by 10% in southern England and fell by 9.7% in the north. Overall, an estimated 7.5 million adults in England are smokers. UCL concluded that the disparity between north and south reflected the concentration of dedicated tobacco control programmes in northern regions and their positive impact, and their relative absence in the south. As the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), mentioned, there is also evidence of significant black market activity in the United Kingdom. Cessation activities have therefore become even more important to deprive the criminal gangs involved of funds, and to ensure that people are free of their grip. Given the impact of public health initiatives, I sincerely urge the Government to accept Liberal Democrat amendment 1, and consequential amendment 2, which are in line with the Government's objectives, and would improve health and save taxpayers money in the long run.

Amendment 84, which is also in my name, is very similar to the Opposition's amendment 85. It would restrict the ability of the Secretary of State to unreasonably designate a place as a smokefree area. If they do not mind me saying so, the Conservatives have been a bit sloppy in drafting their amendment, because they have managed to remove protections in existing law for areas where there is a significant risk of second-hand smoke in smokefree areas. The Liberal Democrats' amendment 84 has an added safeguard: if the chief scientific officer—that is not easy for me to say—advises that there is a significant risk of second-hand smoke, an area can be designated as smokefree. The amendment also retains mention of the areas that the Secretary of State has indicated that he will designate as smokefree, including NHS premises, schools, educational establishments and children's playgrounds.

The Secretary of State has indicated that he will not designate other areas as smokefree, particularly if it would have a detrimental impact on our already struggling hospitality industry and much-loved village pubs. We take him at his word on that commitment, but I hope that the Minister can imagine a future in which a different Secretary of State is less inclined to honour a promise made by someone else at the Dispatch Box. It is right and in good order that in that scenario, Parliament should get a vote on the change of heart. I urge the Government to consider this amendment carefully and ensure that the legislation matches the promises made at the Dispatch Box.

New clause 1, which I have also added my name to, would require the Secretary of State to review and report back on the presence of contaminated vapes, and to find ways to reduce their prevalence. My hon. Friend the Member for Bath has campaigned on this issue following findings by the University of Bath that one in six vapes in English schools contained the drug Spice, which can have serious side effects in children, including cardiac arrest. It seems reasonable that the Department of Health and Social Care and the Secretary of State should try to find a way of addressing that issue.

I intend to push amendments 1 and 2 to a vote to ensure that there is additional funding for public health measures. I very much hope that hon. and right hon. Members will support me in this common-sense move to improve public health.

**Mary Kelly Foy** (City of Durham) (Lab): I begin by declaring an interest as the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on smoking and health. I will speak to my amendments and one or two others.

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill is world-leading health legislation that will create the first smokefree generation, protecting children and young people from the harms of smoking. In the City of Durham alone, some 5,500 children start smoking each year. Most of them will go on to wish that they had never started. This Bill will end that. It will stop the start and ensure that every child has a smokefree future. Recent data from UCL has shown that the rates of smoking are falling fastest in the north-east. This can at least partly be attributed to hard work and amazing regional programmes such as Fresh, which works so hard to tackle inequalities in our region. The same data also shows that progress is not guaranteed; in some areas, smoking rates appear to be increasing. The case for action is clear.

New clause 13, in my name, would put a duty on the Secretary of State to publish a road map to a smokefree country every five years. It was a Labour Government who introduced the first-ever smoking strategy in 1998, "Smoking Kills". It is 2025, and smoking still kills. This world-leading Bill is to be celebrated for many reasons, but the rising age of sale will not impact the 6 million people who are currently smoking in the UK. Smoking is not spread equally across our society; the most affluent 10% are set to become smokefree this year. However, at the current rate, the most deprived will not achieve that until 2050. It is vital that the Government ensure that no one is left behind as we create a smokefree future. Having a clear plan for achieving that, and targets for reducing smoking not only for the whole population, but for pregnant women, those struggling with their mental health and those in occupations with high rates

[*Mary Kelly Foy*]

of smoking, will save lives. Will the Minister meet the all-party parliamentary group following the publication of our report to discuss how we can turbocharge reductions in smoking and create the smokefree generation?

New clause 19, tabled by the Conservatives, would require the Secretary of State to publish reports on the illicit market. Let us be clear that His Majesty's Revenue and Customs already publishes annual data with a detailed analysis of the illicit market, so it is difficult to see what the Department of Health and Social Care could do in addition. There are no additional data sources available that would yield any different results.

Finally, amendments 82 and 83 would remove the exemption for performers. Since 2007, it has been against the law to smoke inside. However, that does not apply to actors smoking in performances for artistic reasons. There is a play on in London's west end that tells the story of the American oil lobbyist and master strategist Don Pearlman. Don Pearlman was a heavy smoker who died from complications arising from lung cancer. The actor playing the lead role smokes on stage. The exemption should be removed, because actors deserve to have their health protected at work as much as everyone else. Audiences and other actors also deserve to be protected from second-hand smoke. Performances at the National Theatre already require that smoking in performances be substituted for vaping or other alternatives. There is no reason why all performances should not follow suit.

Amendments 85 and 86 deal with smokefree extensions. I know that there will be further consultation and debate on the regulations creating extensions to smokefree places and vape-free areas, but can the Minister confirm that there will be exemptions if it is shown that the use of vapes in certain settings aids smoking cessation efforts? I am thinking of, for example, mental health settings. The Mental Health and Smoking Partnership has pointed out that vapes are a valuable tool in such settings to help patients quit. Will the Minister undertake to visit a mental health trust to hear directly about people's experiences? It is vital that we all work with trusts to provide clear guidance on how to navigate these changes. Particular attention must be paid to how the policies in the Bill, and those that will come into effect after it, such as the disposable vapes ban in June, will interact with each other.

Today's funding announcement is welcome, but we have gone down to the wire, given that the funding was due to end at the end of this month. Can we be reassured that, following the spending review, services can expect consistent, long-term funding that will allow them to plan their activities and hire staff on longer contracts?

The Bill presents us with a historic opportunity to transform public health in this country, and, after working tirelessly on it for more than a decade, I am proud to support it. However, we must remain vigilant to ensure that no one is left behind. All aspects of the Bill, from the smoking cessation measures to protections for workers in the arts, must be fully realised if we are to create a truly smokefree generation.

**Dame Caroline Dinenage** (Gosport) (Con): I think you may agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the longer we spend in this job, the more we realise that almost

nothing is ever straightforward. Even the best intentions nearly always have unintended consequences, and there is absolutely no doubt that smoking, and specifically smoking tobacco, has done untold damage in my constituency and continues to do so. The health of my constituents has suffered as a result of the well-documented effects of regular smoking, and, moreover, smoking is a driver of social and economic inequality. Smokers earn, on average, 7% less than non-smokers. I could not believe that statistic when I first read it, but when I thought about it, I realised that it made complete sense. Those who take more time off work because of the inevitable ill-health effects of smoking, those who spend more of their disposable income on tobacco, and those who develop a dependency on a drug such as nicotine will obviously experience, over time, an impact on their earnings. Smoking is like an extra tax on the most disadvantaged communities, and I can see why this Government have maintained the last Government's ambition to phase it out.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): I agree with everything that my hon. Friend is saying about smoking, but the elephant in this room is the dramatic decline in legal tobacco sales. According to HMRC, they have declined by 44% since 2021, while the number of smokers has declined by only 0.5%. We are reaching a stage at which we are taxing cigarettes so heavily that we are fuelling the black market and criminality, and we have to be aware that, as my hon. Friend says, these are unintended consequences.

**Dame Caroline Dinenage:** It is almost as if my right hon. Friend had read what is written next on my piece of paper. I was about to say that unfortunately we do not live in a perfect world, even our noblest ambitions have unintended consequences, and the Bill is not a silver bullet. There is already a thriving black market for tobacco in Gosport, and I am extremely concerned about the possibility that prohibition will exacerbate the problem. I am keen to hear from the Minister what action she plans to take, alongside the phased prohibition, to provide proper resources for the police forces in Hampshire and the rest of the country to ensure that the law is upheld, and what plan she has to take on the criminals who are already profiting, and who will only profit more as the age at which a person can legally buy tobacco rises.

Even without the Bill, smoking rates are falling across the UK as a result of a number of policy interventions, including education, smoking support and awareness campaigns. I recently visited a company in Gosport that provides innovative smoking cessation support. It is a vaping company, but it has a partnership with Mid and South Essex NHS foundation trust, which signposts smokers to its stores, where they are given continuing support to further enhance their shift away from tobacco. Hampshire county council has a similar Smokefree Hampshire scheme, which it says contributes to 500 quits per year. Interventions such as these have proven to be successful, so has the Minister weighed up their merits against the possible implications of the Bill?

3.45 pm

I want to talk mainly about new clause 2, which has been tabled in my name. In a rare example of things genuinely being as simple as they seem, the new clause would simply ban the use of plastic filters in cigarettes.



The debate today will largely focus on the public health benefits of banning smoking—improving cancer rates, for example—and rightly so, and I have to be very clear that banning plastic filters will do absolutely nothing for public health. It will, however, make a great deal of difference to the thousands of my constituents who bathe or swim in the Solent, and to the marine life there.

Over 2 million cigarette butts are littered or dropped in the Gosport constituency, and that figure will be replicated in every constituency across the country. It is litter that we are all paying to clean up: it costs a local council on average about £40 million a year. Inevitably, many cigarette butts are flushed into our waterways, our rivers and our seas. In fact, they account for 66% of all littered items in the UK: it is pretty grim.

Cigarette stubs can take about 14 years to degrade in the marine environment, so it is unpleasant to swim around Stokes bay, at the end of my road, among little pieces of discoloured plastic. The bigger threat, though, is to the environment. One cigarette butt left to soak in water for 96 hours will release enough toxins to kill half the saltwater or freshwater fish that are exposed to it, and 40% of the chemicals contained in cigarette butt leachate have been found to be either toxic or very toxic to marine life. There is even a chance that the slow degradation of plastic butts is contributing to the rise in the microplastics increasingly found in the human body.

Marine ecosystems such as the Solent seascape, which covers 52,000 hectares of coastal and marine habitats, including the Titchfield haven in my constituency, are precious. We have spoken at length over many years about the impact of sewage in our waterways, but we now need to talk about the impact of plastic. That project aims to reverse loss of biodiversity in the Solent, which will have all kinds of benefits, including tourism and nature-based solutions to flooding. Seagrass installation relies on a very delicate ecosystem, which includes thriving fish populations, but leaching toxins from plastic cigarette butts put those populations at risk.

Some large companies have already demonstrated that it is easy to make the switch in production required to accommodate such a change in the law. Biodegradable filters already exist. It has been six years since McDonald's made a decision to switch to paper straws, for example, but biodegradable filters, unlike paper straws, work and make no discernible difference to the user experience. That explains why polling suggests that this measure is supported by 86% of UK adults.

New clause 2 would represent a huge step towards removing 3.9 billion cigarette butts from our ecosystem, combating the blight on our beaches and streets, the stain in our streams and the rubbish on our roads. It is an environmental no-brainer. It is also a parliamentary no-brainer, as it has massive public support. I hope the Government can see the merit in supporting it today.

**Euan Stainbank** (Falkirk) (Lab): I declare an interest as an officer of the APPG on responsible vaping.

I was asked by a teenage member of my family over the Christmas break what my biggest regret is, and I undoubtedly go back to the evening at an empty—a party, for anybody unaware of the Scottish parlance—back in 2016, when I first took a draw off a cigarette. I know all too well the addictive power of nicotine, and I promised when I was sent here by the people of Falkirk in July

that I would do everything I could to prevent another generation from being so easily exposed to it. Sadly, I must say that some of the amendments proposed may jeopardise that near universally supported ambition in our communities.

There is no safe way to consume nicotine, and we have known for near a century that smoking tobacco will in the long term be incredibly damaging to the health of a person. If we pass this Bill and slowly but surely cut off the tobacco industry from new customers, we will see lower occurrences of cancer, fewer heart attacks, fewer strokes and less illness in our communities. Points raised by hon. Members about the black market are important, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response, but they do not undermine my support for the generational ban in this Bill.

For all the reasons articulated, I do not support the various attempts in amendments to alter the generational smoking ban. In Committee, I saw an attempt to alter the scope of the Bill to set the age of sale at 25. I see similar attempts on the amendment paper to change the age of sale to 21, or to scrap the generational smoking ban altogether. I doubt it will come as a surprise to my constituents, who are well aware of my leanings, but for me the freedom for our bairns eventually to be allowed to smoke something that may ultimately kill them does not fall into the philosophical sphere of inalienable liberties.

Saying that, I will don the cloak of alternatively minded colleagues momentarily. For all but the last three days in Committee, I was 24 years old. The shift in the age of sale proposed in Committee would have deprived me of a liberty I already have and that regrettably I exercised extensively in my younger years. Depriving adults of their liberty in the name of liberty does strike me as an odd argument for opponents of a generational smoking ban. This generational smoking ban does not deprive anyone of a liberty they currently hold, but shifts tobacco into the category of inaccessible substances for those who never had, or will have, the right to begin with. The “liberty for our bairns to eventually be able to start smoking” campaign would get short shrift from parents at the school gates of Falkirk, or from those sitting at the bedside of loved ones dying decades prematurely. No smoker wants their bairns to start smoking.

**Catherine Atkinson** (Derby North) (Lab): There is growing concern about the use of vapes as a tool to entice children into sexual exploitation. My probing amendment, new clause 5, was prompted by a police officer in Derby concerned about this national issue. I am grateful to the Minister for meeting me to discuss it. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must acknowledge the use of vapes to groom children, and ensure that licensing authorities and the police work together to crack down on any retailers connected to such activities?

**Euan Stainbank:** My hon. Friend identifies an important point about the protection of young people, and I would be very interested to hear the Minister address it in her winding up.

Non-smokers should never vape, but we should acknowledge that vaping can help a hell of a lot of smokers to quit, and that the evidence base we have on relative harm shows that vaping is far less harmful than tobacco smoking. The consolidation of vaping into a

[*Euan Stainbank*]

more utilitarian device used solely for the cessation of smoking is something we should pursue. That necessitates measures that stop the worrying rise in young people getting their hands on vapes in the first place. During evidence in Committee, Trading Standards articulated that online age gating has a far lower failure rate than sales over the counter. We heard from various sources about how vapes are still far too easy for our bairns to get their hands on through proxy or underage counter purchases. There is still work to be done to put the onus on the vaping industry to safeguard our bairns.

That why I put my name to new clause 6 and new clause 7, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend (Mary Glindon). They would permit the Secretary of State to make regulations mandating vape retailers to sell only vapes that include approved age-gating technology, allowing adults to lock their vapes and prevent bairns being able to use them. That would align with and strengthen the Bill's objectives of deterring underage use by seeking to extend protection away from the point of sale to the point of use. I will ask Ministers to commit to meet me and the all-party parliamentary group to discuss how age-gating technology and wider measures can be supported in the United Kingdom to strengthen the shared aim we all have to stop bairns vaping.

The Bill grants the Secretary of State similar powers to bring in regulations relating to the display, packaging and flavours of vapes. On that, I will make a few brief points. The Bill should not deter smokers switching to vapes. Flavours are a huge reason why smokers quit and stick by quitting, and we should not regulate in any way that undermines the crucial message we must get to stick with adult smokers, which is that vaping has a far lower relative harm than continuing to smoke.

If we can, across this House, acknowledge the scientific consensus that there is no non-harmful consumption of tobacco, the Bill should be supported. It is time to take a step that will do a substantial amount to deter smoking, prevent nicotine addiction and secure a generation against smoking-related disease and premature death.

**Jack Rankin:** I hesitate to break up the consensus ever so slightly, but I do disagree fundamentally with the Bill. In my view, a generational smoking ban misrepresents the proper relationship between the state and the individual, and creates two tiers of adults. Members will be heartened to know that, recognising the will of the House on Second Reading, I do not intend to plough on with that argument too far. What I have tried to do with my amendments, however, is to genuinely improve the main aim of the Bill in a way that gets people off smoking in the interests of public health, which, whether we are for or against a generational ban on smoking, is something that we should all support. That is why I am grateful to Members from across this House—on the Government Benches, the Liberal Democrat Benches and the Democratic Unionist Benches, as well as some independent Members—for supporting the measures in my name, new clauses 8, 9 and 10 and amendment 46.

The message behind those measures is simple: let us ensure less harmful vapes and nicotine products get to the adult smokers who could benefit from them so that smoking rates continue to fall. In that regard, I associate

myself with some of the remarks made by the hon. Members for Falkirk (Euan Stainbank) and for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy).

I feel the risk of the Bill is that Ministers may inadvertently weaken the decline in smoking in Britain somewhat. As the Minister and shadow Minister both said in their opening remarks, vaping is a legitimate and desirable smoking cessation tool for adults who currently smoke.

**Sir John Hayes:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, and I associate myself with much of what he has said already. He will understand that when plain packaging was introduced, just that kind of inadvertent effect was felt, as those who wished to counterfeit tobacco products were able to do so at will, using plain packaging that looks no different from legal tobacco packaging.

**Jack Rankin:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his remarks, and also associate myself with the same remarks from my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage). We have to be a little careful about the inadvertent effects of what might be the goodwill of all of us in this House.

Regardless of how one sees the state's role in this matter, we should all welcome the decrease in smoking in this country from the highs of almost 30% in the early 2000s to 11.6% today. We have to recognise that that is partly due to education, partly to do with social stigma and partly because of legislation that this House has brought forward. We should also acknowledge, however, the essential role that the free market has played, particularly with vapes and other non-tobacco products, in getting adult smokers to stop smoking.

There are still 6 million smokers in this country, and none of them will come under the umbrella of the generational ban. We therefore need to ensure that there are safer alternatives out there for them. In my view, the Bill as currently drafted risks hanging those smokers out to dry by treating vapes and nicotine products—although they are not included in the ban—in the same way as cigarettes are treated, which is a false equivalence that is not backed by the science.

Sitting on the Public Bill Committee, I realised how prevalent the view is among the public that vapes and other smoking cessation tools, such as non-combustible tobacco, are as bad as cigarettes, when in reality vapes are at least 95% safer than cigarettes, according to Public Health England and Dr Khan's independent review—look at any smoking cessation website to find a similar message. Any smoker knows how difficult it is to go cold turkey, and less dangerous off-ramps like vapes can be a lifeline for those looking for a way out of cigarettes. In fact, in many aspects, the NHS actively promotes such tools through its swap to stop scheme, and has found that almost two thirds of people who vape alongside using a stop smoking service quit smoking.

What concerns me primarily is the blanket ban approach to marketing, particularly for vapes and nicotine products, which my new clauses 8 and 9 would address. I know that many across this House have supported the new clauses and share those concerns. Although I totally support the need to stop disposable, rainbow, candy floss-flavour vapes being aimed at children—that is absolutely unacceptable—adult smokers do need to know that there is a safer alternative to cigarettes.

On that concern, many smokers now believe vaping to be as dangerous as cigarettes. Cancer Research UK has found that 57% of adult smokers think that vaping is just as harmful, if not more harmful, than smoking cigarettes. The risk of a draconian approach to vaping, as I consider the Bill to take, will only reinforce that incorrect messaging, which is damaging to public health.

By permitting marketing in limited circumstances and under strict restrictions, as my new clauses aim to do, we can get the message to the 6 million adult smokers that there is a safer alternative out there. Indeed, the Government's own impact assessment recognises the risk of the

"Health impacts of fewer people using vapes and nicotine products to quit smoking."

I say respectfully to the Minister that this should set off alarm bells in Government.

That is what new clause 8 does. It simply asks the Government to have a proper consultation on the potential impacts of a marketing ban, digging deeper than the sparse bullet points currently given to it in the impact assessment. This would allow us to listen to the consumers who actively use these products and find out how these changes will impact them. In the Public Bill Committee, the consumer voice was largely absent. Restrictions on flavours and packaging and vape-free areas are already subject to consultation and this amendment would simply bring marketing in line with that.

A deeper consideration of the impact of the marketing ban would help us maintain our progress towards a smoke-free 2030 and allow the Government the opportunity to prevent the unintended consequences of the Bill. Education through marketing is one of the best tools the Government have at their disposal, so why not wield the free market to effect real social change and let vape companies do the leg work?

4 pm

Further, if new clause 9 were to be included in the Bill, every single non-cigarette nicotine product would have to have a printed warning at the Secretary of State's discretion. This could say something like, "Strictly for adult smokers." We could even use the chief medical officer's own words, "If you don't smoke, don't vape." This would send a clear message about the purpose of vapes, without stopping them from getting into the hands of smokers who could benefit from them.

In the Bill Committee, many raised the issue that any advertising seen by adults would inevitably be seen by children. That is why I tabled amendment 46, which would avoid this problem by permitting advertising in adult-only environments such as pubs, bars and clubs. To me, that is just common sense. If we know that everyone is 18, is no good reason why advertising of these products should not be permitted. Further, we know that these night-time venues are often hotspots for smoking. These are the people who could benefit from tobacco-free products the most. If a vape or a nicotine pouch is advertised in this location, a smoker may well think twice before going to the local newsagent to buy cigarettes. This would work especially well if the same pubs were licensed to sell these products on the premises. I urge the Government, through these amendments, to reconsider their approach to advertising

when it comes to legitimate smoking-cessation tools. My recent written question to the Department exposed that either no real assessment has been done in this area of policy or it has been obscured.

**Euan Stainbank:** Specifically on amendment 46, which I have a degree of sympathy for, who would be responsible for enforcing the advertisements and ensuring that it was only those over the age of 18 who were seeing them?

**Jack Rankin:** I am assuming, to be honest, that it would be the same people who are responsible for the licensing of alcohol advertising.

All my amendments speak to the principles that I have outlined, which I think are consistent with the aims of the Bill, and for which I have received support from across the House. I hope that Members both in here and in the other place will recognise the value of my amendments and that the Government will take these concerns seriously.

**Mary Glendon** (Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend) (Lab): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for responsible vaping, I have followed the progress of the Bill closely. I will speak to new clauses 4, 6, 7 and 15, as well to amendments 36, 37 and 88, all of which stand in my name. I congratulate the Minister on her appointment and on stepping up so wonderfully to help move the Bill forward today.

Youth vaping is an enormous public health challenge that forms one of the Government's central messages in the Bill. All of us in this place will have heard concerns from teachers and parents about the prevalence of youth vaping, and the challenges that schools face in tackling it. The Bill sets out to reduce the appeal of vaping to children, but a delicate and calculated approach must be taken when addressing youth vaping. In addressing one problem, it is incumbent on us all as legislators to not give rise to another—in this case, deterring tobacco smokers from making the switch.

We still have more than 6 million smokers to reach, and vaping is 95% safer than smoking, according to King's College hospital and the former body Public Health England, and it is the most successful tool to help smokers to quit. According to data from Action on Smoking and Health, 3 million adult vapers are ex-smokers. There are hard yards that we still have to take to reach smokers, and I fear that the Bill, at present, is losing sight of what the evidence base says about the relative harms.

Vape flavours can play a significant role in passporting adults towards a less harmful alternative. I was pleased to see in the response to a written question I tabled that the Government recognise that flavours are a consideration for adult smokers seeking to quit. The previous Public Health Minister, the hon. Member for Gorton and Denton (Andrew Gwynne), said that

"it is important we strike the balance between restricting vape flavours to reduce their appeal to young people, whilst ensuring vapes remain available for adult smokers as a smoking cessation tool."

A study led by the University of Bristol last year found that flavour restrictions could discourage adults from using e-cigarettes to help them quit smoking. Amendment 37, which stands in my name, seeks to strike a balance between banning flavour descriptors, which would remove



[*Mary Glindon*]

flavours that deliberately appeal to children such as gummy bear and bubble gum, and allowing adults to use their smoking cessation product of choice.

Sticking on product requirements, amendment 36 would empower Ministers to regulate the design and interoperability of products in order to prohibit the sale of very high-puff count vaping devices. These products are typically cheaper per puff, contain significantly more vape liquid and plastic content than other devices, and have a specific youth appeal. In January, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs released new guidance outlining what can be considered a reusable product, aiming to prevent the retail of vapes with superficial charging and refilling features. I believe that this should be put on a statutory footing to ensure its consistent and effective application. The Bill should be amended to clearly stipulate “one device, one tank” to prevent irresponsible actors from flooding the UK with these products following the disposable ban.

New clauses 6 and 7, which stand in my name, would introduce a requirement for retailers in England and Wales to include age verification at the point of use. While the Bill seeks to tackle youth appeal, a fundamental issue is left unaddressed. Once a vaping product leaves a shop, there is no barrier to its being used by children, but technology against this already exists. I met with IKE Tech LLC, a company that has developed low-cost, Bluetooth-enabled chips that pair with a mobile app for secure identity verification. Its technology also includes geofencing, which can disable devices in certain areas, such as schools. The new clauses would harness the potential that innovation has to offer to address youth vaping accessibility head-on.

Turning to advertising, new clause 15 would create a limited and tightly defined exemption from the new advertising restrictions for in-store promotional materials in specialist vape shops, provided that these are not externally visible and that they meet any conditions around health warnings set by Ministers. I am fearful of a situation where specialist tobacconists are given exemptions to the restrictions set out under clauses 114 to 118 but specialist vape shops are not. These vape stores provide adult smokers with important advice and product consultations in their journey away from tobacco, and I have seen that in action.

Nicotine pouches are currently only regulated through the General Product Safety Regulations 2005, meaning that there is comparatively little regulation around these products, particularly regarding nicotine strength. Nicotine pouches with strengths ranging from 70 mg to 150 mg are easily obtainable. There is a pressing need to limit the strength of nicotine to lower levels. New clause 4, which stands in my name, would ban the manufacture and sale of pouches with more than 20 mg per pouch. This would eliminate the dangerous high-strength products while maintaining a threshold that minimises adverse consequences arising from the restriction, such as smoking and illicit pouches.

Before making any regulations under part 5 of the Bill, amendment 88 would require the Secretary of State to consult

“any persons or bodies as appear to him or her representative of the interests concerned”,

instead of what is stipulated in the more limited current wording. The Bill provides Ministers with broad powers to make further regulations. It is vital that these powers are exercised in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including public health experts, enforcement bodies, cessation specialists, retailers and industry.

As chair of the APPG for responsible vaping, I hope that Ministers will be willing to engage in the coming months as regulations are brought forward. People who do not smoke should not vape. But for those who do use tobacco, I believe that we have a duty to ensure that legislation effectively harnesses the power of vapes as a smoking cessation tool.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend (Mary Glindon), and I congratulate her on her work on vaping and combating illegal sales. I declare my interest as the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for action on smoking and health for nine and a half years. I have seen the work that the Conservative Government did to combat smoking, which led to a dramatic drop, but we are not where we need to be. I commend the Minister and the Government on bringing forward the Bill, and on absorbing almost all the amendments that my colleagues and I proposed in the Bill Committee for the previous Bill to strengthen it and make it much more likely that we can achieve a smokefree England by 2030.

As has been said, the Bill will make us a world leader in tobacco control. We have always been at the forefront, but it consolidates regulation and limits the reach of the tobacco industry. We should be clear that tobacco is a uniquely lethal product that, when used as intended, kills two thirds of long-term users. Above all else, it is highly addictive and hard to quit once people are addicted. Most smokers will say that they wish that they did not smoke and had never started, and that they have had their agency removed by their addiction. By passing this legislation, we are giving choice back to young people in the future, who will avoid ever falling into that trap and the addiction that it brings.

I have tabled a number of new clauses. I think that the Minister is unlikely to accept them, but I commend them to her for further consideration. New clause 17 calls on the Government to consult on the introduction of a “polluter pays” levy on the profits of the big tobacco industry. The all-party group has championed this campaign for many years. It is supported by the Khan review, which was set up by the former Member for Bromsgrove to enable a position to be reached. Almost all its recommendations are absorbed by the Bill, as they were by the previous Bill, but some are outstanding. The “polluter pays” levy is one of them. It is supported by charities, health organisations, academics and think-tanks.

Tobacco consumption costs our society greatly. The latest data from Action on Smoking and Health estimates that smoking costs society in England alone £43.7 billion a year—far more than the £6.8 billion that is raised through tobacco taxes. That includes £27.6 billion in lost economic productivity. We heard from the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about reducing the cost of the welfare state. If we can stop people smoking, they will not become unhealthy and unable to work. They will be able to get back into the

workforce and pay taxes rather than be in receipt of welfare. This is an opportunity to reduce the impact on the benefit system and improve productivity right across the UK.

**Jim Dickson** (Dartford) (Lab): I commend the hon. Gentleman on his excellent speech so far and his work over many years to reduce smoking prevalence in this country. Does he agree that the tobacco companies still make a huge margin on the tobacco that is sold, and therefore could easily afford the “polluter pays” levy that he proposes?

**Bob Blackman:** I welcome that intervention from the vice-chair of the all-party group. As we have said, smoking is not a free choice; it is an addiction peddled by an aggressive industry. I will come to some of the things that the hon. Gentleman has said.

4.15 pm

A “polluter pays” levy would achieve three things. First, it would raise approximately £700 million a year. That money would go to the Treasury and could be used for smoking cessation services that support people to quit, and indeed other health-related matters. In fact, all the Government’s programmes on tobacco, including mass media campaigns, incentives for pregnant women and support for workers with mental health problems, could be funded by that, and there would still be cash to spare for other services. That could go to other public health initiatives to achieve the Government’s aim of halving the gap in healthy life expectancy between the richest and poorest, which the Minister outlined earlier.

Secondly, it would allow the Government to have greater control over the market. The combination of tobacco being highly addictive and four companies having almost a monopoly in the UK leads to severe market failures. We tax tobacco, quite rightly, to incentivise quitting. However, the industry gets around that because it just ups the price, so the cost goes on the consumer rather than on the profits that these companies are making. When there is a tax hike, prices on luxury brands go up even more and prices are kept lower on the budget ones, which undermines the public health objectives of tobacco taxation.

As the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy) said, the reality is that people on a lower income often smoke more, and they will smoke the worst brands. Minimum excise tax was put in place to address that problem, but the practice still exists, so greater controls are needed. The levy model that we propose would give us the tools we need to end those practices and narrow the price gap between the most and least expensive products. We would expect that in itself to bring rates of smoking down, even before the revenue raised was invested in further programmes.

Finally, a levy of this kind would correct a moral wrong. It is right and fair that the tobacco industry, and not the UK taxpayer, should pay for the damage that it has caused to our society. I repeat that the model would come directly from the industry’s profits, which far exceed the norm for consumer products, as has been mentioned. The public support the measure, with 79% of adults in Great Britain supporting a levy on the tobacco industry and only 5% opposed. In the current fiscal environment—where the Government are prepared to look at more controversial ways to raise revenue, it is

clear that they should consult on this proposal. If the Minister is not minded to accept this excellent idea today, would she take it to the Treasury and encourage participation on it?

New clause 16—my second new clause—would introduce a ban on online sales, which is not currently covered under the Bill. I understand that that would be rather unique for the UK, as there is not currently a product available for sale in bricks and mortar shops that cannot be purchased online. However, we would by no means be the first country to do so: Brazil, Mexico, Finland, our neighbours in France, and Greece, to name but a few, have all banned the sale of tobacco products via the internet.

Banning online sales was recommended in the Khan review and by the World Health Organisation, which argues that internet sales constitute a “point-of-sale display” and “inherently involve advertising and promotion”.

Indeed, we can look up tobacco products on any of the major supermarkets’ websites and see reviews such as:

“Quite nice for relaxing on a summer day, beside a bubbling brook perhaps, or at a test match.”

That is not aligned with the message that we want to impart to smokers. As a cricket fan, I very much doubt that any test match ground these days would allow people to light up in any case.

It is important that we look to the implementation of the smokefree generation. With the right support and guidance, retailers will be able to implement the policy. However, will delivery drivers for supermarket shops and Deliveroo drivers, for example, be given the same level of training and information? Will they be as invested in enforcing the age of sale as shop owners and other workers? Currently, online sales are not exploited by under-age individuals attempting to circumvent the law. However, we must be mindful that that may happen in the future. In a country that is moving ever closer to becoming smokefree, should tobacco continue to be available and delivered to our doors at the click of a button? I think not.

Although I fully support the smokefree generation policy, I believe that it needs to go further and that we need to create a nicotine-free future. Nicotine is the drug that people become addicted to. The long-term effects of other nicotine products, such as snus and heated tobacco, are just as damaging and addictive. If we forbade their sale to anyone born after 2009, they would hopefully never know what it is like to experience nicotine and would never be stuck in the vicious cycle of nicotine addiction.

I also fear that legislating only for a smokefree society will leave opportunity for the tobacco industry to innovate and create new products, which we know it does all the time. The industry has targeted marketing at vulnerable people many times, and there is nothing to stop it doing it again in order to monopolise a new market that harms people’s health. That is why the legislation must be active and amendable. To prevent reopening the Bill in future years, we might as well kill two birds with one stone by ensuring that there is no opportunity for nicotine to continue ruining people’s lives. We may need to consider that as the Bill progresses through the Lords.

To avoid duplicating what my colleagues have said—and what they will no doubt go on to say—I will not go into depth on the amendments. I have added my name in support of new clauses 13 and 14, and amendments 86 and 87. I also support the Government amendments.

I thank the Government for adopting the Bill from the previous Conservative Government. I have been advocating for the Bill since I first entered this House back in 2010. It is great that we are finally on the cusp of protecting our future generations and our children's children. I urge Ministers to accept my amendments in the spirit in which I tabled them, to ensure that we cover all bases and leave no room for misinterpretation or for big tobacco to circumvent the measures. I commend the amendments and the Bill to the House.

**Mr Alex Barros-Curtis** (Cardiff West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow some of the speeches that we have heard so far. I rise to support new clause 11 and the package of related amendments that the Government have tabled to this landmark Bill.

I was privileged to serve on the Bill Committee for two reasons: first, I had the pleasure of the company of colleagues from across the House—albeit sometimes for more hours than one might care for on a Thursday evening—and secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this legislation will undoubtedly save lives. On Second Reading, I talked about how the Bill will deliver on our Government's commitment to ensuring that the next generation can never legally buy cigarettes, creating the first smokefree generation. As has been said, smoking is still the biggest cause of cancer and death. Tobacco is responsible for 160 cancer cases per day in the UK, and 3,100 cancer cases annually in Wales.

New clause 11 and the associated grouping of amendments is welcome. As the Minister said, the purpose of those amendments is to ensure that, for example, the list of identity documents keeps up with innovation and accommodates the possibility of digital ID. That is to future-proof the Bill, as the Minister said. Future-proofing has been mentioned in a couple of contributions today, and it came up in Committee, too, where the Opposition in particular expressed concern about the powers that would be delegated to Ministers in order to bring into effect certain provisions of the Bill. Those powers are needed, because we need the Government of the day to be able to respond quickly and with agility to the innovation—I use that term sardonically—of the tobacco industry in finding ways around the rules that we will impose on it if the Bill proceeds.

A great deal of the debate has focused on vaping, on which I will focus the remainder of my remarks. Although I recognise the value of vaping in acting as a smoking cessation tool for some, is it neither harmless nor some panacea, as I said on Second Reading and in Committee, and as colleagues have said, too. There is much to welcome in the Bill in relation to vaping. The ban on the advertising of vapes, and measures to curb youth vaping and regulate the use of vapes, are examples that we welcome. However, the reality is that, as has been said, vaping among the youth has more than doubled. Action on Smoking and Health estimated that as recently as 2023, 20.5% of children aged 11 to 17 had tried vaping. That is an example of a powerful industry profiting not just from cessation but from addiction, marketing vaping at children by switching their conveyor belt of customers to a new source. Indeed, there is some alarming evidence that some vapers are not quitting smoking but simply swapping one addiction for another and many are becoming dual users. I welcome some of the contributions from colleagues, but we must be very much alive to those dangers.

Throughout the passage of the Bill and consistent with the Government's work in the realm of public health since they took office, vaping is regularly referred to as a smoking cessation tool. As has been mentioned, and as various chief medical officers from all our home nations have said, if someone smokes, vaping is much safer. Although I accept that vaping is a helpful tool in the fight for better public health, it is regrettable that we do not have for vaping the wealth of evidence over decades that underpins tobacco and the deadly consequences of smoking. We must therefore be clear on this: if someone does not smoke, they should not vape. Vaping is not harmless; it is just less harmful than smoking tobacco.

Public health policy must be based on evidence and not on spin from the industry. Indeed, the power of big tobacco has been expanded on by colleagues.

**Matt Rodda** (Reading Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. I particularly like the way he summed up the inherent risks of vaping and his explanation that vaping could be helpful to people who wish to give up, but that at the same time there is a real threat to people who have never smoked or vaped. Does he agree that this matter needs to be seen in the wider contexts of issues at secondary and even primary school and of differences in public health outcomes across communities, with a need to focus resources on particular communities—whether children or others—to try to help?

**Mr Barros-Curtis**: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I trust the Minister will expand on that when she comes to wind up the debate.

As I said, public health policy must be based on evidence and not just spin or perception, so moving forward, I urge the Government to ensure that as part of their work to implement the legislation, as well as promoting vaping as a smoking cessation tool they must also undertake work to research the consequences of vaping on both the physical and mental health of the individual, its financial impact and, as was said, any regional and national inequalities that have become entrenched by vaping. When she comes back to this matter in her wind-up, will the Minister also assure me that in so doing she will work with the four home nations to ensure that that data is as thorough as possible?

If that research shows, as I have no doubt it will, that vaping is significantly damaging to the nation's health—perhaps less so than smoking, but none the less still significantly damaging—we must act to curb it. We cannot afford to wait decades and decades for that truth to come out in the way that it took decades for big tobacco to be found out. I would be grateful if the Minister could provide some reassurance on that point.

In conclusion, I am proud to support this legislation. As has been said, there is no liberty in addiction and there is no freedom in being victim to a craving that kills. The Bill takes an unprecedented step forward to curb that damage and I urge colleagues from across the House to support it.

**Nigel Farage** (Clacton) (Reform): I must declare an interest: I am a co-founder of Action on World Health.

I have to say, I find the tone of moral superiority in the Chamber this afternoon almost unbearable. Members clearly believe they are better human beings than those outside who choose to pursue activities that Members



perhaps would not pursue. It would come as a bit of a shock, I suppose, to some in this Chamber, but there are some of us who like a smoke—we do. We even go for a few pints in a pub, we have a punt on the horses and I am even tempted to have the odd doughnut—I know; that is perhaps the naughtiest of all. We want to have fun. We want to make our own minds up. This place can educate us, tell us, give us the facts, but the idea that it should make those decisions for other people shows me that the spirit of Oliver Cromwell is alive and well.

**John Slinger** (Rugby) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a responsible Government should seek to improve public health, particularly the public health of the younger generation?

4.30 pm

**Nigel Farage:** It is quite possible that sugar should be banned, so yes, I agree. It is possible, but I do not think that is what the Government are here to do. The Government can educate; individuals should make up their own mind.

Some of the nonsense I have heard this afternoon has been quite extraordinary. A smokefree generation! We even had the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) suggesting we would be smokefree by 2030. To begin with, the idea that nobody born after 2009 could buy the tobacco products that those born before then could is just another aspect of two-tier Britain. And not a single Member—not one, despite the fact that we are discussing nicotine and tobacco products—so far has mentioned drugs. Oh, no! Let's forget about that, because drugs are illegal already and we cannot do anything about them. I have been hearing for decades that there will be a war on drugs. Where is it getting us? Drug use is rocketing, and class A drugs in particular, with all the associated crime, are proliferating everywhere.

Here is the danger: believe it or not, an ounce of tobacco is now more expensive, if purchased legally in a shop, than an ounce of silver, so already we have a rocketing trade in illegal cigarettes and loose tobacco. If we carry on down this route, with age bands and so on, we will find ourselves in the position that Australia has stupidly put itself in by over-taxing tobacco and making it very difficult to smoke. There have been 40 fire-bombings of premises in Melbourne alone in the last two years. Do not drive tobacco into the hands of the criminals. Do not create a new black market. I totally agree with the Minister: this is not an activity that we should encourage. We are not keen for our kids to smoke, but please treat us as grown-ups. Educate us. Let us make our choices. Do not let the criminals win.

**Dr Beccy Cooper** (Worthing West) (Lab): First, I should say thank you to the Minister for presenting this afternoon, and for allowing me to be on the Tobacco and Vapes Bill Committee, which was incredibly interesting. There were differing views and there was robust conversation. It is always good to listen to different views, but overall the Bill generally had cross-party support. As Conservative Members have pointed out, many Members of their party have been campaigning for this Bill for a long time.

I am a public health consultant—I trained for 10 to 15 years to be one—and the precondition for public health policy is data and evidence. Opinions are interesting—they can add great colour and character to a conversation—but data and evidence will ultimately deliver better population

health outcomes. This public health Bill will stop people dying and will take away addiction to a substance—an addiction that is not a choice.

For many years, there have been public health conversations about whether we should impose measures. This conversation is not new. I wonder how many of us in the House feel strongly these days about wearing seatbelts, but we do not have to go too far back to find a time when people really objected to being told to wear a seatbelt. Tobacco is undoubtedly still the leading cause of premature death and disability in the United Kingdom, as has been mentioned by my hon. Friends. Every day, around 160 people are diagnosed with cancer caused by smoking, and smoking causes at least 16 different types of cancer.

I will talk primarily about new clause 13, proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy). The Bill will do outstanding work to enable a smokefree generation, but we also need to continue to tackle health inequalities for existing smokers. Smoking is harmful, and differences in smoking prevalence across the population translate into major differences in death rates and illness. We in this place come together from across the country and represent different constituencies. We want the best health outcomes, among many other things, for our residents. It is therefore incumbent on us to look at inequalities and where they reside, and to legislate against them where possible.

Smoking is the single largest driver of health inequalities in England. It is far more common among people with lower incomes, and I am happy to discuss with any Members why that is. The more disadvantaged someone is, the more likely they are to smoke, to suffer from smoking-related disease, and to suffer a premature death. Smoking-related health inequalities are not related solely to socioeconomic status. We represent different parts of the United Kingdom. The poorer health of people in the north of England is in part due to higher rates of smoking there. Smoking rates are also higher among people with a mental health condition, people in contact with the criminal justice system, looked-after children and LGBT people. We all have different types of people in our constituencies, and we should be mindful of those inequalities and the need to address them.

Health inequalities will be reduced through measures that have a greater effect on smokers in higher prevalence groups. In practice, that means prioritising population-level interventions that disadvantaged smokers are more sensitive to, and targeting interventions on those smokers. Having run smoking cessation services during my time as a public health consultant, I can absolutely say that it is incredibly difficult for anybody to give up smoking. We have Members who have succeeded, and who are perhaps still trying to give up. To give up smoking, a person needs to be in a place where they have the mental resilience and can put time and energy into quitting. If they are fighting all the other issues that come with the burdens of being poorer—if they are fighting for employment or trying to feed their children—it is so much harder.

My hon. Friend has proposed a road map to a smokefree country, and a report to this place every five years. I am not particularly wedded to that, but we should be laser-focused on reducing health inequalities across all populations. I therefore hope that our Government will consider having a reporting process similar to the one in new clause 13 among the changes to the national

[Dr Beccy Cooper]

health service. In the Health and Social Care Committee this morning, we were talking about where the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities will go following the dissolution of NHS England. This is an ongoing conversation that we need to be mindful of.

We need to ensure that the ongoing importance of addressing health disparities is not lost, and I think that is front and centre of the Secretary of State's agenda in the 10-year plan. On behalf of public health consultants and professionals, I commend the Bill to the House, and I am proud to be part of a Government and a Parliament that will bring this life-changing piece of legislation to the country.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): I want to speak to amendment 4 and the subsequent amendments in my name, and to new clause 3. It is right that where a public health issue is identified, this body should look at whether anything can be done about it through law, fiscal policy, or the other levers available to us, but we should ask ourselves, when we introduce laws, what the consequences are. Are there any unintended consequences, and how practical and enforceable are the measures? If they are unenforceable, all we do is bring the law and this place into disrepute. While some have described this Bill as well-meaning, essential, a flagship Bill, and a show of leadership, I am concerned that we have given little thought to, and had little debate about, the consequences, which are hitting us in the face. Let us be honest with ourselves: it would be good to walk away at the end of today's sitting and say, "We have done a wonderful thing for future generations; we have introduced laws that will do away with smoking and will improve the health of the nation," but we are ignoring the fact that we have introduced legislation that is unworkable, and to which I believe, through my amendments, there is an alternative.

**Jim Dickson:** Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that many warned before the 2007 smoking ban that it would be unenforceable, and that there would be barely any compliance with it? However, from day one, there was 97% compliance. That law has helped to drive a reduction in cancers due to secondary smoking, and a massive number of people gave up as a result of no longer being able to smoke in the pub.

**Sammy Wilson:** The hon. Member will have the answer to that if he reflects on what we are debating today. We introduced that legislation, yet here we are, revisiting the issue, because people are still smoking and health outcomes are still bad—and we have additional problems, which I will come to in a moment, namely the illegal purchase and supply of tobacco. We have tried this in the past—we have tried bans and all kinds of other measures—yet we still have the problem with us.

Let us consider the consequences. First, we are being asked to introduce legislation, the burden of which will fall on retailers, because it is at the point of purchase that the scrutiny required by the Bill, and its implementation, will have to take place. There is a question that we have not debated yet: what happens when a retailer is faced in a few years' time with two people, one aged 29 and the other 28, both demanding tobacco? One says "I'm 29"

and the other says "I'm 29 as well." The retailer is meant to distinguish which of them he can sell tobacco to legally. That is a real, practical problem, and it places a burden on the retailer, because if he does not make the right decision, he faces a fine and the removal of his license, and that source of income for his business will be affected.

**Jack Rankin:** I agree about the practicalities of needing to pick between two adults of similar age in a shop. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the person selling the cigarettes will probably be a shop lad aged 18 or 19? He will have to draw a distinction between adults much older than him. We should consider the position that puts that young gentleman in.

**Sammy Wilson:** That was the next point I was going to come to; the hon. Gentleman anticipated what I was going to say. We will place a burden not just on the retailer, but on those who work in the retailer's store. We are concerned about assaults on retail staff; we have taken legislation on the subject through the House. The evidence from the British Retail Consortium is that many of those assaults take place when goods are denied to individuals because they cannot offer identification and show their age, so we are placing retailers and those who work in shops in great danger. There may be a safeguard against that in some of the bigger stores that have security guards, but many of the shops that sell tobacco are small corner retailers that do not have security guards, or even anyone in the shop other than the shopkeeper or the person behind the counter. Yet we are demanding that they implement the legislation, regardless of how practical or impractical it is for individuals to make a distinction between somebody who is 37 and somebody who is 36, or whatever.

4.45 pm

**Tristan Osborne** (Chatham and Aylesford) (Lab): The right hon. Member might be forgiven for thinking that we are starting from a zero-sum game, but we already have restrictions, as people must be 18 to purchase cigarettes and vapes. Shop workers are already challenging customers on their age, so the regulations do not come from nowhere. Secondly, if you read the Bill, you would know that there is a date specified that would be very clear on identification—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Order. Interventions should be short and the term "you" refers to me in the Chair.

**Sammy Wilson:** It is easier to distinguish between a 16-year-old and a 24-year-old. Usually, the younger the age, the easier it is to make that determination, but it is much more difficult when people are older, yet that distinction will have to be made.

The idea may be that the cost of the licence will be so expensive that many small retailers will be squeezed out of the market, and the only outlets will be bigger stores where there are security guards. However, the sale of tobacco provides an important part of the income of many small retailers. Whether we like it or not, we are putting a burden on people who will find that they are exposed to dangers and difficulties, and will be subject to the law if they make the wrong decision.

The second issue, which has been touched on today, is what happens when people cannot get the tobacco that they want. Where do they go? They go to people who are prepared to sell it to them illegally. We cannot run away from the fact that the sale of illegal tobacco is already lucrative, especially because of the tax increases that we have introduced. It is lucrative for criminal gangs and it funds many of their activities. We have heard statistics that 7% of cigarettes and 33% of rolling tobacco are already sold by criminal gangs. In Northern Ireland, it is probably far higher because paramilitaries were involved in the trade and used it to fund their activities for so long. If anybody thinks, “Oh well, we’ll deal with that problem when it comes,” look at the history of Northern Ireland, where hundreds of millions of pounds found its way into the coffers of terror gangs and action was not taken, because it was sometimes too hard or too difficult to trace the things. Yes, action has now been taken, but do not think that we are going to have an all-out assault on the booming industry that this legislation will produce.

My last point about the Bill being impractical is that it cannot apply in Northern Ireland because, as part of the EU single market, we are under the tobacco products directive. The Irish Republic tried to introduce similar legislation and found that it could not because of that directive. That is why we have tabled new clause 3, challenging the Government to amend the Windsor framework so that the legislation will apply across the United Kingdom. This is not a counsel of despair because I believe that there is an alternative, as set out in the amendment. Indeed, the Government’s own modelling suggests that a much more practical way is to set the age limit at 21.

If the figures and the modelling are correct—although there are questions about the tobacco modelling on doing away with smoking in a generation—and if we impose the age limit of 21, which avoids some of the problems we have talked about with the sale of tobacco, we reach zero consumption by 2050, just as we do with the generational model. That avoids many of the problems and difficulties I have outlined and the consequences for retailers, rather than rushing into this. It is a headline-grabbing measure, but it has not worked elsewhere. Why did New Zealand drop it? Because of the booming market in illegal tobacco. I believe that in a number of years, we will find that we made the same mistake.

**Lillian Jones** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): For me, the Tobacco and Vapes Bill is a landmark opportunity to improve health outcomes for people in my constituency of Kilmarnock and Loudoun, as well as people across the whole United Kingdom. Almost 80,000 people die each year from smoking-related illness, and many of my constituents have told me they wish that they had never started smoking in the first place. With this Bill, we draw a line under the public health tragedy that tobacco has caused over too many decades. On top of the tragedy of 80,000 deaths, every year smoking costs the NHS more than £3 billion and sees our economy lose more than £18 billion in productivity. This Bill is the bold action that our country needs and that my constituents in Kilmarnock and Loudoun will benefit from.

I am proud that this Labour Government are standing up to the tobacco lobby with the banning of tobacco products for anyone born in or after 2009. That radical

change will save lives. In my constituency, I have seen people as young as 12 puffing on vapes on their way to school and when returning home. That is a huge concern for the health and wellbeing of those young people, and the ease of access that they have to vapes is simply unacceptable.

**John Slinger:** My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. She refers to the risk that young people will increasingly use vapes. Does she agree that the ban on advertising vapes cannot come quickly enough? In my constituency of Rugby, I see shops that look like sweet shops and whose names sound like sweet shops that are clearly designed to encourage and frankly entice young people to take up this unpleasant habit.

**Lillian Jones:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend on those points.

While some argue that vapes may be less harmful than smoking tobacco products, our new generation should not be encouraged to become dependent on the addictive effects of nicotine. This Bill does exactly the right thing in giving the Secretary of State the power to ban flavoured vapes that are very obviously marketed to children and young people. Researching the flavours on offer, I found cola gummies flavour, pink lemonade flavour, strawberry chew flavour and tropic bubblegum flavour, to name just a few. Can anyone really claim that those flavours and the countless others on offer are not aimed at children? Many Members from both sides of the House would raise more than an eyebrow at that claim.

This Bill will regulate the wild west of vaping, which we have seen expand on our high streets over the last decade. It will also address the issue of poor-quality vapes, which are a safety concern, including single-use vapes, and end the scourge of these products littering our streets and communities. As someone with a background of 23 years in the NHS, I know the difference that this Bill will make; it will save lives and help to save our environment, and I will be proud to vote for it.

**Sir John Hayes:** In our post-spiritual or at least post-religious age, two phenomena are evident. When God is forgotten and faith declines, people do not believe in nothing but, as G.K. Chesterton said, they believe in anything. They find new causes and crusades, and I know the advocates of this Bill believe that they are crusading in a noble cause.

The second thing that occurs is that, as demons are regarded as purely mythical entities, things that were once regarded as normal and regular become demonised. The curious paradox is that while cocaine is widely available—and, I am told, de rigueur among certain elements of the urban liberal elite—pipe smokers are now seen as heretics. Were that not so alarming, it would be the subject of a comic satire. That is the kind of world we live in: we are simultaneously becoming more prurient and more puritanical.

The amendments that stand in my name and those of other hon. and right hon. Gentlemen are designed to improve the Bill to avoid unintended consequences. The hon. Member for Worthing West (Dr Cooper) said—I think I am quoting her accurately—that we need data and evidence. What is clear from the data and evidence is that previous attempts to deal with the issue of smoking have resulted in a huge surge in illegal tobacco.



[*Sir John Hayes*]

Some 83% of smokers report purchasing tobacco not subject to UK tax in 2024. That number has increased hugely since that earlier legislation. Three quarters of smokers claim to buy tobacco not subject to UK tax from under-the-counter suppliers, who have become legion in constituencies such as mine and, I am sure, in small towns across the whole of the country.

Those are the unintended consequences of well-meaning crusaders who thought they were doing noble things when they passed legislation in this House. That is the data. Those are the facts.

**Dr Beccy Cooper:** Will the right hon. Member give way?

**Sir John Hayes:** I will give way. As I have cited the hon. Lady, how could I do anything other?

**Dr Beccy Cooper:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Is he making the argument that we should not address population health issues—population health interventions have seen a reduction in smoking and a reduction in health-related damage from smoking—because of the consequences of illegal tobacco? Those issues do need to be addressed, but is he saying that we should keep it legal and therefore not see a reduction?

**Sir John Hayes:** What I am saying to the hon. Lady is that the Government—and the previous Government should have done the same—need to take concerted and decisive action to deal with the unintended consequence of well-meaning legislation that led to a huge growth in the illegal sale of tobacco and cigarettes. Rather than introducing a rolling age of consent, which, by the way, is entirely unenforceable, they ought to target their efforts, draw on their resources and seek the almost limitless expertise that is available to Government to deal with an issue that, frankly, is going largely unrestricted.

Good work is being done by trading standards in my constituency in Lincolnshire and by local police, but they struggle, because the legislation is inadequate. I would have supported a Bill, had it come to the House—I will not digress too much, Madam Deputy Speaker, because you will not allow me to do so—that licensed the sale of tobacco. Most tobacconists and most newsagents, I suspect, would welcome that measure. I know that police would like to see that kind of measure, which is rather like what we do with alcohol. There is a precedent there, but that is not what is before us today.

On the rolling age of consent, the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), who has tabled amendment 4, is right that it cannot be enforced. I am in favour, by the way, of raising the age of consent. To be honest, I am in favour of raising the age of consent to 21 for virtually everything. That could be enforced, although it would not be straightforward. But the idea that someone will go into a tobacconist or a newsagent and say, “I am 29” and the tobacconist will say, “Actually, I think you could be 28” or in years to come, “I am 57” and the tobacconist or newsagent will say, “No, no, I think you could be 55” is nonsense. It is never going to happen. No retailer is going to do that. Either the Bill will fail—I think the law would be broken daily—or we will devote undue resources to policing something that frankly does not warrant such attention. Let us recognise

that this is a preposterous proposal. As the right hon. Member for East Antrim said, by and large we should not do things in this House that are preposterous.

**Euan Stainbank** *rose*—

**Sir John Hayes:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is going to tell me why we should.

**Euan Stainbank:** I was a retail and hospitality worker myself in Scotland, and we applied “Check 25” regularly. Would the simple question not be, “Were you born before or after 1 January 2009?” Is that a complex question? I would appreciate an explanation of how it is.

5 pm

**Sir John Hayes:** I tell you, there are two things about this legislation—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Order. “I tell you”? Sir John Hayes, you should know better than that.

**Sir John Hayes:** I said “two”. I said that there were two things about this legislation.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I think it was “you”, but no matter—time is short.

**Sir John Hayes:** Well, let me rephrase it. I tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there are two things about this legislation—I have got it right now—and the first is its core objective and the second is the means by which that objective is met. I am, at the moment, talking about the means by which it is met, and I will say a little more about that when I address some of the amendments in my name and those of other Members. When we pass measures in this House—when we make laws—we should concentrate on both their purpose and their effect. If we do not do that, we are not doing our job as lawmakers. My concern about the Bill is that the effect will be compromised by the means, regardless of its purpose.

I entirely endorse what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage) about plastic filters. I think that her new clause 2 would be a helpful addition to the Bill, and I should be amazed if the Minister did not embrace and adopt it. Perhaps it could be tabled as a Government amendment, but we may vote on it later. I am sure that the Government Whips will want to whip their Members to support it, because it is environmentally right, terribly sensible and entirely deliverable. It would oblige the industry to do the right thing and create filters that are biodegradable and which, as we heard earlier, are produced in immense numbers.

I have mentioned amendment 4, in the name of the right hon. Member for East Antrim, which deals with this nonsense of the rolling age of consent. It is a straightforward amendment that proposes that the age of consent should be 21—a considerable increase on where we are now—and that retailers must observe that. The hon. Member for Falkirk (Euan Stainbank) said that the matter was already being dealt with because there was already an age of consent. Yes, there is one age of consent, but not a series of ages of consent, with the need to assess

people's age presumably by some formal means. Perhaps they will have to take their passports with them every time they go to the newsagent to buy their papers and their ounce of Golden Virginia, or whatever else.

**John Slinger** *rose*—

**Sir John Hayes:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, who I thought asked a terribly weak question during Prime Minister's Question Time earlier today. Let us see whether he can do better now.

**John Slinger:** It is not very pleasant of the right hon. Gentleman to say that, but I thank him for letting me intervene. Regarding the age of consent and the amendment calling for it to be raised to 21, does he not accept that the tobacco industry would merely target its immense marketing power on those who were over 21, and that that could have a very bad effect on public health?

**Sir John Hayes:** The key thing about tobacco—as the hon. Member for Worthing West, the expert on public health who is sitting next to the hon. Gentleman, will no doubt confirm—is that people tend to acquire the habit early and, as the hon. Lady said, cannot break it. Not many people are non-smokers at 30 and become smokers at 40. The vast majority of smokers acquire the habit early in their lives. My father probably started smoking at 13. He gave up overnight when he was 75, because the price of Golden Virginia went up. I said to him, “Do you feel any better,” and he replied, “I didn't feel ill when I smoked and I don't feel ill now”—but that is another matter.

This issue really relates to young people and children in particular, and that brings me to vapes. I support much of what is in the Bill about them. Schools have an immense problem with vaping. Headteachers and teachers tell me that it is something that they have to be religious in scrutinising, because these things can find their way into schools so easily—in someone's bag, for instance. Rather as with mobile phones, we must enforce a ban on vapes in schools with rigour. I think that the measures being introduced in the Bill will reinforce that, so I share the Government's ambition in that respect.

On new clause 12, which stands in my name, I again find it hard to believe that the Government will not accept it willingly, because it simply says that we should review how effective the legislation is. It is probably true that every Bill we debate ought to have something like this attached to it, because it is a good idea—once a Bill has been published, debated, considered and passed into law—that it should be regularly reviewed in such a way.

I understand that the movers of this Bill, its advocates and its enthusiasts believe that they are doing the right thing, and I am not unsympathetic to some of their ambitions. I do sometimes—often indeed—wish that this House was coloured by common sense as liberally as it is peppered with piety. None the less, let me be generous and say that I know that the Minister and others feel that they are doing something noble. However, it is absolutely right, when we legislate in this House, that we do so with the greatest care, with clear and desirable purposes of the kind I mentioned a moment or two ago, appropriate means and measurable effects.

**Tom Hayes** (Bournemouth East) (Lab): Will the right hon. Member give way?

**Sir John Hayes:** I am moving to my thrilling peroration, but I will hesitate for a moment or two.

**Tom Hayes:** I thank the right hon. Member for giving way, and I cannot express just how pleased I am that he has. Children make up one in five of our population, but routinely get ignored, so it is no wonder that playground after playground gets closed. If a child is able to make their way into a playground, they are now subject to second-hand smoke, because to date there is no law to stop that. Does he agree with me that one of the great things about this Bill is that we are going to protect children against second-hand smoke and make sure that their health is better as a result?

**Sir John Hayes:** I agree that it would be better if children were able to avoid either first-hand or second-hand smoke. We have to stop young people themselves smoking. Sadly, too many people do smoke too young. Rightly, as the hon. Gentleman says, we need to prevent their being affected by the smoking of others, so what he said is of course perfectly reasonable.

I will repeat my pre-peroration briefly. I have said that the legislation we pass should have a clear and desirable purpose, appropriate means and a measurable effect. In other words, we need to do the right things by the right means for the right reason. Laws that are unenforceable are not only undesirable; they do us as legislators no favours, for they undermine popular faith in what we do and in who we are. Much of this law is unenforceable for the reasons I have given. Parliament's history is littered with unforeseen consequences. I foresee, and I hope others might too, that with the improvements the amendments would bring to this Bill, we can avoid some of the worst of those unforeseen consequences.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Order. I apologise to all Members, but we will now have a speaking limit of five minutes.

**Tristan Osborne:** I appreciate that you want to guillotine speeches to five minutes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It is a pleasure to speak on the Bill and, as a member of the Public Bill Committee, to see it come before the House. I welcome the contributions of Members across the House, and the quality of the scrutiny we saw in the Public Bill Committee. I also want to reflect on the years of campaigning and service undertaken by Ministers and shadow Ministers that have brought us to this place, and on the advocacy in broadcasts and on the news of people who were smokers but who say that they never should have started. I also welcome the views of young people in my constituency who, when speaking to me at schools and colleges, have told me how vapes are becoming more pernicious and more commonplace in their lives.

I will speak to Government new clause 11 and new clause 6 on age verification and the rising escalator, and I will challenge some of the points made about enforcement. I will also talk to new clause 13 on education and a road map to a smokefree generation, and to new clause 19, which sets annualised reporting on nicotine-based products. I will also challenge some of the Opposition's misconceptions about trading standards and the regulatory landscape.

[Tristan Osborne]

The Bill is forward thinking and responds to an issue, but it builds on previous legislation over many years and best practice in other places and other countries to regulate and reduce smoking. We know that noble crusaders on public health have in the past taken action to clean our air, clean our water, and introduce seatbelt restrictions and food standards. We know that public health measures work. Smoking is the largest preventable cause of illness and premature death in the United Kingdom, killing about 80,000 people a year. It is estimated to cost £2.4 billion to the NHS and a further £1.2 billion in costs every year, with smokers five times more likely to need social care support at home. The annual economic productivity loss adds up to £27 billion. Not only is there an ethical and social motivation behind the Bill; there is an economic one as well.

Age verification was a topic of debate in Committee. I welcome Government new clause 11 and new clause 6 on age verification. Government new clause 11 introduces digital identification, and links in with Government legislation to introduce digital ID over the next five years. This is absolutely enforceable. In many off-licences and supermarkets today, age challenge happens at bespoke counters. Individuals under the age of 18 who try to purchase vapes or tobacco-based products are challenged on their age. All the Bill will do is introduce a fixed date, which can then be assessed using any form of digital ID. It is no more onerous than what is currently happening, but it will require training and a transition period. I challenge the comments made by some opposing the measure that it is somehow unenforceable. We already enforce age restrictions on the sales of products—it already happens.

**Sir John Hayes:** The hon. Gentleman will have read my new clause 12, which asks for a review. It would be really good to look at whether the measure can work in the way he says. I hope he might support my new clause just on that basis. Let us take it at face value: if it works, it works; if it doesn't, it doesn't.

**Tristan Osborne:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his contribution. I want to take him back to his speech, when he said that he would consider an increase in age to 21 or 25. My concern is that that would introduce a two-tier adult status. If we increase the age from 18 to 21 overnight, there will be adults who previously could smoke who will then be banned from smoking for three years. I do not accept the premise that we should have two-tier adults, which is why I believe in a staged increase in smoking cessation.

On new clause 13, I support the Government's ambition to reduce smoking and I want to make it absolutely clear that this measure is part of a global standard to reduce smoking around the world. The Bill is pioneering and I urge Members to support it.

**Jim Allister** (North Antrim) (TUV): On Second Reading, the Government said that this is a four nations Bill. On the face of it, it is, but the legal reality is that it is not. The provisions applicable to Northern Ireland are inevitably destined to be struck down by the High Court because of Northern Ireland's subjugation, under the protocol or Windsor framework, to EU law. The specific EU law that Northern Ireland is subject to

relevant to this Bill is the tobacco directive. According to that directive, states cannot limit the placing on the market of tobacco products. That caused the Governments of two countries within the EU—the Governments of Denmark and the Irish Republic—to withdraw proposals, while acknowledging that they wanted to do what this House is doing, but could not do so, because it would breach the tobacco directive.

5.15 pm

To me, it is an appalling vista that this so-called sovereign Parliament of the United Kingdom can produce a Bill that, on its face, applies to all parts of the United Kingdom, but, because of a Parliament that we do not elect decreeing a superior piece of legislation, in so far as Northern Ireland is concerned—because we are, alas, subject to its rules—the proposal will, as far as my constituents are concerned, be stillborn. That is quite an appalling situation.

The legal recommendations have been quite clear. That is why I drafted new clause 3, which would provide a route to allowing this Bill to apply in Northern Ireland. It would do so by exempting the tobacco directive from passing through the conduit that delivers EU law to Northern Ireland—namely section 7A of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. Northern Ireland is governed under these pernicious EU laws through annex 2 of the Windsor framework, which sets out 289 laws that will continue to apply to Northern Ireland. One of those laws is the tobacco directive. Along with the other 288 EU laws, the directive is, through section 7A, applied as superior law in Northern Ireland law—law that this sovereign Parliament cannot disapply.

That is why, in new clause 3, I have provided the Government with the opportunity to amend section 7A so as to exempt the tobacco directive's application in Northern Ireland. I say to the Government that although they have not accepted this new clause, there is still time to do so in the other place, and that there is no point in simply repeating an assurance, as on Second Reading, that they are confident that the legislation will apply. The same Government lawyers advised the previous Government that the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024 and the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 would apply in Northern Ireland. When those pieces of legislation hit the buffers in the High Court, it was because Northern Ireland, on those two issues, was subject to the superiority of EU law, under which the court ruled.

This is an even clearer situation. The tobacco directive, which says that states cannot ban the sale of products, is set out expressly in annex 2 to the Windsor framework as the superior applicable law. It is therefore even clearer that this legislation will be unable to apply in Northern Ireland.

My challenge to the Government is the following. There will, no doubt, be challenges in the High Court from the tobacco industry, with its vested interests. If it turns out that these provisions are struck down in Northern Ireland, will the Government tonight at least commit to overriding that in future legislation?

**Leigh Ingham** (Stafford) (Lab): I rise today in support of this legislation. Young people vaping is not the biggest issue that comes up in surgeries, but it is one of the biggest issues that comes up when I walk through



town or visit a school, and even when I talk to young people themselves. It is an urgent crisis—not just vaping, but smoking. There are around 760 cancer deaths in the areas around Stafford, Eccleshall and the villages every year, and data suggests that in the next five years more than 1,100 of my constituents will have had lung cancer-related issues.

This legislation shows that this Labour Government care about the children of this country. We care about who they are, and who they will become; we want them to live longer, be happier, and never have the chance to pick up a £5 vape or a cheap pack of tobacco that could set them on the path of addiction for the rest of their lives.

I wish to take a moment to acknowledge the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak), for starting a version of this Bill and bringing it forward despite significant opposition in his own party. I know that he did it out of concern for the future of the children of this country and I commend him for it.

Today, some will talk about choice when they oppose this Bill. In my work as an MP, I have spoken to people whose lives have been devastated by this addiction. I ask whether those who speak about choice truly believe that, once addiction has taken hold, a person has the same freedom of choice that they once did. This is not about taking choice away; it is about giving people freedom from addiction before it ever appears.

For me, the Bill is also about something so much deeper. It is about time—time with family and time with friends. How many of us have lost loved ones to cancer? I lost my grandfather to cancer, and my mum has had lung cancer. My mum was entirely fit at the time she was diagnosed with lung cancer—she used to do a Joe Wicks workout every morning. As she came from a place in the north where people suffer from lung-related illnesses, she was part of a pilot scheme to scan smokers and previous smokers for issues. Her cancer was caught early, while she had no symptoms. My family know how lucky we are. We were lucky that the cancer, which would have continued to grow in her body, was caught then and there. In fact, the cancer was so small that after it was taken away, she needed no further treatment; just a lobe of her lung was removed. My family could not be more grateful that she was part of that scheme, that she is still doing Joe Wicks exercises in the morning, and that she is still around to play with her grandchildren.

How many more precious moments with families will this Bill provide? That is the only question that I am here to answer. Truly, the children of the future may never know how their lives were changed by this Bill—just as I do not really know how my life was changed by the seatbelt Bill introduced years before I was born—because they will never have picked up the smoking habit in the first place. They will live longer, live healthier, and have more time with the people whom they love. Let this be the generation that ends youth addiction before it begins.

**Robin Swann** (South Antrim) (UUP): I echo the words of the hon. and learned Member for North Antrim (Jim Allister) with regard to the importance of this Bill applying to all four nations: I want it to cover the entirety of the United Kingdom. Some 2,200 people in Northern Ireland die every year from a smoking-related

illness. One in four of our cancer cases is related to smoking. The consultation carried out by the previous Government on their legislation, which was specifically about creating a smokefree generation, found that 62.5% of the UK population were supportive. In Northern Ireland, however, 79% were in favour of bringing forward this legislation.

Back in May 2024, when I was a Northern Ireland Health Minister, I introduced the original legislative consent motion, which received all-party support across the Northern Ireland Assembly, and yes, as the hon. and learned Member for North Antrim has mentioned, there were concerns over the applicability of the measure owing to EU regulations and legislation. There was a concern that the law would remain undelivered in Northern Ireland. At that stage, I engaged with the then UK Government, and have now engaged with this Government to seek assurances that this lifesaving, life-changing legislation will apply equally and favourably to all parts of our United Kingdom. I look forward to the Minister being able to give me those reassurances. I have signed new clause 3, because I accepted those reassurances as Health Minister but would appreciate reinforcement in this legislation.

Much has been said about the entrapment of our young people—whether previously with regard to tobacco, or now with vaping and vaping products and how they are being marketed and presented. One of the most harrowing reports that I have read recently was regarding Alder Hey children's hospital, which has now opened a clinic for children addicted to nicotine. They became hooked because of vaping. Twelve children between the ages of 11 and 15 have had to seek medical help to cut down and deal with their nicotine addiction. Twelve children between the ages of 11 and 15 are receiving treatment in a children's hospital due to the evil promotion and enhancement of not just vaping but nicotine. We are looking to save money within our national health service, but we are already encouraging and enabling these young people to become addicted to a dangerous drug. We should be doing everything we can in this place for young people.

According to reports about the Alder Hey clinic, children as young as eight are vaping regularly. Some reportedly cannot get out of bed in the morning before they take their first puff. That is a disgrace. I encourage anyone in this Chamber who in any way opposes the Bill or thinks that this is not the right thing to do to seriously consider how vaping is impacting our young people across this United Kingdom.

I finish by asking the Minister to reassure this House, not just with words but with action. Can she assure those of us from Northern Ireland who have supported the legislation and worked hard to make sure that it had a four-nations approach that the guidance, support and legal enforcement in the Bill is equally applicable to us in Northern Ireland?

**Jim Dickson:** I rise to speak to new clause 14 and amendments 86 and 87. I declare an interest as vice chair of the all-party parliamentary group on smoking and health. I am also a previous smoker and a strong supporter of this legislation.

New clause 14 would introduce a ban on all filters, regardless of whether they contain plastic. I understand the environmental motivations behind new clause 2 from

[*Jim Dickson*]

the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage), but I worry that the amendment is not sufficient to address environmental concerns and could even have a damaging impact on public health. Let us start from the understanding that there are no health benefits to filters. They were developed by the tobacco industry following evidence that smoking caused lung cancer in order to give a false sense of reassurance to smokers. Filters have been dubbed

“the deadliest fraud in the history of human civilisation”.

Most filters contain single-use plastics and are a major environmental hazard, costing UK local authorities around £40 million a year to clean up. Cigarette filters are the most littered item in the world. In the UK they make up 66% of all littered items. Biodegradable alternatives may therefore feel like an attractive solution, but biodegradable filters do not eliminate environmental concerns. They have been shown to be equally toxic to marine and freshwater life when littered in our rivers and seas. They take between two and 14 years to decompose, and they often do so only in very particular conditions, such as under high temperatures. Biodegradable filters could also lead to an increase in guilt-free littering through smokers believing that discarded butts do not have an environmental impact.

However, the greatest risk of biodegradable filters is that they allow tobacco companies to continue with filter fraud and greenwashing in order to rehabilitate their reputation. The best policy, therefore, is to ban all filters. It would mean smokers smoking filterless cigarettes, which, I remind the House, are no worse for their health. It would incentivise quitting, which is the best way to tackle tobacco-related litter and pollution, and it would put people off starting smoking—something of which I am sure everyone in this Chamber would be in favour.

Ending the sale of filters would remove the fraud being perpetrated on smokers that by using a filter they are protecting their health. We banned descriptors such as “light” and “mild”, because they gave false comfort to smokers that they were using safer products and inhibited them quitting. We should do the same again by banning filters, ensuring that those who smoke do not do so because of a belief that their cigarette is safer. Recent ASH polling showed that only 25% of the public is able to correctly identify that filters have no health benefit. The Government should be bold in addressing these misconceptions for the benefit of public health and take the opportunity of a ban to highlight the harms of tobacco.

A ban on filters is an opportunity to protect the environment and secure health benefits. The impact of any ban should be maximised by a strong communications campaign to educate smokers and the wider public about filter fraud.

Briefly, amendments 86 and 87 flag the need for the Government to consider the matter of the sale of bundles of tobacco papers and filters, which could be seen as smoking starter kits. Some supermarkets offer these bundles at only a small cost above the price of the tobacco alone. They are convenient and cost-saving for smokers. That undermines the public health motivation for increasing the price of tobacco products.

5.30 pm

I reiterate my full support for this legislation, and how important it is that we stop the start and bring about a smokefree generation. I commend the work of Action on Smoking and Health in supporting and shaping an excellent Bill that will be a great law.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): I rise to speak to new clause 1 in my name. It would strengthen the Bill by requiring the Secretary of State to conduct a review and publish a report on the impact of contaminated e-liquid and ways to reduce its prevalence. It would also give the Secretary of State power to make regulations to kerb the harm caused by contaminated e-liquid.

I have been campaigning on the issue of Spice-spiked vapes ever since it came to my attention last summer. The Bill is an opportunity to make a real change on this hugely concerning problem that is sweeping through schools across the country. New clause 1 would improve our understanding of contaminated e-liquid and ensure that the necessary regulations could be introduced to reduce the harm that it causes. The issue was first uncovered by Professor Chris Pudney at the University of Bath, who found that one in six vapes confiscated in schools contained the synthetic drug Spice.

Spice is a dangerous prison drug that causes serious harm to users, including hallucinations, dizziness, chest pain, breathing difficulties and damage to vital organs. The highly addictive nature of Spice makes it a gateway to criminal activity, coercion and abuse. It is tragic that anyone would take this drug, but it is especially tragic when young people do, who are often unaware of the dangers. Many young people inadvertently smoke Spice under the impression that it is cannabis. Worryingly, recent investigations have found that vapes are being contaminated with not just Spice but ketamine and MDMA, which are particularly harmful when taken in high doses. The landscape of contaminated e-liquids is evolving rapidly, and it is likely that this issue will worsen if the Bill passes unamended.

An unintended consequence of banning disposable vapes is that it will drive more users towards refillable vapes, which are the primary vehicles for contaminated e-liquids. Refillable vapes are more susceptible to being spiked with harmful substances than disposable vapes. This shift could exacerbate an already significant public health threat, making it even harder to control the spread of dangerous substances in the market. I welcome the ban on disposable vapes, but we must take action to safeguard against these unintended consequences.

The Metropolitan police have warned about children accessing illicit vapes through social media platforms such as Snapchat and Telegram. There is clearly a link between social media-driven drug dealing and the rise of vaping in schools. The ease of access to vapes and their widespread use makes them even more difficult to regulate, and makes it difficult to protect individuals from unknowingly consuming illicit substances. There is a lack of knowledge and oversight, and counterfeit or illicit vape products are slipping through the cracks, exacerbating the already alarming rise in drug-related incidents. There is much more to understand about how illicit vapes and e-liquids are obtained. New clause 1 would set us on our way; it would ensure that we built on the research of Professor Pudney at the University of Bath by conducting a review of the impact and prevalence of these illicit e-liquids.

I have had several conversations with Ministers about this issue. First, in response to my Adjournment debate, the Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention committed to addressing the issue through the Bill. I also met the former public health Minister, who assured me that the Government and health officials were taking the issue very seriously. I appreciate that Ministers want to make changes in this area; I urge them please to follow through and make this change by supporting new clause 1.

As I have a little time, I note new clause 19, in the name of the right hon. Member for Melton and Syston (Edward Argar), which would require the Government to report on the availability of illegal tobacco and vaping products. This is a serious problem to which attention is rightfully being brought. I support that addition to the Bill, but the new clause does not quite get to the heart of the issue that I am focusing on. New clause 1 calls for a specific review of contaminated e-liquid and ways to reduce its prevalence, and gives the Secretary of State power to make regulations to combat the harm that contaminated e-liquid causes.

**Jenny Riddell-Carpenter** (Suffolk Coastal) (Lab): I welcome the amendments to the Bill. This is now a strengthened piece of legislation that will create the first smokefree generation. The chronic health issues that stem from smoking and their impact on our NHS are well known. The Bill, the amendments and what they will go on to achieve will be critical in supporting the NHS and improving health outcomes.

Smoking costs the economy and wider society more than £20 billion a year, including a cost of £3 billion to the NHS and social care. That is equivalent to the annual salary of almost 700,000 nurses or 500,000 GPs, and is the cost of more than 500 million GP appointments.

While the Bill will create the first smokefree generation, the Government recognise that we need to do more to help people quit smoking. That is why I was so glad to welcome the additional funding announced in December to support local authority-led stop smoking services. Suffolk was allocated an additional £900,000 for this year, which means that people in Suffolk Coastal will be able to access support and live healthier, smokefree lives. I know from personal experience just how hard that is. On the very day of the Bill's Second Reading in November, I gave up smoking, because I had just voted on a Bill that would mean that my nieces and nephews would never legally be able to smoke. I have tried to give up smoking before—the last time was just before the general election, when in truth I never stood a chance of succeeding—but I was able to succeed this time only because I have moved to vapes. To quote something that has already been said, “If you smoke, vape; if you don't smoke, don't vape.” It is simple and true.

I spoke on Second Reading about the important role that the Bill will play in preventing young people from taking up vaping. The dramatic rise in children taking up vaping should be nationally recognised as one of the most concerning crises facing young people and children. The Bill will make it harder for young people to be drawn into vaping and will bring the law on vape advertising in line with that for tobacco advertising: there will be a total ban on vape advertising and sponsorship. There will also be a consultation on the vape flavours that we all know are far too appealing to children.

However, we need to do more. As I stand here delivering this contribution, new products are appearing on the market that seek to exploit the loopholes in the upcoming ban on single-use vapes. I understand that the Bill explicitly gives the Secretary of State power to regulate further to limit the size of vapes, and to ban the so-called big puff vapes, which provide more than 600 puffs per pod. Since Second Reading, we have seen products come on to the market that allow people to attach refillable 10 ml pods, creating, in effect, a 3,000-puff vape. That is not a big puff vape; it is a colossal puff vape.

**Wera Hobhouse:** The hon. Lady is talking about refillable vapes. Does she agree that contaminated refills are a huge problem, and that the Government should take that seriously and amend the Bill further?

**Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. We have heard that point made articulately, and not just by her. I look forward to the Minister's response to that.

The issue of the 3,000-puff vape and the additions that can be made to vapes are why I tabled new clause 21, which builds on themes that have been spoken about in the Chamber this afternoon. I welcome the power in the Bill for the Secretary of State to regulate further to standardise the size of reusable vapes, but my new clause would allow us to limit their size sooner and prevent rogue vape manufacturers from circumventing the rules while the Secretary of State undertakes further consultation on such measures. Though the Bill provides the power to standardise vapes, I am asking the Government to legislate now to standardise and regulate puffs per vape, so that we do not see an explosion of new vapes in the marketplace that are trying to get around the single-use vapes ban in this legislation.

I close by thanking the Minister and the Department for their work in bringing the Bill forward, and for the cross-departmental push to make vaping safer and reduce its appeal to children. I hope that it is welcomed in all parts of the House.

**Mrs Sureena Brackenridge** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): I will focus my comments on the vaping elements of the Bill, and particularly the impact on children.

It is a desperately sad and damning reflection on our society that we now need a dedicated clinic at Alder Hey children's hospital to treat children as young as 11 for vaping addiction. I was horrified to read Professor Isba's account of children reaching for their vapes early in the morning, before they get out of bed. Their vape sits next to their mobile phone on the bedside table. The alarming rise in nicotine dependency among children is deeply troubling. Although I welcome the fact that the clinic's success will lead to similar schemes being rolled out across the country, that is not a sign of progress; it is a glaring wake-up call.

Today, we have a chance, through the Bill, to break the cycle of addiction, protect our children and build a healthier future for country. We face the alarming rise of vaping, which has hooked a record number of young people. As a former deputy headteacher, I saw vaping spread through schools like wildfire. I caught students hiding vapes—already hooked before they even understood what addiction meant. I saw students who should have



[Mrs Sureena Brackenridge]

been focused on their schoolwork struggling instead with cravings that they could not control. I saw teachers battling to keep their students in the classroom, instead of sneaking puffs in the toilet. I spoke to worried parents who felt helpless and never thought that their child would be caught up in this. Vaping is not just a bad habit; it is a trap, and too many of our young people are already caught in it.

The situation that we face did not come about overnight. For far too long, the previous Government failed to act while vaping rates among children soared. It felt like the stable door was left wide open and the horse had bolted. We could sit back and do nothing, and watch another generation of young people in Wolverhampton North East and across the country get hooked, but that is not what a responsible Government do, and it is not what this Labour Government will do. Through the Bill, we will take bold action. Smokefree zones will be expanded to protect children, families and the most vulnerable in our communities. For those who want to quit, there will be real support, backed by real investment, delivering real results. For too long, we have seen a market designed to hook kids on nicotine, with bright colours, fruity flavours and shameless advertising that deliberately targets young people.

**Alison Hume** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful contribution. Vaping is not a safe alternative for children. According to last year's "Growing Up in North Yorkshire" survey, 25% of year 8 students and 49% of year 10 students have tried vapes, with 9% vaping regularly. Does she agree that the Bill will put an end to vapes deliberately being branded in ways that appeal to children?

**Mrs Brackenridge:** I am pleased to say that that will end with the Bill, which will ban vape advertising aimed at children, outlaw sales from vending machines and crack down on packaging designed to attract young eyes. Firm action to protect the health of children includes a £10 million boost for trading standards to fund more enforcement officers.

I welcome the recent announcement of the £62 million groundbreaking research to investigate the long-term health effects of vaping by tracking 100,000 young people aged eight to 18 over a decade. Unless we prevent illness, our NHS will continue to be overwhelmed, and billions of pounds will be spent addressing a problem that could have been curbed in advance. I call on the House to pass the Bill in order to protect children in Wolverhampton East and across the country.

**Ashley Dalton:** Let me begin by thanking all hon. and right hon. Members for their contributions. I will try and touch on the many amendments discussed and the key questions raised.

At the heart of the Bill is the establishment of the smokefree generation by gradually ending the sale of tobacco products across the UK. Amendments 4 to 35 tabled by the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), amendments 38 to 45 tabled by the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), amendments 103 to 111 tabled by the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage) and new clause 12 tabled by the

right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) would remove that policy or water it down. There is no liberty or choice in addiction, however, and that is why the Government are committed to creating the world's first smokefree generation. We have the public's backing, with 71% of adults supporting the goal of a smokefree Britain in a YouGov poll carried out in November 2023. Raising the age of sale to 21 will not meet our ambition to make the UK smokefree.

5.45 pm

The shadow Minister and other hon. Members raised the issue of smokefree places and amendments 84, 85 and 92 to 102 would limit those powers. I reassure all hon. and right hon. Members that in England we intend to consult on extending smokefree outdoor places to outside schools, children's playgrounds and hospitals. Private outdoor spaces are out of scope of the Bill's powers, and we recognise that now is not the right time to extend smokefree places to outdoor hospitality settings. The powers, as currently drafted, ensure that the Bill is appropriately future-proofed. Any regulations made under the clauses will be subject to a statutory consultation to ensure that there is sufficient scrutiny of any extension and as health is devolved, the devolved Governments will decide which places they wish to designate as smokefree.

I appreciate the intentions of the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan) to ensure local authorities have funding to address local public health priorities. It would be inappropriate, however, for local authorities to retain the £2,500 fixed penalty notice for licensing offences as set out in amendments 1 and 2, as that could distort the enforcement priorities of local authorities and encourage revenue generation. Councils are already provided with a ringfenced budget for public health and in 2025-26 we are increasing the public health grant to £3.858 billion. We have extended the swap to stop scheme for the coming year, including free vape kits for smokers to use as a quit aid. I can also confirm today that the national smokefree pregnancy incentive scheme will continue into the coming year.

In response to claims of growth in the illicit market, the latest official data from HMRC, published in 2024, does not show an overall increase in the illicit market for tobacco up to 2022-23. History shows that when we have introduced targeted tobacco control measures, they have had a positive impact on tackling the problems of illicit tobacco. When the smoking age was increased from 16 to 18, the number of illicit cigarettes consumed fell by 25% and smoking rates for 16 and 17-year-olds dropped by almost a third.

I also understand the aims of the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Melton and Syston (Edward Argar), with new clause 19. However, the new clause is not needed. The Government already publish annual data on the illicit tobacco market and will do the same for vapes, following the introduction of the new vaping products duty in October 2026. Similarly, the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers provides annual reports and updates specifically on enforcement activity, which includes illegal sale and importation of vapes. An annual report would only duplicate that.

Although I am sympathetic to what the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) wishes to achieve with new clause 1, vapes contaminated with controlled drugs, including spice, are already illegal and are therefore a matter for the police and Border Force.

**Wera Hobhouse:** I hear what the Minister is saying, but the Metropolitan police and other forces tell us that it is incredibly difficult. The Bill gives us an extra opportunity to protect young children from a terrible pathway into addiction and crime. Is it not the task of this Government to stop that?

**Ashley Dalton:** The entire Bill is about preventing addiction among our young people and preventing their move into crime. These things are already illegal and the Government believe that existing legislation will allow for them to be dealt with.

On cigarette filters, I understand hon. Members' concerns about tobacco litter, but new clause 2, tabled by the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage), could lead to greenwashing, improving the reputation of tobacco manufacturers while not necessarily improving environmental outcomes.

**Dame Caroline Dinenage:** That is an incredibly lazy argument. We do not care about greenwashing; greenwashing is just semantics. We care about cleaning up our beaches, cleaning up our streets and reducing the cost to local councils of cleaning up litter. It is ridiculous if the Government are going to be swayed by one lobby or another and not do the thing that is common sense and much better for our environment.

**Ashley Dalton:** I thank the hon. Member for her intervention. If I am allowed to finish, that is one of the issues and that proposal may not necessarily improve environmental outcomes. However, we consider that powers are already available to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that enable the Government to limit the damage to the environment caused by filters, so the amendments are unnecessary.

Similarly, new clause 14, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Jim Dickson), would prohibit the supply of all cigarette filters or cigarettes containing filters, whether they contain plastic or not. Ultimately we believe that the best way to tackle filters is through the reduction of smoking rates. On bundles of tobacco products, the Bill gives the Government the powers to regulate retail packaging of tobacco products and devices, herbal smoking products and cigarette papers, as well as vaping and nicotine products. In addition, the Bill already gives the Government powers to regulate how products are packaged together in bundles, so amendments 86 and 87, also tabled by my hon. Friend, are not necessary.

Amendments 46, 90 and 91 and new clauses 8 to 10 and 15 would all undermine our promise to the electorate to stop vapes being advertised to children. We have a clear mandate, with 74% of adults in Great Britain supportive of a ban, and we will not create any exemptions that could undermine this. On amendment 90 and new clause 15, let me reassure the shadow Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend (Mary Glendon) that the Government are not prohibiting the promotion of vapes in general as a smoking cessation tool.

Let me reassure my hon. Friends the Members for Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend and for Suffolk Coastal (Jenny Riddell-Carpenter) that the Bill already provides the Government with powers to limit the amount of nicotine in a nicotine pouch, to regulate vaping products in such a way that would prohibit the sale of

high puff count vaping devices, including setting tank capacity limits for devices where multiple refill tanks are attached, and to ban any other ingredient that may be harmful. The Government believe that these measures are more appropriate for secondary legislation due to the technical details that need to be captured, rather than in primary legislation as new clauses 4 and 21 would require.

On amendment 37, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend, we recognise that vape flavours are a really important consideration for adult smokers seeking to quit smoking, but we also know that sweet or fruity flavours are the main flavours that appeal to children and that certain flavours and ingredients can be particularly harmful to health. We have been clear that we will carefully consider our future regulations so that we get the balance right, and this is subject to a statutory duty to consult. Similarly, I reassure my hon. Friend that amendment 88 is unnecessary. We will honour the long-established principles of good consultation when consulting on regulations under part 5 of the Bill, including in relation to who is consulted.

On new clauses 6 and 7, while the Government are committed to protecting children from the risk of harms through addiction, our approach across all products in the Bill is for age to be verified at the point of sale, not at the point of use. Mandating any age-gating technology for vapes would create harsher restrictions on vaping than smoking. That could make vapes less accessible and attractive to adult smokers wishing to quit and use vapes as a smoking cessation tool.

I recognise the concerns of the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) about online sales. However, it would not be proportionate to ban all online sales because that would impact on those retailers seeking to operate within the law.

As was discussed in Committee, going back to the issue of wider enforcement, new clause 18 and amendment 89 do not reflect the complex processes required to develop the licensing scheme in England and Wales. Although I am sympathetic to the shadow Secretary of State's aims, rushing to publish draft regulations within two months of Royal Assent would risk creating flawed policy.

I pay tribute to colleagues in the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. This UK-wide Bill has been developed in partnership with them, and I thank them for their support. Our manifesto committed to resetting our relationship with the devolved Governments, and this Bill is a great success in demonstrating collaboration across Governments in improving the health of the nation.

**Jim Allister:** Since the tobacco directive applies to Northern Ireland under the protocol through section 7A of the 2018 Act and applies directly, and the directive forbids the type of proposition in this Bill, would the Minister care to explain to the House how this Bill will be applicable in Northern Ireland as long as the tobacco directive applies?

**Ashley Dalton:** This Bill has been put together, as I said, with collaboration across all the Governments and bearing in mind all the Government's legal obligations under the law. All those things have been taken into account, and the Bill is able to be brought forward in that way. Our manifesto committed to delivering the

[Ashley Dalton]

smokefree generation, and we are working across all Governments to ensure that we deliver that, as well as honouring our international obligations. As a result, the Government do not consider new clause 3 tabled by the hon. and learned Member for North Antrim (Jim Allister) to be necessary. That is because we are content that measures drafted in the Bill that apply in relation to Northern Ireland are consistent with our obligations under the Windsor framework, and the proposed new clause would put us in breach of international law. In the drafting of the Bill, as I have stated, we have considered all its domestic and international obligations, and it is for those reasons that the Government cannot support new clause 3.

The Bill will bring about a real change by creating a smokefree generation. As we have discussed, there is no liberty or choice in addiction, and almost all smokers want to quit and two thirds wished they had never started. I started smoking at the age of 16 and decided I would stop when I was 18—I could not stop. I thought, “I know, I’ll stop when I am 21” and then it was 25, then it was when I graduated, and then it was when I had a child. At no point was I able to give up this pernicious addiction. It took a cancer diagnosis to scare me into being able to stop smoking, and I do not wish that on any of our young people.

In conclusion, many of the amendments are unnecessary because the Bill already grants the Government the power to take forward the issue through the more appropriate route of secondary legislation. This is a landmark Bill: the most significant public health intervention in a generation. It strikes the right balance on the interests of public health by being proportionate and not overly burdensome. It allows the Government to bring forward the appropriate primary and secondary legislation to ensure that we can deliver a smokefree generation that protects all our children from the addiction of tobacco, a uniquely harmful substance.

6 pm

*Debate interrupted (Programme Order, 26 November 2024).*

*The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83E), That the clause be read a Second time.*

*Question agreed to.*

*New clause 11 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.*

*The Deputy Speaker then put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).*

## New Clause 2

### BAN ON THE SUPPLY OF PLASTIC CIGARETTE FILTERS

“(1) The Secretary of State must make regulations under section 140 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 having the effect of prohibiting the supply of relevant cigarette filters or cigarettes containing relevant cigarette filters, whether by way of sale or not, in the course of a business.

(2) The notice required under section 140(6)(b) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to the regulations mentioned in subsection (1) must be published no later than the end of the period of 12 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(3) In this section,

‘relevant cigarette filter’ means a filter which contains plastic and which is intended for use in a cigarette, whether as part of a ready made cigarette or to be used with hand rolling tobacco or other substances to be smoked in a cigarette.”—(Dame Caroline Dinenage.)

*This new clause requires the Secretary of State to make regulations, within two years, which would prohibit the supply of cigarette filters which contain plastic or cigarettes containing cigarette filters which contain plastic. The regulations would be made under section 140 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.*

*Brought up.*

*Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.*

*The House divided: Ayes 137, Noes 304.*

**Division No. 151]**

**[6.1 pm**

### AYES

Allister, Jim	Glover, Olly
Amos, Gideon	Goldman, Marie
Anderson, Lee	Gordon, Tom
Anderson, Stuart ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra</i> )	Grant, Helen
Andrew, rh Stuart	Green, Sarah
Aquarone, Steff	Griffiths, Alison
Argar, rh Edward	Harding, Monica
Atkins, rh Victoria	Harris, Rebecca
Babarinde, Josh	Hayes, rh Sir John
Baldwin, Dame Harriett	Heylings, Pippa
Barclay, rh Steve	Hinds, rh Damian
Blackman, Bob	Hobhouse, Wera
Bowie, Andrew	Holden, rh Mr Richard
Bradley, rh Dame Karen	Hollinrake, Kevin
Brandreth, Aphra	Holmes, Paul
Brewer, Alex	Huddleston, Nigel
Brown-Fuller, Jess	Hudson, Dr Neil
Cane, Charlotte	Hunt, rh Jeremy
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Hussain, Mr Adnan
Cartlidge, James	Jardine, Christine
Chadwick, David ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster</i> )	Jarvis, Liz
Chamberlain, Wendy	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Chambers, Dr Danny	Jones, Clive
Cleverly, rh Mr James	Jopp, Lincoln
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Kearns, Alicia ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i> )
Coghlan, Chris	Kruger, Danny
Collins, Victoria	Lake, Ben
Cooper, Daisy	Lamont, John
Cooper, John	Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Lowe, Rupert
Cross, Harriet	MacCleary, James
Dance, Adam	Maguire, Ben
Darling, Steve	Maguire, Helen
Davey, rh Ed	Mak, Alan
Davies, Ann	Malthouse, rh Kit
Davies, Mims	Martin, Mike
Dean, Bobby	Mathew, Brian
Dinenage, Dame Caroline	Mayhew, Jerome
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	McMurdock, James ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Lee Anderson</i> )
Evans, Dr Luke	Medi, Llinos
Farage, Nigel	Miller, Calum
Foord, Richard	Milne, John
Forster, Mr Will	Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Fortune, Peter	Moore, Robbie
Fox, Sir Ashley	Moran, Layla
Franklin, Zöe	Morello, Edward
Freeman, George	Morgan, Helen
George, Andrew	Morrison, Mr Tom ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster</i> )
Gibson, Sarah ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Anna Sabine</i> )	Morrissey, Joy
Glen, rh John	Munt, Tessa
Glendon, Mary	Murray, Susan



Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Norman, rh Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Paul, Rebecca  
 Perteghella, Manuela  
 Pinkerton, Dr Al  
 Rankin, Jack  
 Reed, David  
 Reynolds, Mr Joshua  
 Roome, Ian  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Sabine, Anna  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
 Simmonds, David  
 Slade, Vikki  
 Smart, Lisa  
 Smith, Rebecca  
 Sollom, Ian

Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Stafford, Gregory  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Swann, Robin  
 Taylor, Luke  
 Thomas, Bradley  
 Thomas, Cameron  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
 Wilkinson, Max  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wrigley, Martin  
 Young, Claire

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
 Sir Edward Leigh and  
 Sir Desmond Swayne

### NOES

Abbott, Jack  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir  
 Akehurst, Luke  
 Aldridge, Dan  
 Al-Hassan, Sadik  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Ali, Tahir  
 Anderson, Callum  
 Arthur, Dr Scott  
 Asato, Jess  
 Athwal, Jas  
 Atkinson, Catherine  
 Atkinson, Lewis  
 Bailey, Mr Calvin  
 Bailey, Olivia  
 Baines, David  
 Baker, Richard  
 Ballinger, Alex  
 Barker, Paula  
 Barron, Lee  
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex  
 Baxter, Johanna  
 Beavers, Lorraine  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Billington, Ms Polly  
 Bishop, Matt  
 Blake, Olivia (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Blake, Rachel  
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Botterill, Jade  
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena  
 Brash, Mr Jonathan  
 Brickell, Phil  
 Bryant, Chris  
 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  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Charters, Mr Luke  
 Coleman, Ben  
 Collier, Jacob  
 Collinge, Lizzi  
 Collins, Tom  
 Conlon, Liam  
 Coombes, Sarah  
 Cooper, Andrew  
 Cooper, Dr Beccy  
 Costigan, Deirdre  
 Cox, Pam  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Creasy, Ms Stella  
 Crichton, Torcuil  
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
 Dalton, Ashley  
 Davies, Jonathan  
 Davies, Paul  
 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  
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eagle, rh Maria  
 Edwards, Lauren  
 Egan, Damien  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Entwistle, Kirith  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta  
 Falconer, Mr Hamish  
 Farnsworth, Linsey  
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh  
 Ferguson, Mark  
 Ferguson, Patricia  
 Fookes, Catherine  
 Foster, Mr Paul  
 Foxcroft, Vicky

Foy, Mary Kelly  
 Francis, Daniel  
 Frith, Mr James  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gelderd, Anna  
 Gemmell, Alan  
 German, Gill  
 Gilbert, Tracy  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Goldsborough, Ben (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Gosling, Jodie  
 Grady, John  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Griffith, Dame Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Hack, Amanda  
 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  
 Hussain, Mr Adnan  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Ingham, Leigh  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jermy, Terry  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Lillian  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Josan, Gurinder Singh  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kitchen, Gen  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Leishman, Brian  
 Lewell, Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 MacAlister, Josh  
 MacNae, Andy  
 Madders, Justin

Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mayer, Alex  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McCluskey, Martin  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McDougall, Blair  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McFadden, rh Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Moon, Perran  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Mullane, Margaret  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, Chris  
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Nash, Pamela (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Norris, Dan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Pakes, Andrew  
 Patrick, Matthew  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Joe  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Ranger, Andrew  
 Reader, Mike  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie

Robertson, Dave  
Roca, Tim  
Rodda, Matt  
Rushworth, Sam  
Rutland, Tom  
Ryan, Oliver  
Sackman, Sarah  
Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
Scrogham, Michelle  
Sewards, Mark  
Shah, Naz  
Shanker, Baggy  
Siddiq, Tulip  
Slaughter, Andy  
Slinger, John  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, Jeff  
Smith, Nick  
Smyth, Karin  
Snell, Gareth  
Sobel, Alex  
Stainbank, Euan  
Stevenson, Kenneth  
Stewart, Elaine  
Stone, Will  
Streeting, rh Wes  
Strickland, Alan  
Sullivan, Kirsteen  
Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
Swallow, Peter  
Tami, rh Mark  
Tapp, Mike  
Taylor, Alison  
Taylor, David  
Taylor, Rachel

Thomas, Fred  
Thompson, Adam  
Thornberry, rh Emily  
Tidball, Dr Marie  
Toale, Jessica  
Tomlinson, Dan  
Tufnell, Henry  
Turley, Anna  
Turmaine, Matt  
Turner, Laurence  
Twigg, Derek  
Uppal, Harpreet  
Vaughan, Tony  
Wakeford, Christian  
Walker, Imogen  
Ward, Melanie  
Wagh, Paul  
Welsh, Michelle  
West, Catherine  
Western, Andrew  
Western, Matt  
Wheeler, Michael  
Whitby, John  
White, Jo  
White, Katie  
Whittome, Nadia  
Williams, David  
Witherden, Steve  
Woodcock, Sean  
Wrighting, Rosie  
Yang, Yuan  
Yemm, Steve

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
Gerald Jones and  
Taiwo Owatemi

*Question accordingly negated.*

### New Clause 19

#### REPORTS ON ILLEGAL SALE OF TOBACCO AND VAPING PRODUCTS

“(1) The Secretary of State must—

- (a) prepare an annual report on the scale of the illegal sale and availability of tobacco and vaping products in the United Kingdom; and
- (b) lay a copy of each report before both Houses of Parliament.

(2) Each report must provide details in the United Kingdom of—

- (a) the estimated amount and value of illegal, counterfeit and contraband cigarettes and other tobacco products available for sale;
- (b) the estimated amount and value of illegal or non-compliant vapes available for sale;
- (c) the action taken to tackle the illicit trade of tobacco, tobacco products, vaping devices and vaping products; and
- (d) an assessment of the impact of the illicit trade of tobacco, vapes and nicotine products on public health and safety.

(3) The first report must be laid within the period of 12 months of the passing of this Act.

(4) Each subsequent report must be laid annually beginning with the day on which the previous report was laid.”—  
(*Dr Caroline Johnson.*)

*This new clause would require that the Government produce annual reports on the rate of sale and availability of illegal tobacco and vaping products and their impact on public health and safety.*

*Brought up.*

*Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.*

*The House divided: Ayes 159, Noes 307.*

### Division No. 152]

[6.14 pm

#### AYES

Allister, Jim  
Amos, Gideon  
Anderson, Lee  
Anderson, Stuart (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)  
Andrew, rh Stuart  
Aquarone, Steff  
Argar, rh Edward  
Atkins, rh Victoria  
Babarinde, Josh  
Bacon, Gareth  
Baldwin, Dame Harriett  
Bedford, Mr Peter  
Bhatti, Saqib  
Blackman, Bob  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, rh Dame Karen  
Brandreth, Aphra  
Braverman, rh Suella  
Brewer, Alex  
Brown-Fuller, Jess  
Burghart, Alex  
Cane, Charlotte  
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
Cartlidge, James  
Chadwick, David (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster*)  
Chamberlain, Wendy  
Chambers, Dr Danny  
Cleverly, rh Mr James  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Cocking, Lewis  
Coghlan, Chris  
Collins, Victoria  
Cooper, Daisy  
Cooper, John  
Costa, Alberto  
Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)  
Dance, Adam  
Darling, Steve  
Davey, rh Ed  
Davies, Ann  
Davies, Mims  
Dean, Bobby  
Dinenage, Dame Caroline  
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver  
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
Evans, Dr Luke  
Farage, Nigel  
Foord, Richard  
Forster, Mr Will  
Fortune, Peter  
Fox, Sir Ashley  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Franklin, Zöe  
Freeman, George  
French, Mr Louie  
Fuller, Richard  
George, Andrew  
Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Anna Sabine*)  
Glen, rh John  
Glover, Olly  
Goldman, Marie

Gordon, Tom  
Grant, Helen  
Green, Sarah  
Griffiths, Alison  
Harding, Monica  
Harris, Rebecca  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heylings, Pippa  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hobhouse, Wera  
Holden, rh Mr Richard  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
Hunt, rh Jeremy  
Hussain, Mr Adnan  
Jardine, Christine  
Jarvis, Liz  
Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
Johnson, Dr Caroline  
Jones, Clive  
Jopp, Lincoln  
Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)  
Kruger, Danny  
Lake, Ben  
Lam, Katie  
Lamont, John  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Lopez, Julia  
Lowe, Rupert  
MacCleary, James  
MacDonald, Mr Angus  
Maguire, Ben  
Maguire, Helen  
Mak, Alan  
Malthouse, rh Kit  
Martin, Mike  
Mathew, Brian  
Mayhew, Jerome  
McMurdock, James (*Proxy vote cast by Lee Anderson*)  
Medi, Llinos  
Miller, Calum  
Milne, John  
Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
Moore, Robbie  
Moran, Layla  
Morello, Edward  
Morgan, Helen  
Morrison, Mr Tom (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster*)  
Morrissey, Joy  
Mullan, Dr Kieran  
Munt, Tessa  
Murray, Susan  
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
Norman, rh Jesse  
O'Brien, Neil  
Patel, rh Priti  
Paul, Rebecca  
Perteghella, Manuela  
Pinkerton, Dr Al  
Rankin, Jack  
Reed, David  
Reynolds, Mr Joshua  
Robertson, Joe

Roome, Ian  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Sabine, Anna  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
 Simmonds, David  
 Slade, Vikki  
 Smart, Lisa  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Rebecca  
 Sollom, Ian  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Stafford, Gregory  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Stuart, rh Graham  
 Swann, Robin  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Taylor, Luke

Thomas, Bradley  
 Thomas, Cameron  
 Timothy, Nick  
 Tugendhat, rh Tom  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Whately, Helen  
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
 Wild, James  
 Wilkinson, Max  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wrigley, Martin  
 Young, Claire

### **Tellers for the Ayes:**

**Paul Holmes and  
 Harriet Cross**

### **NOES**

Abbott, Jack  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir  
 Akehurst, Luke  
 Aldridge, Dan  
 Al-Hassan, Sadik  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Ali, Tahir  
 Anderson, Callum  
 Arthur, Dr Scott  
 Asato, Jess  
 Athwal, Jas  
 Atkinson, Catherine  
 Atkinson, Lewis  
 Bailey, Mr Calvin  
 Bailey, Olivia  
 Baines, David  
 Baker, Richard  
 Ballinger, Alex  
 Barker, Paula  
 Barron, Lee  
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex  
 Baxter, Johanna  
 Beavers, Lorraine  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Billington, Ms Polly  
 Bishop, Matt  
 Blake, Olivia (*Proxy vote cast  
 by Chris Elmore*)  
 Blake, Rachel  
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote  
 cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Botterill, Jade  
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena  
 Brash, Mr Jonathan  
 Brickell, Phil  
 Bryant, Chris  
 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  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Charters, Mr Luke  
 Chowns, Ellie  
 Coleman, Ben  
 Collier, Jacob  
 Collinge, Lizzi  
 Collins, Tom  
 Conlon, Liam  
 Coombes, Sarah  
 Cooper, Andrew  
 Cooper, Dr Beccy  
 Costigan, Deirdre  
 Cox, Pam  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Creagh, Mary  
 Creasy, Ms Stella  
 Crichton, Torcuil  
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
 Dalton, Ashley  
 Davies, Jonathan  
 Davies, Paul  
 Davies-Jones, Alex  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 Dean, Josh  
 Dearden, Kate  
 Denyer, Carla  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dickson, Jim  
 Dixon, Anna  
 Dods, rh Anneliese  
 Dollimore, Helena  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Downie, Graeme  
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eagle, rh Maria  
 Edwards, Lauren  
 Egan, Damien  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Entwistle, Kirith  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta  
 Falconer, Mr Hamish  
 Farnsworth, Linsey  
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh  
 Ferguson, Mark  
 Ferguson, Patricia  
 Fookes, Catherine  
 Foster, Mr Paul

Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Foy, Mary Kelly  
 Francis, Daniel  
 Frith, Mr James  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gelderd, Anna  
 Gemmell, Alan  
 German, Gill  
 Gilbert, Tracy  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Goldsborough, Ben (*Proxy  
 vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Gosling, Jodie  
 Grady, John  
 Greenwood, Lillian  
 Griffith, Dame Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote  
 cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Hack, Amanda  
 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  
 Cox, Pam  
 Hume, Alison  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Ingham, Leigh  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jermy, Terry  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Lillian  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Josan, Gurinder Singh  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast  
 by Chris Elmore*)  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kitchen, Gen  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Leishman, Brian  
 Lewell, Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 MacAlister, Josh  
 MacNae, Andy

Madders, Justin  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mayer, Alex  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McCluskey, Martin  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McDougall, Blair  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McFadden, rh Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McMorris, Anna  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Moon, Perran  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Mullane, Margaret  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, Chris  
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote  
 cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Murray, Katrina  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Nash, Pamela (*Proxy vote  
 cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Norris, Dan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote  
 cast by Kim Johnson*)  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Pakes, Andrew  
 Patrick, Matthew  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Joe  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Ramsay, Adrian  
 Ranger, Andrew  
 Reader, Mike  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Richards, Jake



Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sackman, Sarah  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Scrogham, Michelle  
 Sowards, Mark  
 Shah, Naz  
 Shanker, Baggy  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevenson, Kenneth  
 Stewart, Elaine  
 Stone, Will  
 Streeting, rh Wes  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Sullivan, Kirsteen  
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
 Swallow, Peter  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison  
 Taylor, David

Taylor, Rachel  
 Thomas, Fred  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Tufnell, Henry  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Andrew  
 Western, Matt  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Williams, David  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrighting, Rosie  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yemm, Steve

#### Tellers for the Noes:

Gerald Jones and  
 Taiwo Owatemi

*Question accordingly negated.*

### Clause 1

#### SALE OF TOBACCO ETC

*Amendments made:* 47, page 1, line 12, leave out paragraph (a) and insert—

“(a) that they took such steps as may be specified in regulations made by the Secretary of State to verify that the customer was born before 1 January 2009, or”.

*This amendment allows regulations to specify steps that a seller may take to benefit from the defence in clause 1(2) of the Bill. The Bill currently focusses on paper documents. The purpose of the new power is to accommodate digital methods of verification as well as methods involving paper documents.*

*Amendment 48, page 1, line 16, at end insert—*

“(2A) Before making regulations under subsection (2)(a) the Secretary of State must obtain the consent of the Welsh Ministers if the regulations contain provision which would be within the legislative competence of Senedd Cymru if contained in an Act of the Senedd.

(2B) Regulations under subsection (2)(a) are subject to the negative resolution procedure.”

*This is consequential to Amendment 47.*

*Amendment 49, page 1, line 17, leave out subsection (3).—(Ashley Dalton.)*

*This is consequential to Amendment 47.*

### Clause 3

#### TOBACCO VENDING MACHINES

*Amendment made:* 50, page 2, line 29, leave out from “means” to end of line 30 and insert

“a machine from which any of the following products may be bought or from which they are dispensed to a customer in connection with a sale”—(Ashley Dalton.)

*This is one of a number of amendments extending prohibitions on vending machines to cover machines from which products are dispensed in connection with a sale (for example if payment for cigarettes is made at a self-service till and the customer gets a code which is input into a machine which dispenses the cigarettes).*

### Clause 10

#### SALE OF VAPING OR NICOTINE PRODUCTS TO UNDER 18s

*Amendments made:* 51, page 5, line 19, leave out paragraph (a) and insert—

“(a) that they took such steps as may be specified in regulations made by the Secretary of State to verify that the customer was at least 18 years old, or”.

*This amendment allows regulations to specify steps that a seller may take to benefit from the defence in clause 10(2) of the Bill. The Bill currently focusses on paper documents. The purpose of the new power is to accommodate digital methods of verification as well as methods involving paper documents.*

*Amendment 52, page 5, line 23, at end insert—*

“(2A) Before making regulations under subsection (2)(a) the Secretary of State must obtain the consent of the Welsh Ministers if the regulations contain provision which would be within the legislative competence of Senedd Cymru if contained in an Act of the Senedd.

(2B) Regulations under subsection (2)(a) are subject to the negative resolution procedure.”

*This is consequential to Amendment 51.*

*Amendment 53, page 5, line 24, leave out subsection (3).—(Ashley Dalton.)*

*This is consequential to Amendment 51.*

### Clause 12

#### VAPING AND NICOTINE PRODUCT VENDING MACHINES

*Amendments made:* 54, page 6, line 13, leave out from “means” to end of line 14 and insert

“a machine—

(a) from which nicotine products may be bought, or

(b) from which they are dispensed to a customer in connection with a sale.”

*See the explanatory statement to Amendment 50.*

*Amendment 55, page 6, line 15, leave out from “means” to end of line 16 and insert “a machine—*

(a) from which vaping products may be bought, or

(b) from which they are dispensed to a customer in connection with a sale.”—(Ashley Dalton.)

*See the explanatory statement to Amendment 50.*

### Clause 13

#### DISPLAYS OF PRODUCTS OR PRICES IN ENGLAND

*Amendment made:* 56, page 6, line 29, at end insert—

“(aa) tobacco related devices.”—(Ashley Dalton.)

*Clause 13 confers a regulation-making power to impose prohibitions, requirements or limitations in relation to the display of products and prices in England. The amendment extends the power to cover tobacco related devices (which would include things like heated tobacco devices and pipes and bongs that enable tobacco to be consumed).*

**Clause 14****DISPLAYS OF PRODUCTS OR PRICES IN WALES**

*Amendment made:* 57, page 7, line 22, at end insert—

“(aa) tobacco related devices.”—(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*Clause 14 confers a regulation-making power to impose prohibitions, requirements or limitations in relation to the display of products and prices in Wales. The amendment extends the power to cover tobacco related devices (which would include things like heated tobacco devices and pipes and bongs that enable tobacco to be consumed).*

**Clause 23****RESTRICTED PREMISES ORDERS**

*Amendment made:* 58, page 13, line 24, leave out paragraph (b).—(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*This removes the express provision that prohibitions imposed by a restricted premises order apply to sales by means of a machine or other means. The natural meaning of “sales” includes sales by any means. Express provision here might make readers mistakenly think it is intended to have a narrower meaning elsewhere.*

**Clause 28****RESTRICTED SALE ORDERS**

*Amendment made:* 59, page 15, line 29, leave out paragraphs (c) and (d).—(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*This removes certain consequences of a restricted sale order in relation to vending machines. Vending machines for tobacco, vapes and nicotine products are in any event banned by clauses 3 and 12.*

**Clause 38****FIXED PENALTIES: USE OF PROCEEDS**

*Amendment proposed:* 1, page 20, line 19, leave out from “be” to the end of line and insert

“be allocated by the relevant Local Authority to public health projects.”—(*Helen Morgan.*)

*This amendment would direct funds from Fixed Penalty Notice to public health initiatives as determined by Local Authorities.*

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided: Ayes 72, Noes 304.*

**Division No. 153]**

**[6.26 pm**

**AYES**

Amos, Gideon	George, Andrew
Aquarone, Steff	Gibson, Sarah ( <i>Proxy vote</i>
Babarinde, Josh	<i>cast by Anna Sabine)</i>
Brewer, Alex	Glover, Olly
Brown-Fuller, Jess	Goldman, Marie
Cane, Charlotte	Gordon, Tom
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Green, Sarah
Chadwick, David ( <i>Proxy vote</i>	Harding, Monica
<i>cast by Mr Forster)</i>	Heylings, Pippa
Chambers, Dr Danny	Hobhouse, Wera
Chowns, Ellie	Hussain, Mr Adnan
Coghlan, Chris	Jarvis, Liz
Collins, Victoria	Jones, Clive
Cooper, Daisy	Lake, Ben
Dance, Adam	Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Darling, Steve	MacCleary, James
Davey, rh Ed	MacDonald, Mr Angus
Davies, Ann	Maguire, Ben
Dean, Bobby	Maguire, Helen
Denyer, Carla	Martin, Mike
Dyke, Sarah	Mathew, Brian
Forster, Mr Will	Medi, Llinos
Fox, Sir Ashley	Miller, Calum
Franklin, Zöe	Milne, John

Moran, Layla  
Morello, Edward  
Morgan, Helen  
Morrison, Mr Tom (*Proxy vote*  
*cast by Mr Forster)*  
Munt, Tessa  
O'Brien, Neil  
Perteghella, Manuela  
Pinkerton, Dr Al  
Ramsay, Adrian  
Reynolds, Mr Joshua  
Roome, Ian  
Sabine, Anna  
Shannon, Jim

Slade, Vikki  
Smart, Lisa  
Sollom, Ian  
Stone, Jamie  
Taylor, Luke  
Thomas, Cameron  
Wilkinson, Max  
Wilson, Munira  
Wood, Mike  
Wrigley, Martin  
Young, Claire

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
Wendy Chamberlain and  
Susan Murray

**NOES**

Abbott, Jack	Coleman, Ben
Abrahams, Debbie	Collier, Jacob
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Collinge, Lizzi
Akehurst, Luke	Collins, Tom
Aldridge, Dan	Conlon, Liam
Al-Hassan, Sadik	Coombes, Sarah
Ali, Rushanara	Cooper, Andrew
Ali, Tahir	Cooper, Dr Beccy
Allister, Jim	Costigan, Deirdre
Anderson, Callum	Cox, Pam
Arthur, Dr Scott	Coyle, Neil
Asato, Jess	Creagh, Mary
Athwal, Jas	Creasy, Ms Stella
Atkinson, Catherine	Crichton, Torcuil
Atkinson, Lewis	Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Bailey, Mr Calvin	Dalton, Ashley
Bailey, Olivia	Davies, Jonathan
Baines, David	Davies, Paul
Baker, Richard	Davies-Jones, Alex
Ballinger, Alex	De Cordova, Marsha
Barker, Paula	Dean, Josh
Barron, Lee	Dearden, Kate
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Baxter, Johanna	Dickson, Jim
Beavers, Lorraine	Dixon, Anna
Benn, rh Hilary	Dodds, rh Anneliese
Betts, Mr Clive	Dollimore, Helena
Billington, Ms Polly	Doughty, Stephen
Bishop, Matt	Downie, Graeme
Blake, Olivia ( <i>Proxy vote cast</i>	Duncan-Jordan, Neil
<i>by Chris Elmore)</i>	Eagle, Dame Angela
Blake, Rachel	Eagle, rh Maria
Blundell, Mrs Elsie ( <i>Proxy vote</i>	Edwards, Lauren
<i>cast by Chris Elmore)</i>	Egan, Damien
Botterill, Jade	Elmore, Chris
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena	Entwistle, Kirith
Brash, Mr Jonathan	Esterson, Bill
Brickell, Phil	Evans, Chris
Bryant, Chris	Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Buckley, Julia	Falconer, Mr Hamish
Burgon, Richard	Farnsworth, Linsey
Burke, Maureen	Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Burton-Sampson, David	Ferguson, Mark
Butler, Dawn	Ferguson, Patricia
Byrne, Ian	Fookes, Catherine
Byrne, rh Liam	Foster, Mr Paul
Cadbury, Ruth	Foxcroft, Vicky
Caliskan, Nesil	Foy, Mary Kelly
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Francis, Daniel
Campbell, Irene	Furniss, Gill
Campbell, Juliet	Gelder, Anna
Campbell-Savours, Markus	Gemmell, Alan
Carling, Sam	German, Gill
Charalambous, Bambos	Gilbert, Tracy
Charters, Mr Luke	Gill, Preet Kaur

Glendon, Mary  
 Goldsborough, Ben (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Gosling, Jodie  
 Grady, John  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Griffith, Dame Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Hack, Amanda  
 Hall, Sarah  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Paulette  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 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  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Ingham, Leigh  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jermy, Terry  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Lillian  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Josan, Gurinder Singh  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kitchen, Gen  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Leishman, Brian  
 Lewell, Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 MacAlister, Josh  
 MacNae, Andy  
 Madders, Justin  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mayer, Alex  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McCluskey, Martin  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDonnell, rh John

McDougall, Blair  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McMorris, Anna  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Moon, Perran  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Mullane, Margaret  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, Chris  
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Murray, Katrina  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Nash, Pamela (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Norris, Dan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Pakes, Andrew  
 Patrick, Matthew  
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Joe  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Ranger, Andrew  
 Reader, Mike  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sackman, Sarah  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Scrogham, Michelle  
 Sowards, Mark  
 Shah, Naz  
 Shanker, Baggy  
 Siddiq, Tulip

Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevenson, Kenneth  
 Stewart, Elaine  
 Stone, Will  
 Streeting, rh Wes  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Sullivan, Kirsteen  
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
 Swallow, Peter  
 Swann, Robin  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison  
 Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thomas, Fred  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tufnell, Henry

Turley, Anna  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Andrew  
 Western, Matt  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Williams, David  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrighting, Rosie  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yemm, Steve

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Gerald Jones and  
 Taiwo Owatemi

*Question accordingly negated.*

#### Clause 45

##### POWER TO EXTEND PART 1 TO OTHER PRODUCTS

*Amendment made:* 60, page 23, line 4, leave out from second “to” to end of line 7 and insert “a tobacco related device.”—(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*This amendment changes the wording to reflect the new definition inserted by Amendment 62, but does not change the effect of clause 45.*

#### Clause 46

##### POWER TO AMEND LISTS OF IDENTITY DOCUMENTS

*Amendment made:* 61, page 23, line 16, leave out clause 46.—(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*This leaves out the power to amend lists of identity documents in clauses 1 and 10 since the lists are being removed (and replaced with enabling powers to accommodate digital methods of verification as well as methods involving paper documents).*

#### Clause 48

##### INTERPRETATION OF PART 1

*Amendments made:* 62, page 24, line 21, at end insert—  
 ““tobacco related device” means—

- (a) a device, other than a vape, which enables a tobacco product to be consumed (for example, a heated tobacco device or pipe), or
- (b) an item which is intended to form part of such a device;”.

*This is consequential to Amendments 56 and 57.*

*Amendment 63, page 24, line 24, leave out from beginning to end of line 29.—(Ashley Dalton.)*

*This is consequential to Amendments 47 and 51.*



**Clause 59**

## EXTENSION OF OFFENCES TO VAPING AND NICOTINE PRODUCTS

*Amendment made:* 64, page 30, line 39, leave out from “means” to end of line 41 and insert—

“a machine from which any of the following products may be bought or from which they are dispensed to a customer in connection with a sale.”—(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*See the explanatory statement to Amendment 50.*

**Clause 68**

## AGE OF SALE FOR TOBACCO PRODUCTS ETC

*Amendments made:* 65, page 35, leave out lines 35 to 37 and insert—

“(a) that they took such steps as may be specified in regulations made by the Department to verify that the customer was born before 1 January 2009, or”.

*This amendment allows regulations to specify steps that a seller may take to benefit from the defence in new Article 3(2). The provision currently focusses on paper documents. The purpose of the new power is to accommodate digital methods of verification as well as methods involving paper documents.*

*Amendment 66, page 36, line 2, at end insert—*

“(2A) Regulations under paragraph (2)(a) are subject to negative resolution.”

*This is consequential to Amendment 65.*

*Amendment 67, page 36, leave out lines 3 to 10.—(Ashley Dalton.)*

*This is consequential to Amendment 65.*

**Clause 70**

## TOBACCO VENDING MACHINES

*Amendment made:* 68, page 37, line 3, leave out from “means” to end of line 4 and insert—

“a machine from which any of the following products may be bought or from which they are dispensed to a customer in connection with a sale.”—(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*See the explanatory statement to amendment 50.*

**Clause 76**

## SALE OF VAPING OR NICOTINE PRODUCTS TO UNDER 18S

*Amendments made:* 69, page 39, leave out lines 32 to 34 and insert—

“(a) that they took such steps as may be specified in regulations made by the Department to verify that the customer was at least 18 years old, or”.

*This amendment allows regulations to specify steps that a seller may take to benefit from the defence in new Article 4H(2). The provision currently focusses on paper documents. The purpose of the new power is to accommodate digital methods of verification as well as methods involving paper documents.*

*Amendment 70, page 39, line 36, at end insert—*

“(2A) Regulations under paragraph (2)(a) are subject to negative resolution.”

*This is consequential to amendment 69.*

*Amendment 71, page 39, line 37, leave out from beginning to end of line 7 on page 40.—(Ashley Dalton.)*

*This is consequential to amendment 69.*

**Clause 78**

## VAPING AND NICOTINE PRODUCT VENDING MACHINES

*Amendments made:* 72, page 41, line 1, leave out from “means” to end of line 2 and insert

“a machine—

(a) from which nicotine products may be bought, or

(b) from which they are dispensed to a customer in connection with a sale;”.

*See the explanatory statement to amendment 50.*

*Amendment 73, page 41, line 3, leave out from “means” to end of line 4 and insert “a machine—*

(a) from which vaping products may be bought, or

(b) from which they are dispensed to a customer in connection with a sale.”—(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*See the explanatory statement to Amendment 50.*

**Clause 79**

## DISPLAYS OF PRODUCTS AND PRICES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

*Amendment made:* 74, page 41, line 21, at end insert—

“(aa) tobacco related devices.”—(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*Clause 79 confers a regulation-making power to impose prohibitions, requirements or limitations in relation to the display of products and prices in Northern Ireland. The amendment extends the power to cover tobacco related devices (which would include things like heated tobacco devices and pipes and bongs that enable tobacco to be consumed.*

**Clause 82**

## POWER TO AMEND LISTS OF IDENTITY DOCUMENTS

*Amendment made:* 75, page 43, line 24, leave out clause 82.—(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*This leaves out the power to amend lists of identity documents in Articles 3 and 4H since the lists are being removed (and replaced with enabling powers to accommodate digital methods of verification as well as methods involving paper documents).*

**Clause 83**

## INTERPRETATION OF 1978 ORDER

*Amendments made:* 76, page 44, line 26, at end insert—

“‘tobacco related device’ means—

(a) a device, other than a vape, which enables a tobacco product to be consumed (for example, a heated tobacco device or pipe), or

(b) an item which is intended to form part of such a device;”.

*This is consequential to Amendment 74.*

*Amendment 77, page 44, line 29, leave out from beginning to end of line 33.—(Ashley Dalton.)*

*This is consequential to Amendments 65 and 69.*

**Clause 86**

## POWER TO EXTEND LEGISLATION TO OTHER PRODUCTS

*Amendment made:* 78, page 48, line 19, leave out from “to” to end of line 23 and insert “a tobacco related device.”—(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*This amendment changes the wording to reflect the new definition inserted by Amendment 76, but does not change the effect of clause 86.*

**Clause 88**

## TRANSITIONAL PROVISION

*Amendment made:* 79, page 49, line 19, leave out subsection (2). —(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*This is consequential to Amendment 75.*

**Clause 112**

## INTERPRETATION OF PART 5

*Amendment made:* 80, page 62, line 12, after “consumed” insert—

“(for example, a heated tobacco device or pipe)” —(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*This amendment brings the wording of the definition of “tobacco related device” in clause 112 into line with that inserted by Amendments 62 and 76 but does not change the legal effect.*

**Clause 136**

## ADDITION OF SMOKE-FREE PLACES IN ENGLAND

*Amendment proposed:* 85, page 77, line 8, leave out from “smoke-free” to end of line 15 and insert

“a place in England that is—

- (a) an NHS property or hospital building,
  - (b) a children’s playground, or
  - (c) a nursery, school, college or higher education premises.”
- (*Dr Caroline Johnson.*)

*This amendment restricts the Secretary of State to only being able to designate open or unenclosed spaces outside a hospital, children’s playground, nursery, school, college or higher education premises as smoke-free areas.*

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided:* Ayes 92, Noes 303.

**Division No. 154]**

**[6.38 pm**

**AYES**

Allister, Jim	Farage, Nigel
Anderson, Lee	Fortune, Peter
Anderson, Stuart ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra</i> )	Fox, Sir Ashley
Andrew, rh Stuart	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Argar, rh Edward	Freeman, George
Atkins, rh Victoria	French, Mr Louie
Bacon, Gareth	Glen, rh John
Baldwin, Dame Harriett	Grant, Helen
Barclay, rh Steve	Griffiths, Alison
Bedford, Mr Peter	Harris, Rebecca
Bhatti, Saqib	Hayes, rh Sir John
Blackman, Bob	Hinds, rh Damian
Bowie, Andrew	Holden, rh Mr Richard
Bradley, rh Dame Karen	Hollinrake, Kevin
Brandreth, Aphra	Huddleston, Nigel
Braverman, rh Suella	Hudson, Dr Neil
Cartlidge, James	Hunt, rh Jeremy
Cleverly, rh Mr James	Hussain, Mr Adnan
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Cocking, Lewis	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Cooper, John	Jopp, Lincoln
Costa, Alberto	Kearns, Alicia ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i> )
Coutinho, rh Claire ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i> )	Kruger, Danny
Davies, Mims	Lam, Katie
Dinenage, Dame Caroline	Lamont, John
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver	Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Lopez, Julia
Evans, Dr Luke	Lowe, Rupert
	Mak, Alan

Malthouse, rh Kit  
 Mayhew, Jerome  
 McMurdock, James (*Proxy vote cast by Lee Anderson*)  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Norman, rh Jesse  
 O’Brien, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paul, Rebecca  
 Rankin, Jack  
 Reed, David  
 Robertson, Joe  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
 Simmonds, David

Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Rebecca  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Stafford, Gregory  
 Stuart, rh Graham  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Thomas, Bradley  
 Timothy, Nick  
 Tugendhat, rh Tom  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Whately, Helen  
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
 Wild, James  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wood, Mike

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Paul Holmes and**  
**Harriet Cross**

**NOES**

Abbott, Jack  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir  
 Akehurst, Luke  
 Aldridge, Dan  
 Al-Hassan, Sadik  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Ali, Tahir  
 Anderson, Callum  
 Arthur, Dr Scott  
 Asato, Jess  
 Athwal, Jas  
 Atkinson, Catherine  
 Atkinson, Lewis  
 Bailey, Mr Calvin  
 Bailey, Olivia  
 Baines, David  
 Baker, Richard  
 Ballinger, Alex  
 Barker, Paula  
 Barron, Lee  
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex  
 Baxter, Johanna  
 Beavers, Lorraine  
 Begum, Apsana (*Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana*)  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Billington, Ms Polly  
 Bishop, Matt  
 Blake, Olivia (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Blake, Rachel  
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Botterill, Jade  
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena  
 Brickell, Phil  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Buckley, Julia  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Burke, Maureen  
 Burton-Sampson, David  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, Ian  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Caliskan, Nesil  
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
 Campbell, Irene  
 Campbell, Juliet  
 Campbell-Savours, Markus  
 Carling, Sam  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Charters, Mr Luke  
 Chownes, Ellie  
 Coleman, Ben  
 Collier, Jacob  
 Collinge, Lizzi  
 Collins, Tom  
 Conlon, Liam  
 Coombes, Sarah  
 Cooper, Andrew  
 Cooper, Dr Beccy  
 Costigan, Deirdre  
 Cox, Pam  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Creagh, Mary  
 Creasy, Ms Stella  
 Crichton, Torcuil  
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
 Dalton, Ashley  
 Davies, Jonathan  
 Davies, Paul  
 Davies-Jones, Alex  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 Dean, Josh  
 Dearden, Kate  
 Denyer, Carla  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dickson, Jim  
 Dixon, Anna  
 Dodds, rh Anneliese  
 Dollimore, Helena  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Downie, Graeme  
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eagle, rh Maria  
 Edwards, Lauren  
 Egan, Damien  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Entwistle, Kirith  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta  
 Falconer, Mr Hamish  
 Farnsworth, Linsey  
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh

Ferguson, Mark  
 Ferguson, Patricia  
 Fookes, Catherine  
 Foster, Mr Paul  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Foy, Mary Kelly  
 Francis, Daniel  
 Frith, Mr James  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gelderd, Anna  
 Gemmell, Alan  
 German, Gill  
 Gilbert, Tracy  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Goldsborough, Ben (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Gosling, Jodie  
 Grady, John  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Griffith, Dame Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Hack, Amanda  
 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  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Ingham, Leigh  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jermy, Terry  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Lillian  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Josean, Gurinder Singh  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kitchen, Gen  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Leishman, Brian  
 Lewell, Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive

Lightwood, Simon  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 MacAlister, Josh  
 MacNae, Andy  
 Madders, Justin  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mayer, Alex  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McCluskey, Martin  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDougall, Blair  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McMorris, Anna  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Moon, Perran  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Mullane, Margaret  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, Chris  
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Murray, Katrina  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Nash, Pamela (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Norris, Dan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Pakes, Andrew  
 Patrick, Matthew  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Joe  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Ramsay, Adrian  
 Ranger, Andrew  
 Reader, Mike

Rhodes, Martin  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sackman, Sarah  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Scrogham, Michelle  
 Sowards, Mark  
 Shah, Naz  
 Shanker, Baggy  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevenson, Kenneth  
 Stewart, Elaine  
 Stone, Will  
 Streeting, rh Wes  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Sullivan, Kirsteen  
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Swallow, Peter  
 Swann, Robin  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike

Taylor, Alison  
 Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tufnell, Henry  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Andrew  
 Western, Matt  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Williams, David  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrighting, Rosie  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yemm, Steve

#### **Tellers for the Noes:**

Gerald Jones and  
 Taiwo Owatemi

*Question accordingly negated.*

#### **Clause 168**

##### **COMMENCEMENT: PARTS 1 TO 4**

*Amendment made:* 81, page 121, line 10, leave out subsection (7) and insert—

“(7) The following provisions come into force (so far as not in force by virtue of subsection (2)) on such day as the Scottish Ministers may by regulations appoint—

- (a) section (Age verification in relation to tobacco and vaping products etc) (age verification in relation to tobacco and vaping products etc);
- (b) section 65 and Schedule 9 (extension of retailer register etc in Scotland).”—(*Ashley Dalton.*)

*This amendment produces the effect that NC11 will come into force on such day as the Scottish Ministers may by regulations appoint.*

#### *Third Reading*

6.51 pm

**Ashley Dalton:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Let me start by thanking hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber for their positive and constructive engagement today and more generally as the Bill has progressed through the House. Let me put on record my sincerest thanks to all members of the Public Bill Committee, who scrutinised the Bill extremely thoroughly and brought it to this stage.



[Ashley Dalton]

The Bill is the next step in a long history of action on tobacco, but as the House is aware, it is not a step that this Labour Government have taken alone. I thank the right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak) for his ambition to make a difference to the future of our country by championing the previous Tobacco and Vapes Bill. The Bill that we are discussing today is even stronger in its ambition to tackle smoking and youth vaping, in part thanks to the contributions and debate from MPs from all parties on these most critical of issues.

I thank the Opposition Front Benchers for their engagement with the Bill, particularly the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), who has been a determined campaigner for action on youth vaping for a number of years. I also thank my officials in the Department for Health and Social Care and the devolved Governments, the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, the Government Legal Department and the Clerks, whose tireless work and support on the Bill have enabled the development of this extraordinary legislation.

When this Government took office, we promised to create a smokefree generation. Today we are delivering on that promise. By creating a smokefree UK, we are investing in a healthier society for all. The Bill will tackle the concerning rise in youth vaping and reduce the immense burden that tobacco-related illnesses place on our society and our NHS. I consider it a great privilege to have overseen these last parts of scrutiny of the Bill, and I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to support it to proceed to the other place.

6.52 pm

**Edward Argar** (Melton and Syston) (Con): I am conscious of time, so I will be brief. I recognise the sincerely and strongly held views on both sides of the debate, which has played out with courtesy in this Chamber and in Committee, where Members have shown respect for one another and for differing views. I want to put on record my gratitude to all right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken. I congratulate the Minister on being thrown in at the deep end and taking through a piece of legislation with courtesy, very swiftly after she was appointed.

I thank the Clerks, the Whips and those who served on the Bill Committee. I do want to single out the phenomenal work done by the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), and her staff, Angus Forbes-Cable and Joey Ricciardiello, who did so much on the Bill, especially in Committee. As ever, even though there are strong feelings on both sides, the House has shown itself able to grapple with difficult issues with courtesy and thoughtfulness.

*Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.*

*The House divided: Ayes 366, Noes 41.*

**Division No. 155]**

**[6.54 pm]**

# **AYES**

Abbott, Jack	Al-Hassan, Sadik
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Ali, Tahir
Akehurst, Luke	Allister, Jim
Aldridge, Dan	Anderson, Callum

Aquarone, Steff	Coyle, Neil
Arthur, Dr Scott	Creagh, Mary
Asato, Jess	Creasy, Ms Stella
Athwal, Jas	Crichton, Torcuil
Atkins, rh Victoria	Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Atkinson, Catherine	Dalton, Ashley
Atkinson, Lewis	Davey, rh Ed
Bailey, Olivia	Davies, Ann
Baines, David	Davies, Jonathan
Baker, Richard	Davies, Paul
Ballinger, Alex	Davies-Jones, Alex
Barclay, rh Steve	De Cordova, Marsha
Barker, Paula	Dean, Josh
Barron, Lee	Dearden, Kate
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Denyer, Carla
Baxter, Johanna	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Beavers, Lorraine	Dickson, Jim
Begum, Apsana ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana</i> )	Dodds, rh Anneliese
Benn, rh Hilary	Dollimore, Helena
Betts, Mr Clive	Doughty, Stephen
Billington, Ms Polly	Downie, Graeme
Bishop, Matt	Duncan-Jordan, Neil
Blackman, Bob	Eagle, Dame Angela
Blake, Olivia ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )	Eagle, rh Maria
Blake, Rachel	Edwards, Lauren
Blundell, Mrs Elsie ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )	Egan, Damien
Botterill, Jade	Elmore, Chris
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena	Entwistle, Kirith
Brewer, Alex	Esterson, Bill
Brickell, Phil	Evans, Chris
Brown-Fuller, Jess	Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Bryant, Chris	Falconer, Mr Hamish
Buckley, Julia	Farnsworth, Linsey
Burgon, Richard	Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Burke, Maureen	Ferguson, Mark
Burton-Sampson, David	Ferguson, Patricia
Butler, Dawn	Fookes, Catherine
Byrne, Ian	Food, Richard
Byrne, rh Liam	Fortune, Peter
Caliskan, Nesil	Foster, Mr Paul
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Foxcroft, Vicky
Campbell, Irene	Foy, Mary Kelly
Campbell, Juliet	Francis, Daniel
Campbell-Savours, Markus	Frith, Mr James
Cane, Charlotte	Furniss, Gill
Carling, Sam	Gelder, Anna
Chadwick, David ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster</i> )	Gemmell, Alan
Chamberlain, Wendy	George, Andrew
Chambers, Dr Danny	German, Gill
Charalambous, Bambos	Gilbert, Tracy
Charters, Mr Luke	Gill, Preet Kaur
Chowns, Ellie	Glen, rh John
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Goldsborough, Ben ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )
Coghlan, Chris	Gosling, Jodie
Coleman, Ben	Grady, John
Collier, Jacob	Grant, Helen
Collinge, Lizzi	Greenwood, Lilian
Collins, Tom	Griffith, Dame Nia
Collins, Victoria	Gwynne, Andrew ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )
Conlon, Liam	Hack, Amanda
Coombes, Sarah	Hall, Sarah
Cooper, Andrew	Hamilton, Fabian
Cooper, Dr Beccy	Hamilton, Paulette
Cooper, Daisy	Harding, Monica
Costigan, Deirdre	Hardy, Emma
Cox, Pam	Harris, Carolyn
	Hatton, Lloyd
	Hayes, Helen
	Hayes, Tom
	Hazelgrove, Claire

Heylings, Pippa  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hinchliff, Chris  
 Hinder, Jonathan  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hughes, Claire  
 Hume, Alison  
 Hunt, rh Jeremy  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Ingham, Leigh  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jardine, Christine  
 Jarvis, Liz  
 Jermy, Terry  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Clive  
 Jones, Lillian  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Josan, Gurinder Singh  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kitchen, Gen  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Lamont, John  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Leishman, Brian  
 Lewell, Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 MacAlister, Josh  
 Madders, Justin  
 Maguire, Ben  
 Maguire, Helen  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Martin, Mike  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mathew, Brian  
 Mayer, Alex  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McCluskey, Martin  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDougall, Blair  
 McEvoy, Lola

McGovern, Alison  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McMorris, Anna  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty  
 Medi, Llinos  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 Miller, Calum  
 Milne, John  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Moon, Perran  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morello, Edward  
 Morgan, Helen  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Mullane, Margaret  
 Munt, Tessa  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, Chris  
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Murray, Katrina  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Nears, Pamela (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Norris, Dan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Pakes, Andrew  
 Patrick, Matthew  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perteghella, Manuela  
 Pinkerton, Dr Al  
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Joe  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Ramsay, Adrian  
 Ranger, Andrew  
 Reader, Mike  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robertson, Dave

Robertson, Joe  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sackman, Sarah  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Scroggham, Michelle  
 Sowards, Mark  
 Shah, Naz  
 Shanker, Baggy  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Simmonds, David  
 Slade, Vikki  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, rh Sir Julian  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevenson, Kenneth  
 Stewart, Elaine  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Stone, Will  
 Streeting, rh Wes  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Stuart, rh Graham  
 Sullivan, Kirsteen  
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Sunak, rh Rishi  
 Swallow, Peter  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison

Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Luke  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thomas, Cameron  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tufnell, Henry  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Andrew  
 Western, Matt  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Wilkinson, Max  
 Williams, David  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Wood, Mike  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrighting, Rosie  
 Wrigley, Martin  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yemm, Steve  
 Young, Claire

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
 Taiwo Owatemi and  
 Gerald Jones

## NOES

Amos, Gideon  
 Anderson, Lee  
 Andrew, rh Stuart  
 Atkins, rh Victoria  
 Babarinde, Josh  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Bedford, Mr Peter  
 Brandreth, Aphra  
 Braverman, rh Suella  
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
 Cocking, Lewis  
 Cooper, John  
 Cross, Harriet  
 Dean, Bobby  
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
 Farage, Nigel  
 Forster, Mr Will  
 Fox, Sir Ashley  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Anna Sabine*)  
 Griffiths, Alison  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hayes, rh Sir John

Holden, rh Mr Richard  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Lam, Katie  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lowe, Rupert  
 McMurdock, James (*Proxy vote cast by Lee Anderson*)  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paul, Rebecca  
 Rankin, Jack  
 Reed, David  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Rebecca  
 Thomas, Bradley  
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
 Wilson, rh Sammy

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Sir Edward Leigh and  
 Sir Desmond Swayne

*Question accordingly agreed to.*  
*Bill read the Third time and passed.*

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2025, which were laid before this House on 13 February, be approved.—(*Christian Wakeford.*)

*Question agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

That the draft Community Infrastructure Levy (Amendment etc.) (England) Regulations 2025, which were laid before this House on 25 February, be approved.—(*Christian Wakeford.*)

*Question agreed to.*

## Resettlement of Ukrainians: Coatbridge

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

7.7 pm

**Frank McNally** (Coatbridge and Bellshill) (Lab): It is a privilege to bring the resettlement of Ukrainians in Coatbridge to the House this evening.

We recently recognised the third anniversary of Russia's barbaric and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and the House has rightly been united in its condemnation of Putin and his illegal actions. As has been referenced often in the House, both the current and previous Governments, devolved Governments and local authorities stepped up to support Ukraine, as did ordinary people who engaged in extraordinary acts of kindness towards those forced to flee from their homes and seek refuge. I will focus much of my remarks on the efforts in my constituency, recognised nationally as an example of great practice. I wholly appreciate, however, that such examples are seen across the country.

It is also important to recognise the presence in the House earlier of a delegation from Bring Kids Back, who are working to return tens of thousands of Ukrainian children who have been abducted by Russian forces. The whole House will stand with them in their ongoing fight, and I commend my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Blair McDougall) for raising that at Prime Minister's questions.

In June 2022, North Lanarkshire council in partnership with central Government delivered the Warm Scots Welcome programme in my constituency. The council immediately began work to re-provision and renovate 200 empty flats at High Coats in Coatbridge and in Birkshaw tower in Wishaw, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, Wishaw and Carluke (Pamela Nash). Those towers, previously earmarked for demolition, were redeveloped and supported 400 Ukrainians into permanent accommodation. Shortly thereafter, the three "welcome hotels" in North Lanarkshire that were established in the weeks following the invasion were closed. Health and education provision was also arranged for the families, overseen by a cross-agency support network.

I should note that successful integration into the community of Coatbridge is no accident. North Lanarkshire's resettlement team has effectively supported refugees from crisis areas across the world over many years: from the Congo, Sudan, Syria, Afghanistan and now Ukraine.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for an absolutely superb Adjournment debate, because every one of us can say "Hear, hear" to what he is doing in his constituency. In my constituency, similar things happen. Ballynahinch high school has a class of Ukrainian children with a Ukrainian teacher and Ukrainian classroom assistants. Ukrainians also have employment in Finnebrogue Foods, Mash Direct and Willowbrook Foods. That tells me that we welcome the Ukrainians, as he does in his constituency. I commend him for this debate and say "Hear, hear; well done for helping the Ukrainians." We are here to help.

**Frank McNally:** The term tireless advocate is often used in the House, and the hon. Gentleman has certainly been a tireless advocate for Ukrainian refugees over many years. I commend him and the work he has done in his constituency and across Parliament.



The resettlement team in North Lanarkshire have worked diligently over many years and it has been commended for its work and recognised with awards from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the *Local Government Chronicle* for its efforts.

**Kirsteen Sullivan** (Bathgate and Linlithgow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing forward this important debate on this award-winning project. Does he agree that it is vital that we share best practice across the country with local authorities and Governments in order to be able to plan and respond quickly in times of crisis, to give people the care and security that they desperately need?

**Frank McNally:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The resettlement team in North Lanarkshire have been sharing such best practice, not just in Scotland but beyond, and that is something I am sure the Minister would be interested in as well. My hon. Friend did a lot of work on this issue in her area of West Lothian when she was deputy leader of the council, and I commend her for her efforts. I would also like to mention that three of the Ukrainian refugees have now got jobs with the resettlement team, which is absolutely fantastic.

**Alison Taylor** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing forward this important debate. In my constituency, like his, we have a number of Ukrainian families, who are most welcome, contributing to both the community and the economy. I commend all the organisations that have employed refugees, and I take this opportunity to thank Glasgow airport, which in 2022 invited those arriving in Paisley to a jobs fair, resulting in a number of refugees securing employment in the airport industry. Does my hon. Friend agree that the future of these Ukrainian refugees should be supported?

**Frank McNally:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Glasgow airport is one of a number of businesses that stepped up to the mark and supported Ukrainian refugees, and it is the same in my constituency as well. A number of establishments operating within my constituency have engaged in similar efforts over the past several years. That is welcome to see, and I appreciate her comments. I would like to put on record my thanks to the housing convenor for North Lanarkshire, Councillor Michael McPake, and the head of housing, Stephen Llewellyn, for their strategic focus on ensuring the programme's success.

In my maiden speech, I referenced the long history of immigration in my constituency, from the Lithuanian community to those with Italian heritage, from people from Pakistan and India to, of course, my area's significant Irish diaspora. That heritage was apparent a few weeks ago on Coatbridge main street when hundreds gathered for the St Patrick's day festival led by local champion Tom Nolan. I can now say that following the Ukrainian resettlement in Coatbridge, not only the Irish national day is celebrated in the town; there was a well attended celebration of Ukrainian Independence Day in August 2023 at the town's Summerlee museum. The programme included performances of Ukrainian music and dance. It was incredibly powerful to have the virtual attendance of family members and friends on FaceTime calling from Ukraine, who watched on as Ukrainian children in Coatbridge honoured their heritage.

There have been celebrations of the nativity held by the local Ukrainian community, as well as museum exhibitions about the plight of Ukrainian refugees. The fact that the Ukrainians who have settled in Coatbridge feel comfortable to celebrate their national heritage and to engage the local community in doing so highlights the warm welcome they have received from people in my constituency.

**Lillian Jones** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing to the House this important debate on the resettlement of Ukrainians. Does he agree that not only local authorities and businesses across Scotland welcomed Ukrainians, but families opened their doors and welcomed Ukrainians into their homes? It was an absolutely fantastic thing to have done, and to the benefit of Ukrainians, who have now settled into these communities and become part of them. Would he join me in congratulating and paying tribute to all those families for doing so?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues, I gently remind Members that when they are making interventions they should do so through the Chair—not least because that enables the microphones to pick up what they have said.

**Frank McNally:** I can assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that my hon. Friend made a good point. As I said, they were extraordinary actions taken by ordinary people, who opened up their homes to those fleeing the most horrendous situations. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that in those early days that was a critical action taken by people not just in my constituency and hers but across the country.

The warm welcome received by Ukrainians is in stark contrast to the violence continuing to emanate in Ukraine from the Russian invaders. Perhaps my Scottish colleagues will have read the recent article in *Holyrood* magazine, which contained testimony from residents at High Coats. One resident—Olga—spoke of the challenging initial period in Scotland living in emergency accommodation on MS Victoria, docked in Leith. Her only request of the resettlement team was to have sunlight after five months of living in a ship's dim cabin. With the move to Coatbridge, Olga said her sons began to smile again, making friends in the local school. Local primary schools, namely Greenhill primary school and St Patrick's primary school, have embraced thriving Ukrainian pupils, who have in some cases had to learn English from scratch. Some 60 Ukrainian children in High Coats are part of the Ukrainian kids club supported by the Mission of Innocents organisation. The club is a safe and supportive environment for the children to develop the sort of talents that have been so visibly displayed in the cultural events I mentioned earlier.

The High Coats tower now hosts a full range of cultural and wellbeing opportunities, including English language classes, walking clubs and employability programmes, and it even established a tenants and residents association, which is great to see.

The achievements and successes of this programme have been the result of a multidisciplinary effort incorporating housing services, health partners, schools, social work departments, community learning and development, faith groups, and local organisations in the voluntary sector. This comprehensive effort, touching on all areas of

[Frank McNally]

public service and community partnership, makes a big difference to those fleeing the turmoil of war. It can be an antidote to the disarray and insecure feelings that so many refugees experience. Permanent accommodation, as has been provided in North Lanarkshire, can also make a lasting difference to circumstances and outcomes. As I have said, there are real lessons that the Minister and her Home Office team could learn from the approach taken in North Lanarkshire, and I know that the Scottish and Welsh Governments have closely monitored the programme because it is an innovative local solution to the crisis.

It would be remiss of me not to say that it is important that the Department continues to look at the situation regarding visas, as there is growing trepidation among Ukrainian refugees. The Department should give further consideration to additional steps, and to the possibility of permanent right to remain. I appreciate that there remains uncertainty about the conflict, but some Ukrainians are concerned about the expiration of their 18-month visa extensions and the impact of that.

At the commencement of the conflict and in the months and years since, people in my constituency refused to walk by on the other side of the street; they stepped up, as people have done across the country. For those who have fled the terror, Ukraine is and will always be home, and never far from their thoughts are those who are lost or in peril—family and friends whose lives have been taken prematurely, or who continue to face down Russian aggressors on the frontline while they defend their cities, towns, villages, and land, be it small or large. Their thoughts are also with the Ukrainian children so cruelly stolen—at least 19,500 of them—and their lost homes, lost connections, lost livelihoods and lost time. They seek a lasting and just peace, as we all do, but until then, we must and will stand shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine and its people. Slava Ukraini.

7.22 pm

**Patricia Ferguson** (Glasgow West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to contribute to this short debate. I will be brief, but I want to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Bellshill (Frank McNally) for securing this debate, and add my comments to his in praise of the excellent work done by people and communities in his constituency.

It is a pleasure to hear such heart-warming stories coming out of such a dark and difficult situation. Like my hon. Friend's constituency, my home city of Glasgow has a long, proud record of welcoming refugees; the city has eventually become their home in many cases. My constituency of Glasgow West has a particular record of welcoming people fleeing conflict in their native land. In the 1970s, Drumchapel played host to many people fleeing Chile because of the brutal and fascist regime of General Pinochet. Many of those refugees were fortunate enough to be able to return home after Pinochet's downfall, but others chose to stay and make Scotland their home, and many of those who stayed ended in Lanarkshire, close to where my hon. Friend is from.

In the present day, my area has welcomed the Ukrainian refugees fleeing Putin's murderous onslaught in their country. Many of them, as my hon. Friend said, were originally accommodated in cruise liners—not the best of starts, perhaps, but at least it was a safe refuge

for them, and it is there that many of the cultural activities and school classrooms that have been developed began. The fact that people were together in a confined space obviously helped make that happen.

The joyous part of the story for both the Ukrainian and Chilean communities is that our local Glaswegian communities have been so enriched by being able to be part of their lives and their celebrations, and they have learned so much about another culture on the way. Over the past three years, I have attended many concerts and church services that have been both moving and enjoyable. On 24 August last year, I was delighted to again join in the Ukrainian independence day family fun event in Victoria Park in my constituency, an annual event that is much anticipated. With workshops, music and dance, as well as sporting events, it is truly a fun day, but I hope nobody will ask me to demonstrate what I learned, as I definitely do not have the skill to replicate Ukrainian art. I tried very hard, but I am afraid that my attempts were pretty pathetic.

**Blair McDougall** (East Renfrewshire) (Lab): I was not planning to intervene, but I am minded to mention the 80th anniversary of Operation Open Door, in which the Royal Navy went to Norway to rescue 500 refugees who were under extreme terror from the Nazis. They were brought to my constituency, to the village of Neilston, where they found sanctuary and humanity among the villagers. Does she agree that the relationships and cultural exchanges that she describes will last for generations, as they have in my constituency?

**Patricia Ferguson**: I agree with my hon. Friend. When there is more time, I will share with him my experience of being the manager of Glasgow dental hospital, where many Norwegian dentists were trained after the second world war.

In the context of the Ukrainian celebrations in my constituency, I must mention the Friends of Victoria Park, who do much to promote and protect the park, and who have been generous hosts; the recent installation of a Ukrainian bench in the park is a visible gesture of solidarity. Glasgow also now has an Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain club that promotes a range of services for Ukrainians living in the city and beyond.

I mentioned earlier that the Chileans who lived in Glasgow were eventually able to make a decision about where they wished to live. I sincerely hope that the time will not be too far away when our Ukrainian friends can also safely make that decision for themselves.

7.27 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Seema Malhotra)**: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Bellshill (Frank McNally) for securing this important Adjournment debate on the issue of displaced Ukrainians here in the UK, and the resettlement of Ukrainians in his constituency. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow West (Patricia Ferguson) for her impassioned speech highlighting the culture of Ukrainians, the work done and effort made to integrate the community, and the contribution that Ukrainians make in the UK.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Bellshill is a dedicated supporter of those Ukrainians who have found sanctuary in his constituency. I thank all hon. Members here who have made significant contributions,

showing that this is the story of not just one constituency, but many of our constituencies across the country. I recognise the work of North Lanarkshire council, which responded to the call from the UK and Scottish Governments to extend the hand of support to those Ukrainians who were fleeing and coming here in their time of need. I also recognise the work that my hon. Friend has done as a councillor over a number of years, leading on many programmes and being a leading voice on this issue.

**Mike Martin** (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): As the Minister knows, last month the Ukrainian permission extension scheme came into force, offering a further 18 months in the UK to our Ukrainian friends. Will she shed some light on the situation facing those Ukrainian guests who seek to enter further education, perhaps for three years, but who are unable to do so because they only have an 18 month extension to their visa?

**Seema Malhotra**: I will cover that when I come to my points on the UPE scheme.

I pay particular regard to the efforts and determination that teams in North Lanarkshire have shown and to their support for Ukrainian families seeking sanctuary. We heard about the rapid refurbishment of properties and how Ukrainian families have been able to find good accommodation and be supported to establish themselves and integrate into the community. We have seen in all our constituencies—indeed, I saw it myself when I came to Scotland last month—the support given to children to settle in schools and nurseries and how they have been welcomed in our communities.

I also recognise the support given to help Ukrainian families to seek employment, be more self-sufficient and extend their contribution to our society. There are a number of initiatives in the areas of culture, art, dance and so on, all of which are important in staying connected with Ukraine, but are also important—particularly for children and families—for connecting with the wider community and ensuring that a sense of diversity is truly appreciated. I thank all my hon. Friends and all hon. Members for their support for Ukrainians in their constituencies and for their stability and certainty in the UK.

A number of issues have been raised. I will broadly say that we engage regularly with the Ukrainian community and its representatives. As well as meeting members of the Ukrainian community in Scotland last month, when it was very valuable to hear of their experiences in different parts of the country directly, I attended the service at the Ukrainian Catholic church in London to commemorate the third anniversary of the full-scale, horrific and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. I assure the House that the Government stand in solidarity, as I know we all do, with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people against Vladimir Putin's unprovoked and barbaric war. Along with our allies, we remain unwavering and united in our support for Ukraine's defence of its freedoms and pursuit of peace and justice. My hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Bellshill also raised the horror of children being abducted.

To demonstrate our continued commitment to and support for Ukraine, earlier this year the Government, led by the Prime Minister, signed the UK-Ukraine 100-year partnership agreement, laying the foundations for closer collaboration and co-operation between our

two countries. The partnership seeks to ensure an enduring alliance for life beyond this conflict, covering economic and trade co-operation, investment in energy and infrastructure, and cultural ties, including the twinning of British and Ukrainian schools. That builds on the really important work that is going on and the relationship being built between British and Ukrainian children both here and in Ukraine, which will be important for that relationship in future years.

Thanks to the immense generosity of the British people, we have offered or extended temporary sanctuary to more than 300,000 Ukrainians and their families here in the UK through the bespoke Ukraine visa schemes.

The schemes have provided much-needed sanctuary to our Ukrainian friends for the past few years. We continue to do that, and the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme remains open. The Ukraine schemes provide an initial period of three years' permission to stay in the UK, recognising the inherent uncertainty of the conflict. Understandably, as time has passed, there has been a need to provide further certainty to those who have come to the UK. That is why in February the Government launched the new Ukraine permission extension scheme, which provides a further 18 months' permission to stay in the UK and a continuation of rights to work, to study and to access benefits. Section 3C leave is applied from when an application is successfully submitted.

We want to make sure that students can complete their studies. I know that there have been questions about how that is implemented, and I can certainly share some information about whether we can make that a bit easier, beyond the support already in place. We are working with universities and others on this, including whether support is sufficient or whether we need to do anything differently. The launch of the scheme demonstrates our continued support of Ukrainians here in the UK, and the offer of further permission to stay, along with the continuation of the same rights and benefits, provides vital certainty and security.

Members have raised points about settlement. As I have said, it is a tribute to the British people and the leadership of Governments and Members across the House that we have been able to see so many Ukrainians here in the UK, able to support themselves and their families through incredibly difficult circumstances and living their lives independently. I have heard the matters raised by Members, and the Ukrainian schemes have always sought to provide temporary sanctuary to those displaced by the war in Ukraine. The schemes are not and have never been routes to settlement, but at its heart that reflects the wishes of the Ukrainian Government for the future return of their citizens. The importance of that cannot be overstated. There are millions more displaced Ukrainians in Europe and beyond, particularly women and children, and as events in Ukraine develop, our support remains steadfast.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Bellshill can be assured that we continue to keep the Ukraine schemes under review to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of Ukrainians. In closing, I thank him again for securing this Adjournment debate and allowing important contributions from Members to be heard.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.37 pm

*House adjourned.*





## Westminster Hall

*Wednesday 26 March 2025*

[MARTIN VICKERS *in the Chair*]

### Fishing Quota Negotiations: Impact on UK Fleet

9.30 am

**Andrew George** (St Ives) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the impact of quota negotiations on the UK fishing fleet in 2025.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I come at this debate as someone who is not entirely new to fisheries debates, after having been involved in them in the early days of my parliamentary career in 1997 and on a number of occasions since. On how the fishing industry is perceived by the political process, I have always found that there seems to be an inverse relationship between politicians' desire not to interfere with the fishing industry and the inevitability that politics has to interfere in order to help establish and sustain an industry that is so important to this country. Indeed, there is a further inverse relationship in the sense that the industries that work in and are exposed to the raw power of nature seem to have a higher degree of regulation and administrative burden that is disproportionate to their sense of freedom from office-based activity.

It is interesting that the political parties that always seem keen to use the fishing industry as the poster boys for their campaigns and send flotillas up the Thames do not seem terribly interested in discussing the detail when it comes to the hard miles.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Although he did not name the individuals concerned, did he consider the fact that they might have other fish to fry?

**Andrew George:** We could spend all morning exchanging fishing industry puns, but I think it would be better to get back down to the nitty-gritty of trying to advance policy for the benefit of the fishing industry.

The Minister will appreciate what goes on in my constituency, which he visited last summer when he came to Newlyn, Sennen and other areas around Cornwall to look at the activities within the industry. That was very much appreciated and he clearly has a very sincere interest in the industry. Although he is not personally responsible for what he has inherited, he has a significant task on his hands in helping the industry find a way forward. That is what I hope we can encourage him to do today, because the issue for us—I am speaking on behalf of the industry, which I have spoken to on numerous occasions—is how last year's quota negotiations are impacting on the prospects for the industry this year.

**Seamus Logan** (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for introducing the debate in a light-hearted way—initially, at least—which is a contrast to some of the previous discussions. Is he

concerned about reports that our French allies are seeking to link fishing quotas to other matters, such as access to the €150 billion defence budget? Does he agree that the Government should clarify their position on this, and will he perhaps ask the Minister to do so this morning?

**Andrew George:** I am sure that the Minister heard that intervention. It does trouble me. If we go back to 1974, when Edward Heath was involved in the negotiation of our entry into the EU, and to subsequent negotiations, the fishing industry has often been used as a pawn—a bargaining chip. It would be a great pity if that happened again. I know that fishing Ministers do not usually sit around the Cabinet table, but I hope the Minister will use his influence to make sure the message is heard loud and clear within the Cabinet and by the Prime Minister that the fishing industry is not a bargaining chip that can be handled in that manner.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): My hon. Friend has spoken about political intervention. Fishery quota negotiations are difficult and nuanced at the best of times and understanding the granular detail of advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, for example, is never straightforward. It always goes badly wrong when we bring in other considerations. Does he agree that both our national security and our fishing industry deserve better treatment than the sort the hon. Member for Aberdeenshire North and Moray East (Seamus Logan) just outlined, if indeed what is reported is true?

**Andrew George:** If we are to establish a sustainable fishing industry that is fair to UK fishermen, it is important that the industry is reviewed on its merits and on the basis of science, not on political horse-trading with other countries. I strongly accept that point.

**Aphra Brandreth** (Chester South and Eddisbury) (Con): Given the debate we are having and the risk that our fishing communities could be used as a bargaining chip, does the hon. Member agree that, as the Government have said, food security is national security, and we cannot have our fishing communities and fishing stocks traded against defence in any way?

**Andrew George:** These negotiations are difficult at the best of times. We need to make sure these decisions are made on the basis of merit. Of course, we wish to re-establish UK fishing entitlement out to the 12 mile limit and to ensure that foreign vessels are not able to use their historic entitlements to fish within the 6 to 12 mile zone. Relative stability within the common fisheries policy left the UK, particularly in the western approaches, with a significantly poorer deal in comparison with many European countries, and that is the basis of a great deal of disquiet within the industry.

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): The hon. Member is being generous with his time. I am fortunate to represent the fishing fleet off the Berwickshire coast, which is relatively small but very active, together with the fish processing industry. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation produced a very helpful briefing note ahead of today's debate. One of the points it makes is that, since the UK left the EU in 2020, the

[John Lamont]

UK and Scotland's opportunities have increased greatly, and those opportunities would not have been there had we remained in the EU. Does the hon. Member agree with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation?

**Andrew George:** No, I disagree. I think that overall, the impact on the fishing industry has been a net negative, certainly for people in my own region, who depend substantially on the export of fish to other European countries. In the past, the majority of the fish landed in Newlyn, which is a very substantial port in my constituency—at least 80%—went to France, Spain and other European countries. The impact that that and other things, including veterinary inspections, vivier export requirements and licences, have had on the industry has been significantly detrimental, so I do not accept that. That is a conversation that I would be very happy to have with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, but by no means can one say that Brexit has been a great success, because that is certainly not the case.

The fishermen in my area do not feel that they have been well treated as a result of those negotiations. As a passionate remainder, I was prepared to accept that on the face of it, there was a potential benefit. There should have been—fishing was the only industry in which it was possible to make an argument that there could be a potential benefit as a result of Brexit—but that has not happened, so I reject the basis of that intervention and the point made.

I hope that in time, the Minister will look at the opportunities, rather than taking the sort of stop-start approach that I am going to refer to today—I will get to that point after all the interventions. I hope he will look instead at a medium and longer-term setting of quotas, with rolling multi-annual quotas, perhaps of up to five years. That should be the Government's objective, and they should work with scientists so that the industry can see a way forward, rather than having to adjust its business plans at very short notice, which is the case at present.

I will be adding a few small points about the small-scale, low-impact fishing industry; indeed, I come to this debate as someone with a limited amount of experience within the industry itself. When I was younger, our family had a boat at Mullion, in the south of the constituency, which used to supplement our income from the smallholding that we had. It was very low-impact, outboard motor and oar-based fishing activity that involved the setting of lobster and crab pots—very little of it was mechanised; it was all pulled by hand—and mackerel hand lining. It was low-impact fishing that we could only undertake during the summer months because of the storms that came into the coast in Mullion over the winter period. I have that experience, and many members of my family are engaged in the industry.

The Cornish fishing fleet has a value to the Cornish economy of £174 million, and 8,000 people are employed in the industry, so I particularly wanted to address the impact of the 2025 quota settlement on choke species. It is going to have a detrimental impact on the significant amount of fishing that takes place around the western approaches. The headline impact is that on pollack, which is very much bycatch fishing only. Boats under 10 metres are allowed just 75 kg per month. We have to remember that this is an ultra-mixed fishery, so even

though those fishermen target other species, such as hake, it is hard for them not to catch pollack. Because pollack is healthier than the science seems to indicate, fishermen end up catching a lot more of it and, under the regulations, are obliged to land it.

When the long-term ban was announced last year, the previous Government provided financial support for only one year, and the Minister and the new Government have not announced any other compensation for those affected by the pollack ban. I would be interested to know whether the Minister has anything to say about that. The industry asked for management measures for the recreational industry. At present, there is no management in place for the recreation fleet. The Cornish Fish Producers Organisation estimates that up to 50% of the total pollack catch around our waters is taken by the recreational angling industry.

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea advice for pollack is currently being benchmarked, as the Minister knows, and that formal review of the available science will lead to new advice in June. The House and I would be interested to know what power and influence the Minister has in that regard before June and over any decisions taken after June when the benchmarking process has been completed. Will he commit to introducing new management of the pollack stock on or before the completion of the benchmarking process? The industry cannot wait until next January.

There are similar problems with Dover sole. Our fleet is targeting megrims and monkfish, but Dover sole are known to be abundant in many areas. In areas VIIe, VIIf and VIIg, Dover sole are relatively abundant, and therefore the total allowable catch for those areas is relatively good, but data is lacking for areas VIIh, VIIj and VIIk, which has led to a much lower total allowable catch as a precaution. For example, each boat can catch 400 kg of Dover sole per month in area VIIe, but in VIIh it is limited to just 30 kg per month. Because of the catches that have been experienced, that is a significant diminution in the activity that the industry can pursue.

In 2023-24, the Cornish Fish Producers Organisation fleet worked with the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science to collect genetic samples of sole in VIIe and VIIh areas to provide evidence of the genetic links between the two stocks. Unsurprisingly, they saw that Dover sole swim between those areas. If that is proven and accepted, there will be greater confidence in setting fishing opportunities for the fleet to target monkfish and megrim in those other areas. I hope the Minister will prioritise the review of the scientific evidence at the UK-EU Specialised Committee on Fisheries, with a view to making a joint request to ICES to amend the total allowable catch for Dover sole in that area.

Similarly, the industry is working with scientists, CEFAS and environmentalist non-governmental organisations to aid the recovery of the stock of spurdog—a slender shark found in our waters—by providing bycatch and discard data. The spurdog fishery reopened in 2023 with a 1 metre maximum landing size as a precautionary management measure. Spurdog is a non-target species in a mixed fishery, so its increasing abundance is leading to increased unavoidable bycatch, forcing vessels to discard fish over 1 metre in length. In December the written record agreed that that rule should be reviewed in 2024 and 2025, but so far no meaningful adjustment has been made. Will the Minister promise to follow



through on the commitment to review the 1 metre rule and work with the industry to develop more sustainable management measures?

There has been a dramatic recovery of bluefin tuna in our waters over recent decades. In the past, the Atlantic bluefin tuna saw drastic cuts in catch limits, and a crackdown on illegal and unreported catches across its whole range. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas has taken that action over the last 20 years to reach a tipping point. Over the last decade the recovery has benefited that fishery, and has reached the shores of Cornwall, where sightings of bluefin tuna have increased by a factor of 60 since just a decade ago. The total allowable catch set by the International Commission is over 40,000 tonnes, more than half of which is allocated to the EU. In 2021 the UK received 50 tonnes of quota, initially for bycatch. In 2025, the UK quota is 66 tonnes, with 45 tonnes for commercial hook-and-line vessels.

Sixteen tonnes, almost a quarter of the entire quota, is set aside for accidental mortality from recreational catch-and-release permits. Tuna are vulnerable to unintended mortality due to the long fights they often endure with anglers, so mandatory training and strict handling procedures have been applied to some vessels, and 1,700 tuna have been released with minimal mortality. But in 2024 recreational catch-and-release permits were introduced, with a voluntary code of conduct and training. Will the Minister join a roundtable meeting of MPs, fishers and scientists to look at how the UK tuna industry can be managed more sustainably?

I will not detain the House for much longer, but there are other issues that I know the Minister is aware of, and which I have spoken to him about—particularly the impact of regulations on the small-scale fishing industry: day boats, under 7 metres, that fish around our coast and take less than 1% of the annual catch. Last summer I met Jof Hicks on the island of St Agnes in the Isles of Scilly. Over the last five years, he has gone out of his way to develop a fishery that has the lowest possible impact because there is no plastic or fuel involved: he uses sail and oar, and he makes his own crab pots entirely from natural materials—growing his own withies and tamarisk to make the pots. He is sustaining a living from that. Admittedly, some of the restaurants on the Isles of Scilly are able to provide him with relatively healthy prices for his produce, but he is nevertheless demonstrating that it can work. However, he complained to me that all the same regulations that apply to supertrawlers apply to him with his home-made boat and locally made lobster and crab pots. I urge the Minister to have a close look at that, perhaps with me. I am not arguing that this is the future for the fishing industry, or that we can feed the nation by this method, but it can make a measurable difference and provide an alternative way of catching fish in areas such as mine, and no doubt in other places. We could forge a different approach. If we could take unnecessary burdens from the shoulders of people such as Jof Hicks, that would be enormously appreciated.

I will bring my remarks to a close, because many others wish to speak. I hope that the Minister will respond to the questions raised. I believe that politicians and the fishing industry are all pushing in the same direction—towards a sustainable industry based on the best available science—but we need to ensure that the

regulations that are informed by that science do not create unintended consequences that have a detrimental impact on fish stocks and the fishing industry.

Things have changed. The culture has changed, and the industry is much more engaged with a science-based approach than perhaps it was when I first engaged in these debates nearly 30 years ago. I hope that we will continue with openness and dialogue, and that we will push for efficiency in the way we update the regulations this year. The pressures on the fisheries I mentioned earlier, which are being affected by choke stocks such as pollack and Dover sole, need to be addressed before the end of the year.

**Martin Vickers (in the Chair):** I remind Members to bob if they wish to speak. I intend to call the Front-Bench spokespeople at 10.28 am; if Members bear that in mind, we can probably manage without a formal time limit.

9.57 am

**John Cooper (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I congratulate the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) on securing this important debate.

I declare a sort of interest: in a previous life, I was a special adviser with the Scotland Office, and I spent the larger part of 2021 working on exports from Scotland to the EU. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that the EU, far from being our avuncular friends in this matter, were a protectionist bloc. Many of the difficulties we faced, including the transport of live langoustines—he mentioned vivier transport—were to do with problems on the far side of the short strait. It was bloody-mindedness at best and outright protectionism at worst.

But let us talk about chips—not the golden-fried essential component of what we Scots call the fish supper, but bargaining chips, for that is yet again what our fishing crews risk becoming. The statistics are superficially simple: the Office for National Statistics says that fishing accounted for just 0.03% of the UK's economic output in 2021. However, that does not capture the reality that a great many of our fragile coastal communities, not only in Scotland but across the UK, are entirely dependent on jobs in fishing's at-sea component and its allied onshore processors.

If fishing were a trifling little homespun affair, why is the EU so interested in it? With the Business and Trade Committee, I travelled to Brussels to discuss this Government's reset of relations. What Labour expects from this reset is opaque at best, but the EU—good protectionist that it is—has already drawn up an invoice, and top of its list is fishing. Amid warm words about security and co-operation between Britain and the EU, the French are keen to lock us out of the new £150 billion Euro defence fund, only to then show a bit of ankle on negotiations involving—quelle surprise!—fishing.

Just as Labour's Employment Rights Bill, with its heavy pro-union bias, takes us back to 1979 and the winter of discontent, so fishing is drifting back to 1973. Then, our prized and pristine waters were the quid pro quo for access to what was then the European Economic Community. Today, the dice are loaded in favour of the EU fleet. According to the Scottish Fishermen's Federation—I note that the hon. Member for St Ives is not a huge fan of it, but I certainly am—the EU catches around seven times more fish by value in UK waters

[John Cooper]

than we land from EU waters. Britain's status as an independent coastal state was hard won, and we must not allow our fleet to be dragged back into the ambit of the hated common fisheries policy. We cannot allow a linkage between fisheries and access to markets to be established.

British fishing is already under a series of threats. Let us be as clear as the blue ocean about the conservation issue: fishermen are to the fore in this area, for they know that if they clear the seas of fish today, there is no tomorrow for them. Things such as spatial squeeze are real. Our seas are vast but not limitless. Boats cannot fish between floating wind turbines or trawl near those turbines' subsea infrastructure. To say that boats can simply up nets and go elsewhere is to demonstrate a terrifying lack of knowledge about the sea. Fish and seafood are not evenly suffused; they are in some places and not in others.

Fishing is food security, as we have heard. It is a livelihood for many—not just for those who literally risk life and limb on the storm-tossed seas, but for those onshore. Fish and chips are as emblematic of this country as the bright fishing boats at quaysides from Kirkcudbright to Kirkwall and more. They must not be frittered away at the behest of an avaricious EU.

10.1 am

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to serve under your chairship, Mr Vickers. I commend the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) for setting the scene so well. Fishing is important to me, as the representative of the village of Portavogie. The hon. Member for South Down (Chris Hazzard) takes his money but does not take his seat in this House, so I also have to speak for the fishing sector in Kilkeel and Ardglass. I am quite happy to do that; I do it regularly to represent the collective viewpoint of the sector and to ensure that we have a voice in this House.

I liaise with the fishing bodies in Northern Ireland. The feeling, as things stand, is that they are happy with the quota negotiations at the moment, provided that the Government continue to deliver to the sector in Northern Ireland the quota allocations that they have indicated they will deliver, and that they do not take a backward step and grant the EU more than it has currently, at the expense of our fishing industry.

The message from my fishermen—from the Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation and the Irish Fish Producers Organisation—is simple. The Minister has met them and he knows that. I hope that he will come over sometime shortly to meet our fishermen, and I look forward to that. I know they have a very high opinion of him; they see him as one who stands firm, and they hope that the Government will stand firm and not—to use a pun—row back on where we are at the moment.

The Northern Ireland industry's priority for the negotiations is not necessarily quota; it is access to the Republic of Ireland's 6 to 12 nautical mile zone, which we lost through Brexit. My questions to the Minister will be along those lines. In the original withdrawal agreement, France was granted access to UK waters—specifically, English waters on the south coast—on the basis of grandfather rights. There is therefore, I believe,

a precedent for offering access to limited named vessels in the negotiations. The principle of promoting access for UK vessels to EU waters has mixed receptions from those who want their scallopers—and we have many of them in Northern Ireland—to have access to French waters, and those who would like to see EU vessels, with the exception of EU-owned flagships, out of UK waters.

It is my belief, as I said, that the top priority for the Northern Ireland fleet in the upcoming negotiations is to have access restored to those parts of their traditional fishing grounds, which they had grandfather rights to, that lie in the 6 to 12 nautical mile zone of Irish waters. Given that precedent was set when the UK granted access to its territorial waters to a limited number of named EU vessels, will the Minister confirm that he will press for Northern Ireland's vessels to have the same privilege as those granted by the previous Government to the French? That is the first of my three questions.

My second question comes from the—I will use an Ulster Scots word—shenanigans being played out between the UK and the EU. The UK has banned bottom trawling in some areas of UK waters that are important to the French trawling fleet. I understand the reason for that and I support it. The ban applies to both the UK and all other countries. By way of retaliation—the French are well known for their retaliation; if we give them a kick, they kick us back almost twice as hard—the French have linked fishing rights to the Security Action for Europe initiative. There is always a clause or add-on to anything that the French do—I could make some further comments, but I will not. There are claims that the EU is trying to play politics with the livelihoods of UK fishermen by attempting to link defence contracts to fishing rights, so will the Minister take this opportunity to renew his commitment to treating food security as national security, and will he commit to pushing back against any attempt to use our fishing communities as pawns in wider political games? I know the Minister: he is an honest politician and an honest Minister. His fight will be for our fishermen, and I wish him well in that.

Our fishing industry relies on the Government to be its mouthpiece and its strength. I know that that is the Minister's desire and I believe that now is the time to prove to our fishing crews and fish producers that this new Government are on the side of our industry and prepared to push and, if necessary, fight their part. The industry is more than the fishing crew; so many subsidiary businesses rely on it. On behalf of those people—my people—I ask the Minister to send the clear message from our Government and this House that the fishing industry is alive and well and ready to thrive even more.

10.6 am

**Harriet Cross** (Gordon and Buchan) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) for securing the debate. I rise to speak on behalf of the fishing communities in both my Gordon and Buchan constituency and wider north-east Scotland, who play such a crucial role in the UK's fishing sector but are facing unprecedented challenges following, among other things, the most recent quota negotiations.

The total allowable catch quota negotiations have been another example of the UK losing when Labour Governments negotiate. Analysis by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs itself shows that, as a result of the most recent negotiations, UK

quota fell by 5% for 2025, representing a 38,000 tonne decrease and a £9 million reduction in the value of fishing opportunities. In total, the UK secured approximately 747,000 tonnes of quota, valued at about £950 million—a decrease from 2024 in both tonnage and value.

Let us not forget that behind every percentage point of the reduction are real people—fishermen and women, their families and our coastal communities—who now face difficult decisions about their future. That is before we even start to consider “paper fish”, or quota allocations that cannot realistically be caught—that is to say, their benefit exists only on paper. That might happen, for example, when a country is allocated quota for species that are not present in sufficient quantities in its water, when quota is allocated for species that the fleet does not have the correct gear or capability to catch, or when the quota exists administratively but does not translate to actual fishing opportunities. The Scottish Fishermen’s Federation and other fisheries organisations have highlighted the distorting effect of paper fish when discussing quota negotiations, because it means that actual usable quota is less than what appears in official statistics. Some quotas look great on paper, but provide no benefit to the fleet.

DEFRA has published two reports—one on economic outcomes and the second on sustainability—considering the UK’s fishing opportunities for this year. We should remember that sustainability under the Fisheries Act 2020 has three pillars—environmental, social and economic—and that no one pillar takes precedence over the others. In Scotland, about 70% of key commercial stocks are fished sustainably. Yes, there is still room for improvement, but it is important to recognise that progress has been made in the last 30 years. For example, in 1991, the same indicator showed that sustainability levels were only at 35%. The industry has driven that progress alongside fisheries scientists and managers, because no one has a greater vested interest in healthy seas and fish stocks than our fishermen and those who depend on them for their livelihoods.

There is still much work to do for the UK’s fishing industry to benefit fully following Brexit and our departure from the broken, inequitable common fisheries policy. Under the adjustment period in the trade and co-operation agreement, the EU still has unrestricted access to the UK exclusive economic zone. That benefits the EU far more than the UK and, unsurprisingly, the EU wishes for that position to continue. As other Members have mentioned, we just have to look at how things have developed in recent weeks to get a true understanding of the EU’s approach to fishery negotiations. Some EU member states are now saying that, unless the UK gives way to exactly what the EU wants on fishing, it will be excluded from the EU’s defence fund. It is almost unbelievable that anyone would risk the safety, security and defence of Europe and its allies on such a pretence.

Fishing and defence—indeed, national and international security—should not be conflated. Our national security is vital, our energy security is vital and our food security, in which fishing plays a major part, is vital, and each should be dealt with in its own right. We cannot allow our fishing communities to be caught up in this EU posturing. The UK Government must state unambiguously that giving up their rights to our waters and natural resources would represent a long-term loss

of a national asset critical for food security and production of climate-smart food. I invite the Minister to do so in this debate.

I urge the Minister to commit to securing a better deal for UK fishing in the revised TCA—one that genuinely rebalances quota towards zonal attachment principles—and protect our fishing grounds. Will the Government ensure that small-scale and coastal fishing operations have proper representation in future negotiations? The Conservative party committed to that in our manifesto, along with seeking additional opportunities for these vital parts of our fishing fleet.

10.11 am

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I congratulate the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) on securing this important debate at a critical time in the EU negotiations. I had not intended to make a speech—I was just going to intervene—but I heard him lamenting the interventions.

I will focus on a couple of points. The first is about science, and the second is about the EU negotiations. My constituency of Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes has a long-standing, proud fishing heritage. It had the largest fishing port in the world at its height, although things have moved on significantly since those days; what we have left is a single company that operates a fleet that largely fishes out of Peterhead, where the majority of the fish are at the moment. We have a significant fish-processing sector that employs around 6,000 people. The scope of the fisheries sector extends far beyond catching, and that is worth remembering in this debate: the number of jobs in the entirety of the sector is important all around the coast of this nation.

I was struck by the comments made by the hon. Member for St Ives about the differences in expectations between supertrawlers and individual fishers. We talk about the fishing industry as if it is one industry rather than a collection of individuals, some of whom are self-employed or run small or microbusinesses. It is worth considering that there are differentials in size, scope and range of capacity between the businesses that operate around the country, as there are in other sectors, where there are large businesses as well as small and medium-sized enterprises. That may well assist with some of the issues the hon. Gentleman raised.

What struck me from the speeches of the hon. Member for St Ives and the hon. Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross) is that we talk about relying on science to drive our fisheries and to give us the scope of the TAC, but the science is often too slow. It does not meet the needs of fishers, who are looking not only for what they are going to be catching today, but, hopefully, for what they will be catching in six months or a year’s time. Although things have improved, there is still room to improve and speed up the flow of information from the scientific community to inform the fisheries community, to ensure that it is properly reflected in the amount and the species that fisherman are allowed to catch.

It is not new that fishing is used as a negotiating tactic, particularly when it comes to defence. It was critical in the establishment of NATO, much to Grimsby’s misfortune in the 1970s. The agreement with Iceland that started the cod wars of the 1970s was purely down



[Melanie Onn]

to the negotiations around the establishment of NATO and the United States having a base in Iceland. That impinged on the area in which Grimsby trawlers could go out and catch. This is not new, then, and it poses an inherent danger when the desire for safety and security in our nation is potentially weighed against livelihoods and an industry.

When it comes to defence in these very insecure times internationally, we should be aware of the likelihood of the EU's expectations, and we should go into things completely open-eyed but unafraid to defend what remains of our fishing sector, to give it the hope it needs to sustain and grow. It is important that we do not serve up too much politics in that effort. The conversations since we left the EU, with many years of the Conservative party wrangling over the issue of Europe, have been unhelpful when it comes to the practical manner EU member states tend to undertake their negotiations. It is important to have a level head and maintain a practical and clear-eyed perspective on the negotiations. Despite the noise we hear from EU member states, we must remember that it is a negotiation, so people will raise flags about the issues important to them.

When it comes to exports to the EU, there is an opportunity for UK fisheries in much of what we catch and farm. With their slightly non-white-fish palates, EU member states will want much of the crayfish and speciality fish that do not tend to get eaten in this country. There is plenty of opportunity and not as much to fear as we have heard this morning. I wish the Minister and his colleagues all the best in the course of the negotiations, and remind him not be afraid to stand up for UK fisheries, whether in Scotland or Cornwall—

**Jim Shannon:** And Northern Ireland!

**Melanie Onn:** And Northern Ireland. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman—how could I be so remiss as to forget Northern Ireland the day after his birthday?

I remind the Minister to celebrate the UK fishing industry, to stand firm and to promote the opportunities that come from the great-quality products we have in the UK, which I know members of the EU community want. We have quite a lot of strength in our fishing arsenal.

10.19 am

**Caroline Voaden** (South Devon) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George) for securing this important debate and other hon. Members for their informed contributions. In summing up for the Liberal Democrats, I would like to echo some of the points made and consider the Government's approach to negotiations with the EU. I thank the Minister for his visit to Brixham straight after the election, and for his interest in the industry.

I agree with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) that we need to negotiate with a clear head and try not to allow the Brexit psychodrama to colour our positioning too much as we go into the negotiations. However, it is fair to point out that our fishing communities were badly let down by the previous Conservative Government, who spent years promising that Brexit would be a boon for British fishers.

Perhaps in contrast to what was said by the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (John Cooper), the fishers in Brixham in my constituency clearly feel betrayed by the former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. He toured the harbour and promised them the earth, then cast them adrift at the 11th hour, giving EU vessels virtually the same rights that they had under the common fisheries policy while burdening our own vessels with the millstone of veterinary certificates and border checks if they want to export their fish to their biggest market—the EU. In particular, our shellfish exporters have been incredibly badly affected by the red tape they now find themselves tied up in.

The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations described the post-Brexit TCA as a

“near-complete capitulation to the demands of the EU”.

The previous Government's botched deal has undoubtedly harmed the UK fishing industry and caused great uncertainty, which is only increasing as the end of the transfer period approaches. As we have heard, it is not just fishers who are affected: it is the entire supply chain and the infrastructure that keeps our coastal communities vibrant.

The Liberal Democrats hope that the current Government are entering into negotiations with our valuable fishing industry uppermost in their minds. One tangible benefit for the industry post Brexit was the ability for the UK to develop its own fisheries management measures. The evidence-led process, which is intended to be focused on long-term environmental, economic and social sustainability, is very different from the common fisheries policy, which remains top-down, bureaucratic and riven by political compromise, as many Members have said. However, it is vital that real-world scientific data is incorporated swiftly into stock management decisions to reflect what is actually happening on the ground—or rather, in the sea.

The Liberal Democrats believe that there is a real issue in relation to data-deficient stocks, which is impacting the sustainability of fishing quotas. Bycatch rules are leading to fish being thrown back into the sea that will not survive, making a nonsense of sustainability objectives and impacting the livelihood of UK fishers who could land those fish. Small species of fish, which could be caught and offer economic benefit, are not properly accounted for in the quotas. The Government must consider appropriate ICES alternative advice scenarios, which deliver similar results for stock sustainability, to ensure that the socioeconomics have also been carefully considered.

Let us take pollack, for instance. As my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives said, a formal review by ICES is due in June 2025. That advice must be fed quickly into management decisions. There is currently no management in place for the recreational fleet, which the Cornish Fish Producers Organisation estimates to account for up to 50% of the total pollack catch. The zero total allowable catch for pollack severely impacts the under-10 metre fleet, which relies heavily on that stock. Catch data for the commercial and recreational sectors shows that the under-10 metre fleet is responsible for the lowest catches of pollack and the lowest impact on stock, yet that sector is impacted most by the current approach to management.

I echo the call of my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives for the Minister to commit to introducing any new management of the pollack stock with immediate

effect upon publication of the advice, rather than waiting until January 2026. Will the Minister also look again at recreational catch limits? Anecdotal evidence suggests that a substantial tonnage of fish—even fish with zero total allowable catch, such as pollack—is caught by boats claiming to be recreational. We also need to look again at bluefin tuna catch limits. The species is now becoming more abundant in our waters and, as we have heard, is regularly caught by recreational anglers.

Members of the South Western Fish Producer Organisation, and those operating in and around Brixham, are concerned about the impact of recent annual quota negotiations on the highly valuable sole fishery in the western channel. The quota has been cut every year for the past three years. This year it was cut by 3%, despite the latest encouraging ICES advice identifying no immediate issues with the stock. The decision stemmed from a management decision made in 2023, as opposed to concerns about the stock itself. Catch limits unfairly target the inshore fleet of smaller boats. As we have heard, supertrawlers represent just 4% of UK fishing boats but account for 75% of all the fish landed, whereas the under-10 metre fleet accounts for just 1% of all fish landed.

The Liberal Democrats are committed to ensuring that sustainability is at the heart of our post-Brexit fisheries strategy by reforming the fishing quota allocation system to reward the most sustainable fleet, and ensuring that all catch limits are set at sustainable levels. The example of Jof Hicks in the Isles of Scilly shows how imbalanced the regulations are in an industry that includes such a wide variance in vessel size and activity. We would radically overhaul how our quotas are allocated, prioritising support for small and medium-sized enterprises, revitalising local economies and better protecting our seas from environmental harm.

In 2018, then shadow Environment Secretary, Sue Hayman, said that Ministers needed to take

“urgent action to use the powers that they have domestically to redistribute fishing quotas to deliver a fairer deal for smaller boats.”

Now that Baroness Hayman is a DEFRA Minister, are the Government still in favour of redistributing quotas to support smaller boats?

We urge the Government to consider the roll-out of a multi-year quota system that would enable the industry to plan into the future, rather than adhere to the current annual cliff edge system. That would provide certainty for fishermen and the industry, and support the recovery of most of the fishing stock. However, we must also ensure that some flexibility is built into the arrangement, as climate change is affecting fish stocks. We can see from the arrival of more bluefin tuna in our waters that things are changing. It is vital that the industry is able to review catch limits as the marine environment changes.

EU vessels still have free access to UK waters in the six-to-12 nautical mile zone, whereas we do not have the same access to EU waters. The NFFO has described that distribution as “radically inequitable”; I am sure we would all agree. Under proposals published last week, we heard that the EU’s €150 billion defence fund will consider purchasing British weapons only if the Prime Minister signs a security pact with Brussels—something France has tied to fishing rights.

The President of the European Council has said that the EU will not let the question of fishing rights derail a pact with the UK on security and defence. Most Members

present have echoed the point that we should not allow the defence of Europe and the security of our nation to be negotiated against the fishing industry. Will the Minister confirm that he will go out to bat as strongly for our fishing fleet in the negotiations as it looks like the French are going to? If not, will he at least try to get some of the red tape on exports to the EU removed?

The Labour general election manifesto said:

“We will seek to negotiate a veterinary agreement to prevent unnecessary border checks”.

Almost nine months later, British exporters have passed the milestone of 1 million export health certificates issued since Brexit, every one of them representing time and money lost by British fishers and farmers. Will the Minister assure our hard-working constituents that the deal for 2026 and beyond will include an end to the requirement for export health certificates, so that whatever our fishers are able to catch they can sell to the widest possible market at the best possible price?

Food security is national security. Protecting, promoting and supporting our fishing industry is vital to that security. I look forward to hearing the Minister’s response to some of the questions raised and points made today.

10.28 am

**Dr Neil Hudson** (Epping Forest) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers, for this important debate on the impact of quota negotiations on UK fishing. I congratulate the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) on securing the debate. I thank him for his thoughtful opening remarks about science and sustainability, and his interesting comments about species such as pollack, Dover sole and bluefin tuna, and bycatch.

We have had thoughtful contributions from hon. Members from all parties. The comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Chester South and Eddisbury (Aphra Brandreth) on the importance of fishing for food security were echoed by many colleagues. My hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) talked about the opportunities for UK fishing, after our departure from the European Union. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway (John Cooper) spoke about the importance of not using fishing as a bargaining chip in EU negotiations, the importance of the UK as an independent coastal state, and the important issue of spatial squeeze.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross) talked about the importance of the quota negotiations and what they mean to people in communities throughout the country, and made important points about paper fish and sustainability. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) talked about the diversity of businesses and the people that depend on UK fishing.

I am sure that Members need no reminding of the importance of our fishing industry. Fishing has always been vital to the UK across our four nations. It has been the lifeblood of many communities up and down our country. Island and rural communities are particularly reliant on a strong fishing industry for their local areas to thrive. It is incumbent on all of us in this Chamber to make sure that the views of fishing communities are heard.

[Dr Neil Hudson]

We Conservatives admit that we did not get everything right in negotiations on fisheries while in government—I am very open on that point—but as we head towards 2026, we have at least made some progress. When we were in government, we worked to secure the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement for fisheries in 2021. The TCA represented the UK's first domestic fisheries legislation in nearly 40 years, and the last Government took advantage of the agreement to increase our fishing quotas. In 2024 the UK negotiated 785,000 tonnes in quota, worth almost £1 billion to the UK fishing industry—a major achievement and an important step in the right direction for UK fisheries. By 2026 that will amount to £146 million, or 25% of the previous annual EU catch from UK waters. Significant quota increases have benefited the pelagic sector, particularly for species such as herring and mackerel. We also secured new deals with other coastal states, including Norway. These agreements, negotiated by the last Conservative Government, were designed to get the best outcomes for the fishing industry.

After June 2026, the Labour Government must take a strong stance in negotiations with the EU to secure the fishing industry's long-term future. Despite attempts to reassure the industry, it is undeniable that many people remain concerned that the Labour Government will simply use fishing as a bargaining chip in their attempts to negotiate a reset with the EU. It is vital that the Government do not cede fishing grounds to France or other countries as the price for a closer relationship with the EU, as any such deal would be a major blow to our UK fishing industry.

I note that when asked about that by the shadow Defence Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), in Defence questions on Monday, the Secretary of State for Defence failed to deny that fishing could be a sacrifice in discussions on defence. It is absolutely incredible that we are hearing reports out of Europe that the UK may be excluded from the £125 billion EU defence fund unless the UK capitulates and gives the EU what it wants on fishing rights. Our collective EU defence and security that the UK contributes so much to must not be jeopardised, and nor should our fishing communities be used as a bargaining chip. Will the Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs confirm today, as the Secretary of State for Defence did not on Monday, that the Government will not bargain away our fishing industry in such important deliberations about our international security?

There are already questions to be raised over the negotiations for fishing opportunities concluded by the Government in 2024. DEFRA's own research on the economic outcomes of annual negotiations for UK fishing opportunities in 2025 has shown a 38,000 fall in tonnage for this year's quota compared with last year, a decrease of 5%. Negotiations with other coastal states saw a 15% fall in tonnage for this year's quota compared with last year, representing a loss of £65 million. It is vital that the new Government secure good deals for the fishing industry. I urge the Minister and the Government to provide more clarity on why the quota negotiated for this year has gone down.

It is also important to note that the benefits of negotiations are seen not just in the raw numbers of tonnes secured, but in ensuring that we have a proper

process, using rigorous scientific data, so that the right types of fish are also available to UK fishermen and the fishing industry, meeting economic and environmental concerns under the Fisheries Act 2020. As we have heard today, pollack is abundant in UK waters, but the UK has only 24% of the pollack quota. The previous Government put in place support in this regard, and again we ask the Minister what the Government will do in the future about the management of pollack.

It is important that we fish sustainably. I note that in Scotland around 70% of key commercial stocks are fished at sustainable levels. Although that shows scope for improvement, the upward curve from a figure of around 35% in 1991 is welcome. The UK can be proud that our fishing industry follows the science and looks to care for our waters. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon and Buchan articulated so strongly, no one has a greater vested interest in the health of their seas and the health of their fish stocks than the very communities whose livelihoods depend upon them.

The need for proper rigour in process must extend to energy policy, including offshore wind policy, to ensure that while we certainly do what we can to meet our energy security needs, we are not at the same time enforcing a spatial squeeze on our hard-working fishing industry without properly ensuring that we are meeting our needs under fisheries legislation and policy. As with much of our environmental approach, we should make sure that the right projects are pursued in the right places, balancing competing priorities fairly. I shall be grateful if the Minister assures us that his Government are looking to do this.

Although economic considerations must properly be considered in debates such as this one, it is important that we do not lose sight of the human element and the welfare of protected marine species. Both are important to ensure that the fishing industry can continue to succeed and precious natural resources are protected from the impact of quotas.

Also important for the future of fishing is the mental health of the people in our fishing communities. Fishing is undeniably a dangerous and demanding industry, and the stress and anxiety that comes with the job is only made worse by the financial pressures and uncertainty that many fishing communities face. The fishing industry does incredibly tough and dedicated work to support the UK's food security, and I urge the Government, as I have done previously, to work on a cross-party basis to improve safety and access to mental health support for all those working in the industry.

In the last Parliament, after an inquiry that I initiated, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee published its cross-party report on marine mammals. In particular, the report highlighted the issue of bycatch, where seals, dolphins and other sea life are tragically snarled in fishing gear. The Minister and I have debated and discussed this issue a lot. An estimated 650,000 marine mammals are believed to die each year worldwide after being needlessly caught and snarled in fishing gear, including more than 1,000 in UK waters. Steps have already been taken to end these unnecessary deaths, including work on the introduction of remote electronic monitoring that began under the last Government, yet it remains clear that more action is needed.

The last Government's ultimate goal was to make electronic monitoring systems on fishing vessels, including non-UK vessels, mandatory once we were in a position



to do so. According to the Marine Management Organisation, only six marine mammals were reported by fishing vessels to have suffered bycatch injury or death in 2023, yet the last Government's bycatch monitoring programme had estimated that between 502 and 1,560 harbour porpoises, 165 to 662 common dolphins, and 375 to 872 seals were captured as bycatch in UK fisheries in 2019. Do the Government believe that bycatch of marine mammals remains under-reported? Also, can the Minister provide further clarity on the timescale for introducing electronic monitoring systems in a sensible and pragmatic way?

The UK also has a very important role to play with our global soft power. Like all Members, I am sure, I strongly oppose the hunting of any cetaceans—dolphins, whales or porpoises. There is no humane way to kill a whale, so that barbaric practice must end. Although there is a tradition in the Faroe Islands of killing pilot whales and dolphins for meat and other products, the previous Government long expressed their concern about the welfare issues surrounding those cetacean hunts and the domestic regulation currently in place. Ministers in the previous Government urged the Faroe Islands to look at alternatives and encouraged its representatives to consider the many economic and social benefits that responsible cetacean watching can bring. We very much welcome the fact that the Government recently secured 2,000 tonnes of fishing in this year's round of quota negotiations with the Faroe Islands, but will the Minister comment on whether the Government used our soft power to set an example to the world by raising our stance on those hunts with international partners such as the Faroe Islands, and on whaling more widely in negotiations and international meetings, given that, horrifically, whaling is still practised by countries such as Norway, Iceland and Japan?

The next few years will be decisive for the UK fishing industry. As we approach June 2026, when the EU-UK trade and co-operation agreement expires, the Government must make clear their plans for negotiations to secure the best outcomes for the fishing industry. In any negotiations we must ensure, as a sovereign coastal state, that our fishermen and women retain unrestricted access to our own waters. The Opposition will work tirelessly to scrutinise any deal put before Parliament to ensure our fishermen and women get the best possible outcome. National security, food security and energy security are all critical, and need to be addressed sensibly and strategically in their own right, but our fishing communities must not be treated like a bargaining chip within these domains.

10.41 am

**The Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs (Daniel Zeichner):** It is a pleasure to speak with you in the Chair, Mr Vickers. I thank the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) for securing this debate. I welcome the opportunity to talk about the UK's fishing and seafood industry and particularly the impact of quota negotiations on the UK fishing fleet in 2025. I thank all Members for their constructive and thoughtful remarks.

I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Dr Hudson) said, particularly about cetacean hunts. I assure him that we have pressed that case at every opportunity, and that is exactly why we will be proceeding with electronic monitoring. We have common cause on some issues.

We have heard from Members from all around the United Kingdom—Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and, of course, the south-west—and the views of hugely diverse interests. As my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) pointed out, this is a complicated sector. I will try to cover as many of the points that Members made as possible. I say that to give them a sense of where I am going and so they do not feel that I am leaving them out. I will start with some general points, and then touch on the reset with the European Union and say a bit about the spatial squeeze. I will then address the very detailed points that the hon. Member for St Ives made.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his very thoughtful and sensible introduction, which covered a range of issues. I reiterate how much I enjoyed that visit in the glorious late summer last year—it seems quite a long time ago now. I very much enjoyed seeing the diversity of the fishing fleet in Newlyn and the fish market, and listening to the views of fishing and seafood businesses. It is only by having direct discussions with people working on the frontline that I can be properly informed. It is all very well sitting around having policy discussions, but it is best to hear from those people.

I want to restate at the outset just how important the fishing sector is as a source of sustainable food for our country—a number of Members made that point. There are also wider social, economic and cultural issues surrounding that historic sector. As the Secretary of State has said repeatedly, the Government are keen to co-create policy through listening to fishermen and their representatives. That will enable us to create better policy.

Fishing is, of course, a very challenging job, and as the hon. Member for Epping Forest rightly said, sadly it is too often dangerous. It is therefore always right to pay tribute to those who have been injured or have tragically lost their lives at sea over the last year. The Marine Accident Investigation Branch published its 2023 annual report in October, in which it detailed the tragic loss of four lives and the loss of three fishing vessels in 2023. It is always important that we remember that. It is also important that the good work to improve safety continues—I will touch on the regulatory issues later—and that safety is paramount. I am afraid that there is still under-reporting, as the marine accident investigation branch flags up.

This debate is about the fisheries negotiations for 2025 and the impact on the industry. It is timely because we published reports on the sustainability and economic outcomes of the negotiations just last week, so I thank the hon. Member for St Ives for securing it now. The independent sustainability outcomes report states that the number of fish stocks, set in line with scientific advice, stayed the same for 2025 compared with last year, while the economic outcomes report details the UK fishing opportunities for all UK quota stocks in 2025. As mentioned by the Select Committee Chair, the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), those reports are quite complicated.

I recognise the point made by the hon. Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross) about the figures, although I take slight issue with her: yes, 769,000 tonnes of quota is down a little, but I am told that its value is slightly up, at £1.04 billion—it is about the same. The issue is that our share has remained constant while the

[Daniel Zeichner]

overall amount has fallen on scientific advice. We need to be mindful of this issue. One thing on which everybody agrees is that it is essential that we follow scientific advice. We obviously have to interpret that advice in line with legislation and policy, but we still have the global challenge of maintaining our fish stocks.

As an independent coastal state, our approach to all negotiations has been driven by our domestic priorities, and sustainability is at the heart. We aim to set catch limits that take account of the best available scientific advice, but we will always back our British fishing industry and, through negotiations, push for the best possible opportunities for British vessels. That is a complicated set of trade-offs and negotiations. Many different parts of the sector come to me, quite rightly, to make their case, and they do it well, but we have to get the best deal for everybody.

In that spirit, in our bilateral negotiations with Norway for 2025 we trialled a new approach by working closely in partnership with UK industry representatives to develop a package of quota exchanges. This approach stems from our commitment to putting more emphasis on delivering our policies and programmes in partnership with stakeholders—we are working with the industry, so it is not just us doing it.

Industry feedback about addressing the balance of those who contribute and those who benefit from the negotiations has been broadly positive. In the light of that feedback, my officials will this year be hosting a series of workshops with stakeholders to help us consider how we take forward our negotiations for the next year. I am determined that we do things differently under this Government, and I am keen that we co-deliver wherever possible.

The hon. Member for St Ives asked about multi-annual quotas, which we discussed a few months ago. When setting TACs for stocks, we are guided by the best possible scientific advice. For most stocks, that is provided annually by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, but for some stocks, such as black scabbardfish and northern shelf ling, ICES provides biannual advice, so we agree catch limits for more than one year. In some forums, we are seeking long-term management strategies that can provide greater stability for industry between years. I hear the hon. Gentleman's point, and we are looking at this issue, but it is important that we respond to annual advice.

**Andrew George:** I am not a fisheries scientist, but a lot is known about the maximum sustainable yield and the recruitment of each of those species that are relevant for commercial fisheries, as well as about the length of life and when species reach sexual maturity. It is therefore surprising that scientists cannot provide some projections for future years. Even if the data is only indicative, it would be helpful for the industry to know it.

**Daniel Zeichner:** I hear the hon. Gentleman's point, and I will go away and discuss it further. Virtually every Member who spoke talked about our relationship with our near neighbours in the European Union. Clearly there is a negotiation going on by proxy, if not directly, at the moment, so I will not comment on the individual points that have been made other than to reflect that we

are determined to get the best possible outcome for our nation. I am determined to get the best possible outcome for our fishing sector, because there is a widespread sense that people were sold short last time around.

The temporary adjustment period for fisheries access ends in 2026, as was agreed in the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement. The Government are absolutely committed to a reset with the European Union, but I assure the House of my determination that we get a good outcome for the fisheries sector. We have proven our ability to build a strong relationship with the EU on fisheries matters, including through the quota negotiations. We have had five years of annual negotiations, and we have built strong foundations on which to take forward future agreements that benefit our shared fish stocks and our respective industries. Other countries are clearly pushing very hard, and we will push equally hard for our sector.

In 2026, the fisheries heading of the trade and co-operation agreement will see access for EU vessels into the UK zone become a matter for annual negotiation, to sit alongside our annual consultations on catch limits with a range of coastal states and international fora on fishing opportunities. That is a very important point.

Our ambitions for fisheries are no longer tied to the EU common fisheries policy. We have our own objectives, and we are making progress on things like fisheries-management plans, which are very important. That is central to our priorities for UK fisheries and the thriving, sustainable industry we want.

Clearly, one of the biggest issues facing the sector is the spatial squeeze, and I want to send a message to the industry that I am absolutely determined to stand up for our fishing sector. We need to achieve a whole range of things in our waters, and food is one of them. That will only get more difficult in the coming period, but we have established a very good process for resolving these issues through our marine spatial prioritisation programme. We will take a strategic approach to managing those dilemmas, but I do not underestimate how strongly people in the fishing sector feel about this—it has been raised with me repeatedly. I insisted that we put out the very strong written statement a few weeks ago on protecting the fishing sector.

**Melanie Onn:** This is the point I wanted to make to the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Dr Hudson). Does the Minister have a sense that great progress has been made, particularly on the Celtic sea and the Crown Estate's approach to engaging with the fishing community at the earliest stage to try to minimise the impact of spatial squeeze?

**Daniel Zeichner:** The Crown Estate plays an important role, and we are working together closely. Things have improved. It has not always been an easy relationship, but we have a strong process and I am confident that it will work successfully.

I am conscious of time, so I will address some of the points that have been raised, particularly in relation to the south-west. I am very much taken by what the hon. Member for St Ives said about low-impact fishing. These are complicated issues, but I am pleased that, from January 2025, the licence cap of 350 kg of quota species has been removed for the under-10s. That was

quite contentious a while ago, but it gives fishers greater flexibility to diversify between quota and non-quota species.

The pollack issues are clearly fraught and complicated, and I am afraid that my advice to the hon. Gentleman is perhaps not entirely what he wants to hear. We agreed with the EU a bycatch-only TAC for pollack, which equates to a UK share of 172 tonnes of pollack in area 7 for 2025. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about abundance, but the ICES advice is what we have to follow. Its advice is for a zero catch, as last year, and it does not see signs of recovery. That is clearly a problem in the short term. We are forecasting to allow for a 20% increase in stock biomass next year.

I understand the strength of feeling on the recreational pollack fishing industry, and we have sent a clear signal that this is the last opportunity for this to work for the recreational sector. Voluntary guidelines have been developed by the Angling Trust and the Professional Boatman's Association to encourage anglers to adopt a bag limit and a minimum conservation reference size, as well as closed seasons to avoid the spawning period, and the use of descending devices to reduce pollack mortality. We want to see whether those measures can work, but if they do not, I am prepared to introduce mandatory measures. I appreciate that this is still a very difficult question.

Moving on briefly to sole, the issue of 7h and 7e is quite complicated. This is probably an incomprehensible conversation for people outside the industry, but we are looking closely at the potential genetic connection between the two. We are working with the EU in the Specialised Committee on Fisheries to facilitate consideration of the data by the relevant ICES working group to improve our scientific understanding and to encourage the most appropriate management. There is ongoing work, but I appreciate that this is a concern.

The scientific work on pollack is due in June, and I will go away and look at it more closely before coming back to the hon. Member for St Ives.

I want to give the hon. Gentleman a minute to respond, so I will bring my remarks to a conclusion. I very much appreciate the wide range of challenges facing the sector, and I understand why people are feeling anxious and fraught. This is a difficult time, but we tackle it by working together in close collaboration. I am determined that we work and listen closely.

**Dr Hudson:** Will the Minister give way?

**Daniel Zeichner:** I will not, as I want to give the hon. Member for St Ives a moment to respond.

As I said back in November, I genuinely think there is a bright future for the fishing sector, and it is important that we understand it is a key source of food. The Government are absolutely committed to making the most of these opportunities to ensure that we can properly contribute to food security and economic growth.

10.57 am

**Andrew George:** We have had a very engaging and thoughtful debate, as the Minister said. In the small amount of time remaining, rather than going through each of the contributions made by the hon. Members for Dumfries and Galloway (John Cooper), for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross), for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) and for Epping Forest (Dr Hudson), as well as my hon. Friend the Member for South Devon (Caroline Voaden) and the Minister, I will bring the conversation back to the positive outlook for the future of the fishing industry that the Minister has encouraged us to accept. That is certainly the message we would like to come from this debate.

On the specifics of the future total allowable catch of pollack, the Minister quoted the ICES advice that it does not see any signs of recovery, which is contradicted by what the industry is seeing in its nets as we speak. I hope that we get updated advice before the end of the benchmarking period in June. I would appreciate it if the industry and I could meet the Minister at that point to ensure that we have the most up-to-date evidence, which will be critical to the opportunities for the rest of this calendar year.

I welcome the Minister's comment on looking again at the regulation of the recreational sector. Those points are worth pursuing, as is what the Minister said about low-impact, small-scale fishing. Perhaps we could have further discussions on that, as I know many Members are interested to know how it can be advanced.

Clearly, the apparent tie that has been made between the fishing industry and defence is the worrying backdrop of the debate. Likewise, the trade and co-operation agreement has cast a shadow over this very productive debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the impact of quota negotiations on the UK fishing fleet in 2025.



## Grassroots Rugby League

11 am

**Jade Botterill** (Ossett and Denby Dale) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government support for grassroots rugby league.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers.

There was recently a debate in Westminster Hall about rugby union, and I am glad that now that the six nations is over, we can get back to talking about real rugby, especially on the day that the return of the Ashes has just been announced. From the grassroots to the biggest stages, I know all too well how sport is an essential part of our lives. The value sporting clubs bring to communities cannot be overstated, but in my view, there is something truly special about rugby league because it is entirely embedded in our communities.

Those deep roots come from the history of the sport, with northern towns and working-class players wanting a competition that better represented and reflected them. We may see players making TV big hits on a weekend and scoring match-winning tries, but in the week we see them doing the big shop at the local Asda, coaching their kids team, at the school drop off and even—sometimes—down the pub.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate; her enthusiasm is infectious. Back in Northern Ireland, the Spar grocery chain group have supported rugby for some two years. Does the hon. Lady agree that, while we welcome that local business support for the grassroots, there is a need for governmental support and incentives to make it easier to support the sport and promote it in the lower classes as well as to women, so that they have the opportunity as well?

**Jade Botterill**: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention. This is my first ever Westminster Hall debate, so I am very grateful for any interventions. I agree that we need to do more and I will come on to women in the sport later.

Rugby league players are not invisible heroes driving around in Ferraris and posting their lavish lifestyles on Instagram. These players and their teams are in their community, not above it. Their victories are our victories as much as we also share their defeats.

**Josh Simons** (Makerfield) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. One of the rugby players most embedded in the community in my patch is Billy Boston. Local councillors in my patch have started a petition to secure Billy Boston a knighthood. Does my hon. Friend agree with me that in general, rugby league deserves more national recognition and that a very good way to start would be to ensure that Billy Boston becomes Sir Billy Boston?

**Jade Botterill**: I could not agree more. I absolutely think any recognition we can give the sport is great and we should look at doing that.

The impact, involvement and contribution of players is represented perfectly by Kevin Sinfield and the late, great Rob Burrow. It would be remiss of me not to mention these two gentlemen who perfectly personify rugby league and did so much to increase awareness of

motor neurone disease, including securing investment for West Yorkshire's very own MND research centre. That grit, loyalty, purpose and solidarity, alongside a commitment to others and their community, leaves real, positive, lasting change. We in this place could learn much from them. Community spirit is an over-used phrase, but not with league. It is what we are about, who we are, the game and the fight, but it is also the people as well—the places, families, clubs, and community. That is league, and that is why I am so proud of it.

**Harpreet Uppal** (Huddersfield) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. She will know, as my neighbour, that Huddersfield is the birthplace of rugby league. We are really proud of that, and of our team the Huddersfield Giants, as well as our local community clubs, Newsome Panthers, Moldgreen Juniors and St Joseph's. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must do more to support and fund local infrastructure to ensure that such clubs thrive?

**Jade Botterill**: Yes, we need to do more so that grassroots clubs can really thrive. I will come on to that later in my speech.

We can see the spirit of rugby league in the finances of the clubs, from the charitable foundation that almost every club funds and operates, to the shirts sponsored by local businesses. For example, in recent years my local team, Wakefield Trinity, has had Horbury's Bistro 42, Evenfinish Groundworks, and Wetherby Whaler fish and chip shop on their kit—and now their entire stadium is sponsored by DIY Kitchens. That is local sport and local enterprise coming together for the benefit and enjoyment of the whole area.

What a team Wakefield Trinity are! I was at the game on Friday against Hull FC; it was not quite the result I wanted, but that is by the by. I should declare an interest in Wakefield Trinity, not just as a fan but because the club gave me one of my first proper jobs, teaching PE in schools right across Wakefield. Being the community development officer for my local team showed me the true value of what sport could do for young people. It also confirmed to me how post-industrial communities such as mine were suffering, having been failed and ignored by previous Governments. Indeed, it was through that job that I became political, as I saw the damage the closure of the Sure Start centres did to the families of the children I was teaching.

Because of the spirit of localism and community, where Government had failed towns like mine, Trinity rolled up their sleeves and stepped in. During my time at the club's community foundation, I worked on projects providing education, confidence, development and opportunity to children right across the M62 corridor. As part of the programme, I took thousands of children to Wembley. More often than not, that was the first time some of those kids left their home towns.

Wakefield Trinity Community Foundation continues to do so much important work across our community today. The club's Safety Net project runs training sessions for children with challenging behaviour, helping them build friendships, gain confidence and understand themselves; its Trinity All-Stars programme provides physical activity sessions and support groups for children with physical or learning disabilities; and its One Trinity initiative gives people living with dementia an afternoon a month to relive fond memories of rugby league.

During the election, I was proud to take part in a roundtable with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Movember and Rugby League Cares, to discuss the importance of mental health. I was so moved to see former players, known for their gruff, gritty exteriors, talk openly and honestly about their mental health. In the area where I grew up, and now have the privilege to represent, too often men bottle up their emotions. It was so impactful to see players and the club aware of their role in the community, and so keen to use it proactively to break the stigmas that keep so many from opening up. That work—opening up conversations about mental health—is exactly the value that rugby league can provide to communities like mine.

In post-industrial northern towns, as jobs and industries have disappeared, the institutions and communities that came with them have fallen away. However, rugby league teams have survived, embedded in our communities through thick and thin, providing place, meaning and an entire team to look up to. In our towns, where young people, especially young men, lack direction and are too often denied the opportunity warranted by their aspiration, league can provide role models and structure—a hand on the shoulder, a word, sometimes stern, always caring, when it is needed most. That is mirrored across the north: what were once jewels in the crown of thriving towns are now needed to bind our communities together.

No one will be surprised to know that I believe the new Labour Government truly understand that, and I will support them in bringing opportunity and hope back to these areas, so rugby league teams and their communities can thrive once more. Our sport has already survived so much, but it is vital we provide for its future, so its value to the community can continue for generations to come.

**Mark Swards** (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech about the power of rugby league to change our communities. Farnley Falcons in my constituency was founded in 2005 by volunteers, and it has gone from strength to strength. As a result of fostering community spirit, they now have record numbers of boys and girls playing rugby league in Leeds South West and Morley. I was so pleased to be able to secure funding, alongside the Leeds Rhinos foundation, for them to renovate and build a new clubhouse. Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute not only to Farnley Falcons, but to community clubs everywhere that foster that spirit?

**Jade Botterill**: I absolutely commend the Farnley Falcons; they do so much for the community that is so underestimated. Everyone in that town will know how much they do for the community and will be grateful for that.

Securing and growing the sport ensures that future generations have access to the many developmental, physical, mental, social and community benefits of the clubs. That is why I support calls for the Government to drive greater access and opportunities to enjoy rugby league in schools, particularly in the towns that love the sport so much. We want to see more people being physically active, building stronger communities and tackling inequalities.

As a woman who loved league both from the stands and on the pitch, I would love to see more women enjoying the sport. The RFL are doing some incredible

work in growing the girls' game and crucially, their position within our communities means clubs can also bring working-class women into the game—something other sports struggle to achieve at the elite level. However, blockers to better integrating the game remain in the facilities and pitches. Will the Minister look at how we can use the recently announced grassroots sport package to tackle this problem?

As I have described, the power of rugby league comes from the grassroots and localism. I welcome the success of larger clubs in bringing our sport to wider audiences, but the Government must continue to support the smaller clubs who remain its beating heart. Much like the communities that play it, rugby league—from the grassroots to the finals at Wembley—deserves support, attention and care. For all northern post-industrial towns, I urge the Government to continue their work to provide that.

11.12 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock)**: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr. Vickers. I am pleased to be responding to this debate and I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Ossett and Denby Dale (Jade Botterill), who represents the seat just up the road from mine. It is her first debate and I think it is a fantastic one. She was incredibly generous to say she would welcome interventions, but I wonder whether she will still be doing that on her third and fourth debate. This is a good natured debate on a great topic, so I congratulate her.

I also join my hon. Friend in welcoming the news that Australia will be returning to England this autumn for the first Ashes tour since 2003. One match will be played at Everton's new Bramley Moore Dock stadium, which I plan on visiting. This Government are supportive of rugby league and the role that clubs play, from the elite level to local communities. That is reflected in this half-hour debate as we saw the number of Members from across the House who are here to show their support.

It is great to see how rugby league's fiercest rivals have recently put aside differences to join forces in tackling inequalities. My hon. Friend spoke about her area of Wakefield and I understand that the clubs are collaborating with Prosper Wakefield District, a newly appointed charity partner, to tackle various social issues including the Wakefield children's bed appeal. It is incredible to see the team spirit in the community foundations of the Castleford Tigers, Wakefield Trinity and the Featherstone Rovers as they unite to address issues such as health inequality, youth engagement and community safety. That is supported by the RFL Community Trust and brings important social value. My hon. Friend rightly paid tribute to the amazing work and fundraising on motor neurone disease—an issue and cause that is really close to my heart. She also rightly spoke about Rob Burrow and Kevin Sinfield, and I echo those comments.

This year, rugby league celebrates its 130th anniversary. Rugby league clubs make a huge contribution to their communities and week in, week out, local people come together to support their clubs, their children's teams and young players. They are places where thousands of people play sport and get active every week. My hon.

[Stephanie Peacock]

Friend spoke passionately about the particular impact of that on post-industrial towns. I represent one myself, in Barnsley South, where we have a couple of grassroots teams, the Dearne Valley Bulldogs and the Dodworth Miners. We see grassroots teams all across the north of England, and that is reflected in the attendance at today's debate.

We know that community sport, and especially sports such as rugby league, can play a major role in building confidence and teamwork, supporting life skills for future generations and improving community cohesion. Through our arm's length body Sport England, we provide direct financial support to rugby league, supporting it to thrive and grow. In 2022, Sport England announced long-term funding support of £11.9 million for the Rugby Football League up to 2027.

The social value generated by community sport and physical activity is vast—in excess of £100 billion a year. Indeed, the RFL recognised in its facilities strategy last year that social isolation, mental and physical health issues and antisocial behaviour pose a challenge for future generations, but can be sustainably addressed through sport. My hon. Friend spoke very passionately about that; we see it across a number of sports, but the points she made about rugby league in particular were really important.

We know, and can evidence, that being active saves on half a billion GP visits. It also prevents 3 million cases of serious conditions each year, including 1.3 million cases of depression and half a million cases of back pain, and leads to a reduction in diabetes. However, we also know that the benefits of sport go much wider than health. For example, sport contributes directly to 10,000 fewer crime incidents a year. A 2019 report highlighted that every pound spent on sport by rugby league community clubs generates a social return of over £4. The social impact of rugby league on players and volunteers is estimated to be more than £185 million, and although a couple of those figures are a few years old, they underscore the vital role that sports such as rugby league can play in driving positive public health and societal outcomes across communities.

The Government are committed to supporting sports such as rugby league. We do this primarily through the work of Sport England, but I have heard the points that my hon. Friend has made about promoting sport in schools. I was pleased to meet the leading governing bodies with the schools Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell). She is incredibly passionate, and we work closely together to try to improve sport in schools. I look forward to continuing that work with my hon. Friend the Member for Ossett and Denby Dale, who also acknowledged that in the past week, the Government confirmed that they will invest £100 million in grassroots sports facilities via the multi-sport grassroots facilities programme. Central to that programme is its multi-sport offer: 40% of projects will offer regular and sustained multi-sport use. That is vital investment that will help support rugby league clubs to develop their facilities across our towns and cities, and it also shows the importance of working alongside local areas, taking a place-based and community-driven approach.

We do not underestimate the challenges faced by grassroots sport, including rugby league clubs. They include increased financial pressures with ever more responsibilities, population behaviour shifting away from traditional sport offers, or the challenge of securing volunteers—I take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to all those volunteers who give up their time. Sport England supports clubs to address those challenges with advice and guidance through its Buddle programme, which provides free resources to grassroots sports clubs to help them maximise their role at a local level. It also provides financial support through the £160 million movement fund, which provides both grants and crowd-funding support to grassroots clubs.

The Rugby Football League itself is doing brilliant work to tackle inequalities throughout its sport, clearly showing the value of that sport. Examples include its Awakening Rugby League in the City programme, which will create a pathway for talented athletes who may never have considered playing rugby league, giving them an opportunity to experience the game for the first time in a supported environment. Through the Inspiring Futures programme, delivered by the charitable foundations of the seven super league clubs and supported by the RFL, the sport is able to reach more children and young people, supporting them to grow and develop and helping steer them away from violence and crime. More broadly, the RFL have also been working with its social care partner to relaunch its On the Same Team campaign, helping to tackle prejudice within society. That campaign offers simple and inspiring education that helps young people to understand the impact of their words and behaviours on other people, and how we can thrive when we are on the same team.

In 2022, England was proud to host the rugby league world cup. It made history as the biggest rugby league tournament ever, and as the first time that the men, women and wheelchair tournaments played simultaneously and that equal participation fees were paid. That was a major step forward, and one that the sport should be incredibly proud of. The subsequent social impact programme has done incredible work to tackle inequalities in the communities that need it most, many of which are located in the host towns and cities such as Leeds, Hull and Huddersfield—many of the Members for those towns and cities are present in the Chamber today. That is testament to the power of major sporting events to deliver transformation in communities and facilities across the country.

Following the world cup, we saw a boost to women and girls' participation in the game, with 33% more females playing the sport just a year later in 2023. The RFL also launched the RugBees programme, aimed at breaking down gender stereotypes and encouraging more young girls into the sport. The scheme is open to girls aged between seven and 11, and is designed to help them develop confidence in areas such as catching, passing and kicking. It is the first rugby league programme to be developed specifically for primary school-aged girls. Following England's historic victory in wheelchair rugby league, that sport has also seen significant growth, leading to an expansion of the wheelchair super league to eight teams in 2025 and the renewal of the Tryz rugby league sessions run by Access Sport in partnership with the Rugby Football League.



As things stand, not enough people are active or participating in sport—I know that from my own area. We want to do everything we can to get people more active and more involved, enabling them to access the sports they love. As such, this debate has been a great opportunity to outline the Government's commitment to supporting grassroots rugby league and sport more generally. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ossett and Denby Dale for giving us the chance to discuss this important topic in her first debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.20 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Local Government Finances: London

[EMMA LEWELL *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Mr Calvin Bailey** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered local government finances in London.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Lewell.

This Government are committed to fixing the foundations and getting local government back on its feet after 14 years of neglect and decline. Vital uplifts in funding, alongside the move towards multi-year settlements and away from wasteful bidding wars, have been extremely welcome. This is a Government who stand for giving councils, like all our providers of public services, the certainty and stability that they need to go from costly crisis management to long-term prevention and root-and-branch reform of local public services. These agendas are vital for our national missions on growth, NHS waiting lists, and crime and antisocial behaviour, and are an opportunity for all our young people.

I want to lay out some of the main challenges facing local government, which need to be fully recognised and addressed by Government policy to prevent further councils from moving into crisis. The economic and social changes that have relentlessly driven council costs upwards were simply ignored by Conservative Governments. Rather than tackling these drivers and supporting our councils to adapt to the impact of social change, policy since 2010 has at best papered over the cracks. Financial support has been reduced to the point that our boroughs are receiving around 28% less funding per Londoner than under the last Labour Government.

**Dawn Butler** (Brent East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an important speech. In my constituency, Brent council has had to cut its budget by £220 million since 2010. Under the Conservative Government, it suffered. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is nice that we now have this change of direction from the new Government?

**Mr Bailey:** My hon. Friend is right. It is important that we recognise the circumstances in which we found ourselves and that we point to the measures that this Government have taken to start to fix this endemic problem, which I will continue to explain.

Over and over again, the Tories passed the buck without passing the bucks. Our councils have had to deal with wider changes to legislation and other new duties and responsibilities, even as financial support has been repeatedly eroded. This challenge has been building and building. London's population has grown by 900,000 in the last 15 years, with massive consequences for rising demand for services, particularly adult and children's social care, special educational needs and disabilities, and temporary accommodation.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing the debate. One of the biggest issues for all councils—London councils and other councils across this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—is housing. The Government have committed to 1.5 million houses, and that is a commendable

[*Jim Shannon*]

strategy to address the issue. Does he agree that, whenever the houses come through, the Government have to look at rental accommodation and price, which many people are finding it hard to manage? It is not just the provision of houses, but ensuring that people can actually rent and live in social and rented housing.

**Mr Bailey:** The hon. Member is right, but we cannot adjust the market situation without adding more houses to the stock. Once we have increased the number of houses, we can start tackling the private rented sector. We are doing so, and I hope that the Minister will expand on some of the measures that this Government are taking to bring our landlords into line and improve the quality of the private rented sector.

As a result of the problems I have described, London's boroughs are facing an unprecedented financial crisis, one that threatens the vital public services that millions of Londoners rely on, including my constituents in Leyton and Wanstead. Our communities are strong, but we also face significant challenges, ranging from crime and antisocial behaviour to a shortage of decent, affordable homes and the need for better opportunities for young people. All those issues can only be addressed effectively if our excellent councils can invest in our future.

Many councils are now teetering on the edge of issuing section 114 notices—meaning effective bankruptcy—and those risks are increasing, because the drivers of increased costs have simply not been accounted for. Seven London boroughs, nearly a quarter of the total, require exceptional financial support for 2025-26 amounting to over £400 million, and London accounts for almost a third of the total national EFS funding of £1.3 billion. We need to seriously engage with these challenges and chart a sustainable path forward. According to London Councils, London boroughs are forecast to overspend by £800 million this year; particular pressures include homelessness at £330 million, adult social care at £200 million and children's social care at £160 million. The cost to the public purse will be so much greater in the long run if we do not deal with this crisis now.

By far the most acute financial pressure facing London boroughs is homelessness. The scale of the crisis is staggering: London Councils assesses that one in every 50 Londoners is currently homeless and living in temporary accommodation, including nearly 90,000 children. First and foremost, this is a human tragedy. Like many other colleagues, I have been engaging with individuals and families who are suffering as a result of the housing crisis, including a very powerful visit that I had this Christmas with Crisis in central London. In addition to this human suffering, homelessness represents the fastest-growing financial risk to London's local authorities, with our councils spending £4 million per day on temporary accommodation—a figure that has surged by 68% in just one year.

**Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for giving way and for securing today's important debate. I agree a lot with what he is saying about homelessness and the challenges it creates for London authorities, whether in inner London or outer London, but it prompts the question of why his Government have cut the housing targets for Labour councils in central London.

**Mr Bailey:** I thank the hon. Member for his intervention, but it is difficult to accept that kind of challenge when his Government missed every one of their housing targets over the course of 14 years, and he has ignored the fact that the trajectory I have described was set under his Government. If that trajectory continues, homelessness alone will push London boroughs into bankruptcy, although the Government have been working hard to address the enormous challenges that we have inherited—which I have just highlighted to the hon. Member—after the abject failure of Conservative housing and homelessness policies. We welcome the recent uplift to the homelessness prevention grant and this week's confirmation of £2 billion of grant funding for social and affordable homes across the country. However, there are further measures that could provide much-needed support to London boroughs.

One issue exacerbating the crisis is the cap on the amount of local housing allowance payable for temporary accommodation, which has been frozen at 2011 rates for nearly 14 years, even though such accommodation has become massively more expensive in recent years. The cost to London councils of acquiring temporary accommodation increased by 68% in the single year up to 2023, while the number of homeless Londoners increased by about 8% over the same period. This has created a significant funding gap for local authorities. Updating the cap would provide immediate financial relief for London boroughs, which could then spend more resources on preventing homelessness.

**Dawn Butler:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful point. London Councils has stated that one in 50 Londoners are currently homeless and living in temporary accommodation, and as my hon. Friend has said, spending is around £114 million per month, or approximately £4 million a day. Does he agree that this is unsustainable?

**Mr Bailey:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. She refers to one of the three main stresses on our councils: addressing that would bring the greatest relief to all of them. Another step that the Government could take to tackle the homelessness crisis would be to ensure that the LHA rates reflect actual housing costs. London rents have risen so fast in recent years that just 5% of private rented properties are affordable on LHA, pushing more and more families into homelessness. I hope the Minister will set out the steps the Government are taking to review LHA rates, because that could make a huge difference to many families as well as to council finances.

Additionally, a longer-term social rent settlement would stabilise council housing revenue accounts and allow boroughs to increase the building of the new genuinely affordable homes that Londoners need, which we know is the only way to tackle the housing crisis.

When deprivation measures—rightly—have such a significant impact on funding formulas, it is vital to ensure that they effectively account for the impact of rents. Housing costs are one of the biggest drivers of deprivation in London, which is the third most deprived region in England once housing costs are considered. Beyond housing, the fundamental issue at the heart of London's council funding crisis is a growing disparity between funding allocations and actual levels of need. The main local government funding formula has not

been updated since 2013, meaning that allocations are based on outdated data that fails to account for population growth, demographic changes or London's high housing costs.

Such difficulties can be illustrated by the councils that serve my constituents in Leyton and Wanstead. Redbridge has had population growth of 11.4% since 2011 and has huge pressures from homelessness, with a spend of £52 million a year on temporary accommodation. This is driven by the fact that Redbridge has an enormous private rented sector, comprising 75% of renters locally. The eviction rate in Redbridge is at 4.6% per 10,000 renters, almost triple the London average, with 86% of those evictions coming from the PRS. There is no escaping the reality that shocking numbers of people in constituencies like mine are now being evicted as the housing market changes, and identifying creative policies to tackle it is truly urgent.

Waltham Forest is facing massive pressures from increased homelessness, with a 55% increase in temporary accommodation in just one year up to last October. The requirement to spend under 51% of the homelessness prevention grant on temporary accommodation, although obviously a step in the right direction, will mean that still more of the bill for rising homelessness costs will have to come from the general budgets, including from reserves and other spending.

Costs from special educational needs and disabilities have also been surging, with a forecast overspend of £4.6 million, but the increase in the high needs block funding has not recognised that. Across London the upshot of the large gap between assessed need and actual funding, which the Institute for Fiscal Studies has identified as 17%, is the largest shortfall of any region in England. Many outer London boroughs are among the lowest funded per capita in the country, despite significant pressures.

We welcome the Government's commitment to reviewing local government funding, because this is a huge opportunity to create a system that accurately reflects the current levels of need. In particular, we need to make sure population figures are robust, which requires serious attention to whether the figures for London reported in the last census are accurate, given that many people left the capital during the pandemic and have since returned.

**Mr French:** I echo the hon. Member's comments about funding not keeping up with demographic changes. That is a cross-party criticism—not one aimed just at the Labour Government—because the problem is historical. Other price and funding challenges coming through include contract inflation, and the impact of the jobs tax on all local councils. The impact on Bexley council is expected to be around £5 million next year, but the Government are only providing £1.6 million of funding. Does the hon. Member agree that Ministers must address that issue, as well as the issue of fair funding, to ensure that councils can be financially sustainable?

**Mr Bailey:** No, and I will allow the Minister to explain why later.

The Tories' legacies are a local government funding formula that does not recognise London-wide changes, pressure and needs, and a woefully outdated division between outer and inner London. Even 15 or 20 years ago, the traditional distinction between the core city and its

outer areas made some sense: density and deprivation were more concentrated in the centre, as a legacy of slums and deindustrialisation. But the impacts of affordable housing and demographic changes have since consigned that situation to the past.

The population, especially people on lower incomes, have moved outwards, but the funding formula has not kept up. The places we live in have changed massively. Populations have grown as new people have come in, which has pushed up rents and house prices, contributing to real social exclusion and deprivation for many. I will quote just two of the many statistics that illustrate that. The borough of Redbridge has more than 80,000 children and young people; Islington has less than half that figure, but the figures for spending on children's services are almost the inverse—Islington is able to spend £81 million and Redbridge just £44 million. That cannot be justified by deprivation rates, because Redbridge sits above the London average rate, and Islington below it. The situation is no different for public health, where outdated formulae mean that Waltham Forest receives 2.5 times less public health funding per person than Kensington and Chelsea, despite having higher levels of deprivation.

We must recognise that this is not just about the grant formula itself. Inner London weighting has impacts across many policy areas and therefore affects the quality of life of my constituents. Performance levels across education, health, crime and antisocial behaviour are becoming harder to sustain due to recruitment and retention issues, because teachers and police officers can earn up to £6,000 more just by travelling 15 minutes on the Tube. The disparity impacts both revenues and costs, because many inner London boroughs have a greater ability to raise funds from business rates and charges. That also needs to be further taken into account in the Government's funding reforms.

Ultimately, we need significant change that recognises the impact of huge London-wide demographic shifts, but we also need specific, special consideration for outer London. I welcome the steps that the Government have taken so far to reform the local government financing system, including by giving councils multi-year settlements, which allow them to plan more effectively. That said, local government funding reform will not, on its own, guarantee the financial sustainability of local government, and we all know the challenging financial position that the Government inherited.

If greater resources cannot come from national Government, one alternative would be to empower local authorities to raise revenue through greater fiscal devolution. The fact that seven London boroughs now require exceptional financial support should be a wake-up call for us all—but EFS is not a solution; it is an emergency measure that does nothing to address the structural funding problem. The two London boroughs that required EFS in 2024-25 need even greater support in 2025-26. Relying on EFS would only kick the can down the road and allow financial instability to deepen. That presents a further concern for my constituents because our local councils have managed their budgets prudently and well. They have dealt with the inadequacies of the funding settlement and have often had to increase council tax as a result.

We cannot continue to see success punished, as happened under the previous Government, through policies that direct funding towards life support instead of tackling



[Mr Calvin Bailey]

the underlying drivers of increased costs, which affect well-managed and poorly managed councils alike. I urge the Government to work with the local government sector to explore alternative support mechanisms, such as long-term debt restructuring, to give councils a genuine route to financial stability. We look forward to the funding reforms due in the next 12 months, but we must recognise that the pressure driving costs for our councils is linked to other policies across Government, from housing and planning to special educational needs and disabilities reform.

Strong and empowered local government in London is vital to support delivery of our national missions. Whether we are talking about raising living standards, delivering 1.5 million new homes, getting our NHS and social care system back on their feet, or creating good jobs and strong communities, it all comes back to local councils such as Waltham Forest and Redbridge delivering for local communities. Our Labour councils can do so much more if those challenges are tackled.

Despite the challenges, our hard-working local government staff and council leaders are already innovating and delivering change. In Waltham Forest, the council aims to deliver 27,000 new homes and 52,000 square feet of working space. Redbridge has taken forward a new empty property strategy to tackle that element of the housing crisis, alongside plans to deliver 19,000 new homes and 7,000 new jobs over the next decade. London MPs across the House, along with our hard-working councillors and council officers, are keen to work in partnership with the Government to address the huge challenge we face, and I look forward to playing my part in that.

**Emma Lewell (in the Chair):** I remind Members that if they wish to speak, they should bob in the usual way, as they would in the Chamber. We will need to impose a four-minute time limit to ensure all Members get to speak.

2.52 pm

**Julia Lopez** (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Lewell. I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey) for securing this vital debate. I requested a debate on this subject myself, so I am glad that one of us got drawn in the ballot. As an outer London MP, I am extremely sympathetic to the compelling case he makes about the disparity between the centre of the city and its outskirts.

Residents in Havering pay among the highest council tax in London and in return they rightly expect robust services. They want to see their vulnerable neighbours supported, parks and streets well maintained, and essential services working effectively. However, Havering has been under significant financial pressure for years. The root cause of the issue is an outdated and flawed local government funding formula that does not adequately reflect the changing needs of our borough.

Havering's population has undergone significant changes in the past decade. We have had one of the fastest increases in child numbers in the country, and we have a growing elderly population. Both groups come with

complex, multi-layered needs. Those demographic shifts have driven up demand for expensive social care services, but the funding formula still relies on outdated data and fails to reflect those changes, which has left Havering facing growing financial strain.

Other London councils have been able to build reserves during this period, largely because they have benefited from the same outdated formula, especially given that covid grants were allocated on that basis. That has created a disparity between inner and outer London: some boroughs have received more than they need, while others such as Havering are struggling. The Department for Education uses a much more up-to-date formula, which is why Havering has received the bulk of London's capital funding for schools to meet the rising number of children—one part of Government acknowledges the change, yet another is a decade out of date.

I have long advocated reform of the local government funding formula to reflect those demographic shifts. The previous Conservative Government initiated a fair funding review to address the imbalances, but the pandemic stalled progress. Much of the groundwork for reform has therefore been done, and I urge the Minister to accelerate the review to bring about the necessary changes.

In recent years, Havering council has received some crucial uplifts in social care funding, which have helped it continue to deliver vital services, but the fundamental structural issues in the funding formula remain. Without a long-term solution, the situation will only worsen. To address that, in January I facilitated a meeting between Havering council and the local government Minister, Baroness Taylor. I was grateful for that meeting. As a result, the Government approved further exceptional financial support, which enabled the council to set a budget for the year. That is welcome support, but it is a temporary fix, and a lasting solution is needed. Again, that requires pushing forward with the funding formula review.

On top of those ongoing funding issues, the Government have also introduced fresh financial pressures through the Budget. One of the most significant changes is the increase in employer national insurance contributions, which has driven up the cost of social care and other essential services across the borough. Those increases are directly impacting local businesses and services, from pharmacies and GPs to critical childcare providers and high street shops. Just last week, I spoke to several high street businesses: they are facing huge business rate increases, rising parking charges and the impact of the NICs increases. Those increases are pushing customers away from our high streets and threatening the vitality of our local economy. There will obviously be an ongoing knock-on impact on the local government funding issues.

The latest local government finance settlement has provided Havering with the smallest increase in spending power since 2021, an increase essentially wiped out by the additional national insurance costs. On top of that, Havering has been excluded from the national £600 million recovery grant; no non-Labour London council, apart from Tower Hamlets, will benefit from that spend in the capital. Looking forward, the council is looking at ways to get the economy growing again locally, but that is not going to deal with the fundamental issue of the funding formula. I ask the Minister to accelerate the review so that our residents can benefit.

2.56 pm

**Jas Athwal** (Ilford South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Lewell. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey) for securing this debate.

Local government funding must be fair and must reflect the needs of the boroughs. As has been said by the two hon. Members before me, my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead and the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez), the recovery grant offers some respite, but boroughs such as Redbridge—which should in our estimation have received £6 million—did not get a penny. Despite facing significant financial constraints, these boroughs, such as Redbridge, still managed to punch above their weight. That does not mean they do not deserve the money; it means they deserve even more money, because they are well-run, efficient and effective councils.

Redbridge council's children's services have been rated outstanding for the second time in a row, and its adult social care is excellent. It has weekly bin collections and has built two new leisure centres and a new lido, with a climbing centre on the way. People might think that it is rolling in money—but that could not be much wronger. While it is a well-run and effective council, Redbridge is the 11th most deprived borough in London, with a core spending power of £904 per person. When we extrapolate that over the population, the council receives about £73 million less per year than it should—and yet it did not receive the recovery fund. That is a lot of money.

We have heard the arguments about inner and outer London. Yes, inner London has the ability to generate funds, and of course there is less ability for the outer-London councils to raise cash. That is equalised by residents from outer London having to pay more council tax to make up the services that the residents deserve. No one can tell me that residents in outer London deserve less money per head than people in inner London. We have heard that housing is one of the biggest decimators of finance at the moment. Homelessness is rife all over, exacerbated by the fact that more expensive inner London areas can buy up housing in outer London areas such as Redbridge, Waltham Forest and Havering. Therefore, at my weekly MP surgeries, many of my cases deal with inner London councils whose people are being housed in outer London boroughs.

The three key asks are for central Government to use updated and accurate data, such as that from the Office for National Statistics, on employment, income and homelessness, so that outer London boroughs can be more fairly served. We need to reform the funding formula so that updated data on deprivation and demands on services, particularly housing needs, are taken into account. Of course, we need to use the census data—

**Emma Lewell (in the Chair)**: Order. Sorry but the time is up. I now have to reduce the time allowed to three and half minutes.

3 pm

**Peter Fortune** (Bromley and Biggin Hill) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Lewell.

Before serving the people of Bromley and Biggin Hill as their Member of Parliament, I served them as a councillor in the borough for 12 years. I was also

privileged to be deputy leader of that great borough. I have, therefore, long been familiar with the financial challenges that face local government. As much as the Labour party would like to pin the blame solely on decisions taken in 2010, the story is far longer than that.

For Bromley, the story of underfunding started in 1997, under the previous Labour Government. Bromley council's net budget has reduced by more than a quarter in real terms and nearly two fifths per person. It is true that the previous Conservative Government asked councils to make significant savings to tackle the country's deficit but, ultimately, without those difficult decisions our nation would not have been able to weather the financial storm caused by the coronavirus.

I regret that the previous Conservative Government did not deliver a long-promised fair funding review, but I recognise that that was hard to achieve in the aftermath of the pandemic, the energy crisis and high inflation. It is a problem that successive Governments of all stripes have failed to grasp. The new Labour Government's actions have made it even more challenging for councils. It is the same old Labour story in London: more money is spent on Labour areas and less on the Conservative suburbs.

Bromley council was awarded the second-lowest funding settlement amount per person. If Bromley received the average settlement grant of funding per person for London, the borough would receive an additional £80 million a year. In addition to inadequate settlements, Bromley did not benefit from the recovery grant. With inflation rising fast again under the Labour Government, the funding pressures will worsen, further eroding councils' financial standing. Nor have councils received adequate funding to cover the cost of Labour's decision to increase employer's national insurance contributions. This jobs tax will further push up costs, especially in social care.

Bromley is a well-managed borough, and I commend its Conservative leader, Councillor Colin Smith, and his excellent team, but like all London councils Bromley faces enormous pressures that are simply unaffordable. We retain the fourth-lowest level of council tax in outer London because we are a low-cost borough. Bromley council has saved more than £150 million since 2011, but being a low-tax, low-cost borough means there are few remaining savings.

It is becoming increasingly impossible for councils to balance the books. Bromley can this year, but only thanks to the authority's reserves, carefully built and protected over many years of sensible and responsible stewardship, despite opposition calls to reduce them. That is not sustainable in the long term. It is why a quarter of London boroughs have already effectively declared bankruptcy and requested exceptional financial support.

Future local government settlements must adequately fund councils to deliver, especially considering the rising national insurance costs. They should reflect the higher costs that all London boroughs face, fixing the area cost adjustments that wrongly say that Bromley is one of the most affordable places in London. There should also be a mechanism to reward low-cost and efficient authorities, instead of asking them to make savings while spendthrift authorities are given more.

Finally, the Government should allow councils to change statutory charges to match costs, and reduce ringfencing to allow councils to be more flexible and more concerned with their own priorities.

3.4 pm

**Natasha Irons** (Croydon East) (Lab): Councils are at the coalface of politics and are leaders in delivery. From potholes to parks and parking, local councils deliver the things that we care about. For too long, our councils have been failed by central Government. They have been undervalued and underfunded.

In London, where councils receive 28% less funding per Londoner than they did in 2010, boroughs are now at crisis point. London's housing emergency has pushed an estimated one in 50 Londoners into homelessness and pushed London councils into spending £4 million a day on temporary accommodation.

**Dan Tomlinson** (Chipping Barnet) (Lab): Barnet council now processes 10 homelessness applications every single day—more than double the number it was processing just two years ago. This, coupled with additional spending on educational needs and adult social care, is crippling councils' budgets, much as council leaders will try to do the best they can by their local communities. Does my hon. Friend agree that that must change if we are to see a sustainable future for councils in outer London?

**Natasha Irons:** Of course I agree. It is imperative that we solve this crisis.

With overspends in children's and social care services across London, seven London boroughs require exceptional financial support to balance their books, and Croydon council is one of them. As with councils across the country, poor decisions and failure in governance, mixed with chronic underfunding, saw the council issue its first section 114 notice in 2020.

As an outer-London borough with inner-London problems, Croydon has historically suffered from a financial settlement that does not reflect the demands on its services. The debt built up over successive administrations now costs the council £71 million a year to service, and it borrows £38 million of that from central Government. Although I appreciate that it is not something the Government can just write off, I urge them to work with Croydon council to restructure the debt and find a long-term solution to bring down the cost and its impact on day-to-day spending.

Debt is not Croydon council's only challenge, because even if the debt were wiped out, it would still need to borrow an extra £65 million from the Government to balance its books. Although there are overspends in the areas that we would expect, such as children's and adult social care, the council is also grappling with a number of neighbouring boroughs placing vulnerable people in temporary accommodation in Croydon while not funding the ongoing associated costs.

A massive 24% of people in temporary accommodation in Croydon have been placed there from outside the borough, with the highest number of placements coming from Lambeth, Lewisham and Bromley. With families often stuck in temporary accommodation for many months or even years, it falls to Croydon to pick up the further, ongoing costs with regard to demand-led services. With councils across London bidding for accommodation and social care placements in Croydon, the council is often forced into a bidding war to provide support for its own residents.

Will the Government look at funding London councils properly, and introduce measures such as including deprivation in the local government funding formula, or increasing the local housing allowance in line with inflation and removing the cap on how much councils can reclaim to cover the costs of temporary accommodation? Will they also consider ways to reduce profiteering in the marketplace for demand-led services, consider legislating to ensure that a home council continues to fund the costs of care when children are placed outside their home borough, and ensure that a family's home council continues to fund the costs of placing homeless families outside the host borough? I ask because no one wins when councils are forced into this situation and pitted against one another.

If we want people to see and feel the change that they voted for, on their streets, in their communities and across this country, it is properly funded councils that can deliver that. If we want the services that communities rely on every day to be of the highest quality, it is properly funded councils that can make that happen. If we want to make it feel as if the lights have finally come on in this country, it is properly funded councils that can flip the switch.

3.8 pm

**Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Lewell. I thank the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey) for rightly raising this issue for debate. I am grateful to him, as I am sure we all are.

I endorse the comments of pretty much all Members who have spoken, but especially my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez)—we share the borough of Havering. Members have highlighted what we all know: the local government funding system is fundamentally broken. No matter what borough we come from, the current system simply is not working. We are all suffering local services that are inadequate. Funding is not there for things that are essential, and we are seeing money spent on things in local government that I believe are wasted.

Particularly in Havering, as well as in Bromley and in Hillingdon, which is represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), we also say that our boroughs are spending a lot of money to fund the Greater London Authority, and most of that seems to be spent in inner-London areas. Outer-London areas are funding inner London. We have been doing that for many decades, not just since the Greater London Authority and the mayor were created, but under both Governments.

I would like to depoliticise this issue a bit. We can blame each other—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] We can blame each other, but the last Government did not deal with it, and I hope this Government will attempt to deal with it. Without fundamental change, the problem will go on and on. What we need is less, but more effective, government. We need spending on the right things. We need to give control back to our local areas and to have less control by central Government and the Greater London Authority.

I will not repeat all the arguments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster, because all the points she made were absolutely correct,



but Havering has particularly suffered from underfunding and an unfair funding formula for many decades—in fact, all the way back to when the London boroughs were created in the 1960s. When the London boroughs were created, the outer-London areas, which were considered to be wealthier, were effectively putting money into the centre, and they did so for many decades. As hon. Members have said, that has changed. As the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead said, outer-London areas have altered and the demographics have changed. But the funding formula remains the same.

We need to completely change how we deal with this issue. Fiddling around with the figures at the edges will not solve it; we need root-and-branch reform of how local government operates in the Greater London area. We need more flexibility in areas such as Havering, which are not really in London—we orbit London, but we are far more linked to Essex areas than we are to inner London—and fundamental reform of the whole system.

Outer London has always been poorly funded and unfairly treated. In Havering, which has a large older population and a large younger population, and changing demographics, we particularly need more support. I hope the Minister will pledge that support, because all our constituents need change.

**Emma Lewell (in the Chair):** Order.

3.12 pm

**Daniel Francis** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Lewell. I need to say at the outset that my wife is employed as a SEND co-ordinator in the London borough of Bexley.

I was a councillor in Bexley for 20 years, including 10 years under the last Labour Government. I hear what the hon. Member for Bromley and Biggin Hill (Peter Fortune) says, but I assure him that we had a very different funding arrangement then—my local authority was not in the position it now is. The hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French) is no longer in his place, but he was the deputy leader on the council and I the leader of the opposition when we faced our funding crisis back in 2021. That funding crisis continues to this day.

In our council, reserves have been used to balance the budget for years. That includes the £5 million we needed to balance the budget in the 2018 council election year. Things became worse in 2021, when the council applied for its capitalisation order. It made 15% of staff redundant and had to sell a building for £9 million to fund the redundancy costs. In the period from 2010 to 2015, Bexley went from having the 10th most expensive council tax in London to the 8th most expensive.

At my election speech last year, I pledged to work tirelessly with my Conservative-controlled local authority to deliver for local people and businesses, and I am here on their behalf to make some key pledges about the pressures they face and the pressures we have heard about today.

First, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Jas Athwal) said, we face the matter of the fair funding settlement. Demographic changes in outer London and inner London mean that the borough I was first elected to represent on the council 25 years ago is a very

different borough today. Parts of my constituency, such as Slade Green and Northumberland Heath, are very different, demographically and in terms of poverty, from how they were then. My council's position is that council tax should not be a primary driver of increased core spending power, and that we should simplify the assessments and reduce the number of relative needs formulae.

Then there is the public health grant. I have sat there, through budget after budget, as either leader of the opposition or the opposition finance spokesperson, listening to the Conservative leader, Baroness O'Neill, saying that the public health grant for Bexley is the second lowest in London. I am pleased—in fact, I am proud—that, under a Labour Government, Bexley this year has had the sixth-highest public health increase of all the boroughs, but clearly that position remains, and our public health grant remains too low. As I have said, our finances remain in a very difficult position, with a £32 million budget gap next year, which needs to be addressed.

Most worrying is our safety valve agreement. Our safety valve agreement was signed because of the significant overspend in special educational needs, but that will expire next year. We are not currently on course to achieve the requirements in the safety valve agreement and the statutory override. There is potentially £12.8 million at risk. As I have continually said to the Government, we clearly need to resolve that to protect some of our most vulnerable children in next year's budget, but also residents and businesses across the London borough of Bexley.

3.16 pm

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Lewell. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey) on securing this important debate.

I was a councillor in Southwark for six years before I was elected to this place. It is a privilege to serve in local government. Our councils carry the heavy responsibility of delivering local services across a huge range of areas, and they have a unique opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of local residents by delivering vital protections for vulnerable people as well as the services that all of us rely on. I pay particular tribute to my local councils, Lambeth and Southwark, for the work that they did during the covid-19 pandemic and what they have done over the last few years to support residents with the cost of living crisis.

I was elected to my local council in 2010, on the same day that the Tory-Lib Dem coalition Government took power in Westminster. I remember the first meeting of our council, when we were briefed on its financial settlement from central Government at the start of a period of austerity. I remember the shock that descended in the room at the scale of the cuts to our budget as the impact on local services became clear.

We had no idea what was yet to come. For 14 years, the Conservative Government outsourced both the pain and the blame for their austerity programme to our local councils, cutting well over 50% of the local government grant, slashing the affordable housing grant, freezing council rents, reducing investment in the existing council housing stock, and freezing the local housing allowance, driving up homelessness. On SEND—an area in which

[Helen Hayes]

I take a particular interest as Chair of the Education Committee—the coalition placed almost all the statutory responsibility for delivering services on councils, but took away their ability to deliver new school places directly, driving up home-to-school transport costs and the cost of purchasing places in the independent sector.

There will not be a Member here today who does not see the impact of the housing crisis, and the crisis of temporary accommodation, on our constituents and local authorities. The shortage of homes is driving more and more residents to seek support from their council, and putting more and more into the worst-quality accommodation, which has destabilising effects on families across our city. The Liz Truss mini-Budget had a devastating impact on our councils' ability to build new homes. Both of my boroughs have ambitious programmes for delivering new homes, but they have had to mothball sites as the cost of materials and labour has been sent spiralling.

On all of these issues and many more, London councils face a perfect storm in their finances, and we urgently need support from the Government. Let me finish with five quick measures that the Government should turn their attention to: raising the local council housing allowance to stabilise housing in London; ensuring immediate investment in small sites owned by councils and housing associations that already have planning consent and can be delivered; addressing the statutory override—there is not sufficient engagement with councils on what the Government plan as they begin to plan for the next financial year—getting housing revenue accounts back on a sustainable footing; and delivering multi-year settlements to give certainty and stability to our councils for the future. I know that our councils have the commitment and determination to keep delivering for our residents, and I call on the Government to support them to do so as a matter of urgency.

3.19 pm

**Bambos Charalambous** (Southgate and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Lewell. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey) on securing this vital debate and making such an excellent speech. As the Member for Southgate and Wood Green, I have the privilege of representing two boroughs—Enfield and Haringey. Both have faced enormous pressures on their budgets since 2010, when we had the first iteration of the then Government's austerity agenda. Funding to local councils was slashed, and London councils were particularly badly affected.

Since 2010, Enfield has had £200 million slashed from its budget, a 42% cut. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that Enfield's share of current local authority funding is the fourth worst in the country relative to comparative need, with a gap of £90 million per year. Like many other outer London boroughs, Enfield suffers from damping, under which the Government calculate the need of outer London boroughs but then take away a proportion and distribute it elsewhere. That is just plain wrong. Enfield needs to get the funding it actually requires to provide services for its residents, but it has lost £11.6 million year on year since 2012-13 as a result of the calculation for outer London boroughs.

Since 2011, Haringey has had its budget cut by £143 million in real terms and has seen a 30% cut in its workforce. It too faces huge pressures on its budgets, particularly in adult social care, in which costs have risen by £31 million, and in children's social care and SEND provision, where costs have risen by £6 million over the same period.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead has already mentioned the antiquated inner-outer London funding formula that adversely affects both Enfield and Haringey and, as is clear from the debate, many other outer London boroughs. The outdated inner-outer London definition needs to be scrapped. Other colleagues have mentioned the huge pressures that London local authorities face in relation to temporary accommodation. Last year, Enfield faced a £17.3 million overspend on temporary accommodation, and for Haringey the figure is £13 million over the last two years.

Despite all that, the councils still provide excellent services. I am proud to put on the record the great work that Haringey Learning Partnership does in the circumstances. What needs to be done? The inner-outer London formula needs to be scrapped, and we need to double the homelessness prevention grant, introduce a funding formula that addresses deprivation, and reform capital flexibility.

3.23 pm

**Rachel Blake** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Ms Lewell. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey) for securing this important debate. I also thank our friends and colleagues from the London local government family who are here listening to the debate. Their tireless work, day in, day out, is not unappreciated, and we are really happy to see them here today.

It has been good to listen to the cross-party support for the debate, but I was a little disappointed not to hear a bit more reflection from Opposition Members on how we got here, despite our having much shared experience as local representatives. That includes the slashing of housing investment by the previous Conservative Government and the slashing of genuinely affordable homes by the previous Conservative mayor—where is he now? Let us not forget the failed fair funding review that the hon. Member for Bromley and Biggin Hill (Peter Fortune) referenced, which hung over local government for years and prevented meaningful planning.

In the last 14 years, we have seen an 173% increase in rough sleeping and a 69% increase in temporary accommodation—that is shameful—as well as rising rents and falling investment. Let us not forget that the cause lies firmly with the Conservatives. The hon. Member for Bromley and Biggin Hill tempts me to remind us what happened in 1997. Labour halved temporary accommodation, made record investment in the condition of homes through the decent homes programme, and introduced the historic 2008-11 programme of new, genuinely affordable homes, which benefits many families now.

**Andrew Rosindell:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Rachel Blake:** No.

Let us come to the matter at hand. I would like to talk about temporary accommodation costs, special educational needs and the specific challenges of managing the visitor economy in the very centre of London.

**Joe Powell** (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): On the specific challenges for central London, does my hon. Friend agree that Westminster council is making the right decision to make use of the new council tax powers to implement a premium for second home owners? Will she join me in encouraging Kensington and Chelsea council to look at doing the same? That could raise £11 million a year, but is not currently the council's position.

**Rachel Blake:** I am delighted to celebrate the work that Westminster city council does on tackling the challenges we face as a visitor economy. I am not sure how much Kensington and Chelsea council would appreciate me joining my hon. Friend's campaign, but I certainly will, because it is for the best for the very centre of London.

Last year, Westminster city council spent £95 million on temporary accommodation, and the City of London's temporary accommodation costs increased 52% to £1.1 million. I am very proud of the investment that Westminster city council is choosing to make to insource temporary accommodation. It is a real pioneer in that. However, we are doing it in a very challenging environment in terms of overall costs. I acknowledge the challenges that my outer London colleagues face because of the number of families moving to that area. We very much want those families to stay in the centre of London, and I hope that some of the solutions we will put forward will make sure that that happens.

On special educational needs, the number of pupils on education, health and care plans increased by 37%—from 1,035 to 1,413—between 2018 and 2024. None of those children and families deserves to have to go through such a difficult approach to securing a special educational needs plan, and every single one of them deserves the security and certainty that investment in their education will continue in the future.

I turn to the specific challenges of the very centre of London. We have higher additional street-cleaning costs, and Westminster has just invested £2 million in tackling the additional antisocial behaviour that we face. What can we do about that? The Government have made great progress, with £2 billion announced today for 18,000 new genuinely affordable homes, core spending power up by 5.3%, and multi-year settlements, which will make such a big difference. However, we can go further. Let us bring forward the short-term lets registration scheme and pilot it in Cities of London and Westminster. Let us review the formula so that it does not have to be uncertain and complex, and let us tackle the temporary accommodation crisis for good. Imagine what that would do for those families. Imagine what it would do to life chances. Imagine what it would do to public finances when we are not pouring money into a poor-quality private rented sector, but building the genuinely affordable homes that our country and our city need.

**Emma Lewell (in the Chair):** With a time limit of two minutes, I call Danny Beales.

3.28 pm

**Danny Beales** (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Lab): Last, but not least. It is a pleasure—less of a pleasure now, but it was a pleasure—to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Lewell. I echo the points my colleagues have made about the unprecedented financial pressures on London councils. While we need to tackle temporary accommodation, the SEND crisis and much more—that is as true in Hillingdon as in any other borough—we also need to ensure the very best financial governance for local authorities.

Unfortunately, in Hillingdon, on top of those long-term pressures, we have seen short-termism and poor governance. A salami-slice approach to budgeting—taking off an extra per cent each year—and the failure to transform services and build the financial base of the council long term have all come home to roost, with the council now in financial crisis. We have seen that if we do not invest in new homes, we get temporary accommodation pressures. If we do not invest in early years and youth services, and close them instead, we get more pressures later in the education system. That is what has happened in Hillingdon.

We have the lowest reserves among our nearest neighbours. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy reported that we ran them down from £62 million in 2021 to £20 million in 2025.

**Dan Tomlinson:** In Barnet, we have around 85 care homes. Inner London boroughs such as Camden and Islington have around 20, yet the grant that inner London boroughs receive is around £3 million, whereas Barnet council and other outer London boroughs only get around £2 million. Does my hon. Friend think that that injustice in the funding formula is also causing issues for councils such as the one in the area he represents?

**Danny Beales:** I do—we have to consider the costs that outer London boroughs face, as well as London more generally. As has been said excellently by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey), London is special; it is different, and it faces extra costs and pressures. That is the case right across London.

This very year, Hillingdon's own financial officer wrote a damning cover report to the council's budget, making it clear that the road is fast running out. They pointed to governance issues within the council and an inability to meet its own, less ambitious savings targets in previous years, compared with the projected future targets. My constituents have paid the price for that mismanagement—they are paying substantially more every single year, with fees and charges going up exponentially, and getting fewer services as a result.

I welcome the calls for extra long-term financial support for local government, which is much needed; however, we have to ensure as a Government that when we agree that extra long-term financial settlement, which hopefully we will, governance improvements are in place. This money should not be used to fix the cracks in the short term again, but should be used to fundamentally transform services, including the SEND system, the housing system, the social care system and many others. In some authorities, when times were slightly easier than they are today, that did not happen.



[*Danny Beales*]

To sum up and echo my colleagues' points, London councils are on their knees financially. As a Government, it is vital that we intervene, because local government is key—it is everyone's front door to government and their community. We need to invest and we need long-term reform of services, including our education and housing systems, to provide the mixed, successful and financially sustainable communities we all want to see.

3.32 pm

**Luke Taylor** (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your benevolent gaze, Ms Lewell. I thank the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey) for securing this important debate, and I point to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, which shows that I still proudly serve as a councillor in my constituency in Sutton borough.

London faces a crisis in council funding unparalleled in living memory. We have a funding system that has been starved for years under previous Conservative Governments. As a result, our councils are now struggling to meet the growing demands of the communities they serve. This is not an exaggeration—this is an emergency. Since the onset of austerity in 2010, per capita Government funding has been reduced by more than a fifth, with boroughs now receiving 28% less funding per resident. Meanwhile, London's population has skyrocketed, increasing by over 900,000 in the past 15 years. The city's councils are crying out for a long-term funding solution.

Local government provides critical frontline services to our society. It is where people turn for help to meet their daily needs, and it is how communities are supported. Let us be clear: many councils that put in considerable effort to balance the books are not at fault here; they are simply not given enough financial support in the first place as statutory demands rise. It makes a mockery of our conversations about policy here in Westminster when people's bins go uncollected and children are left waiting for their EHCPs. Our attention should be focused on helping local government, which is at the frontline of the state, to deliver the basics.

Outer London boroughs like Sutton, Kingston and Richmond are getting a raw deal on Government funding—in fact, some of the worst in the country. We see that in police abstractions and we see it in financial council funding.

**Andrew Rosindell:** The hon. Member mentions that the people of Sutton are getting a raw deal, and I am quite sure that they are. Does he think that the people of Sutton are getting good value for money from the precept we are paying to the Mayor and the Greater London Authority, or would he like some of that money put back into the local communities that he serves?

**Luke Taylor:** I thank the hon. Member for his intervention. Sutton has one of the lowest spends per resident by Transport for London of any of the London boroughs. We have no tubes, no overground, and half a tram stop in the very northernmost part of the borough, which shows how poorly we are served by TfL infrastructure, so I agree with the hon. Member's point.

Outer London is being left behind, with some of the lowest support per capita. Our broken system means that inner London continues to be prioritised, despite the shifting needs across the city. There is a growing mismatch between funding allocations and local need, worsened by a funding formula that has not been updated since 2013. The data on which those allocations are based—population demographics and deprivation levels—are outdated and no longer reflect the reality on the ground. Research from the IFS in 2022 found a 17% gap between funding need and actual funding across London, the largest gap of any region in England. There is a temptation among many—we have all heard it—to paint London as a city where the streets are paved with gold and the challenges of poverty are less intense, which is nonsense. London has the second highest poverty rate in the country, second only to the west midlands. It has infrastructure problems, growing homelessness and millions of people suffering with the ever-rising cost of living, which is particularly pronounced in the context of London's overheated property market.

The problem is diffuse, not concentrated in inner London. Indeed, poverty is shifting across London in ways we have not seen before, as working patterns change and jobs and industries ebb and flow. The outdated funding model forces outer London boroughs to tackle what are often characterised as inner London problems with far less support. The Minister must reassess the funding formula to ensure a fairer deal for boroughs like Sutton.

It is time to recognise the significant demographic and social changes that have taken place in London over the last 12 years. The homelessness crisis is an example of how poverty is shifting across London in unprecedented ways. Homelessness in my home borough of Sutton increased by 51% between 2018 and 2023. London is at the epicentre of the UK's homelessness disaster, with the highest levels in the country. London Councils estimates that one in 50 Londoners are currently homeless and living in temporary accommodation. In Sutton every night 1,200 families are housed at the cost of the council. Nearly 90,000 children in the capital are homeless. That is one in every 21 children in London—at least one homeless child in every classroom.

As the Liberal Democrat MP for Sutton and Cheam, I am proud to live in a borough that is committed to housing the homeless where we can, but for the sake of such boroughs that hold that commitment it is essential that we address the gaps in support and provide long-term solutions to end homelessness for good. The financial strain currently put on councils to fight the crisis is utterly unsustainable. Boroughs are spending £4 million every single day on temporary accommodation, and those costs have shot up by 68% in just one year. If such trends continue, homelessness will bankrupt our boroughs and plunge our city back into the dark days of Victorian poverty and inequality. Municipal government will wither away and the fingertips of the state will succumb to financial frostbite, meaning we will no longer be able to reach out and rescue families from homelessness and communities from disintegration. Our city will be a plaything of the rich and famous—no longer a home, but a cold shell. Let us be under no illusion: that is what is at stake.

We are already seeing councils needing exceptional financial support just to survive. The housing revenue account is under unprecedented pressure, and with cuts

to resources, capped social rents, rising inflation and ageing housing stock, London boroughs are being forced to cut £260 million over the next four years, making it harder to build new homes or to maintain the ones we already have. So we on the Liberal Democrat Benches urge the Government to urgently publish a cross-Whitehall plan to end all forms of homelessness and exempt groups of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness from the shared accommodation rate; ring-fence emergency funding for local councils for permanent accommodation of rough sleepers; increase the local housing allowance rates in line with inflation; and ensure sufficient financial resources for local authorities to deliver the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. If we do not, I fear the consequences for the future liveability of our city will be existential.

3.38 pm

**David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve once again under your chairmanship, Ms Lewell. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey) on securing, with cross-party support, a very wide-ranging debate. My starting point, having served 12 years as a London councillor under the last Labour Government and then 12 years as a London councillor under the previous coalition and Conservative Government, is that he should be careful what he wishes for when he has a debate on this subject.

We can already see a pattern beginning to reassert itself in the finances of our local authorities in London and in local government generally. What sound like significant increases are announced, but while one hand gives, the other takes away. Extra funding that has been announced, for the most part comprises maximum possible rises in council tax, very large increases in business rates, and an assumption that local authorities will raise the maximum possible fees and charges from their residents, which is then deducted from any central Government support. We can see the imposition of that in decisions large and small. On the smaller side, we have had representations from London Councils about the impact of ringfenced grant funding to tackle homelessness, which reduces the freedom and flexibility of local authorities in the capital to deploy those resources to keep people off the streets. On a much more macro scale, we have the national insurance contributions rise, which, after additional Government support, leaves local authorities in England over £1 billion net worse off than before the Budget was announced.

Many of us will have served through many years when there were announcements, such as significant rises in the single regeneration budget, and the establishment of the dedicated schools grant under the last Labour Government. However, as Members who experienced those announcements will know, that approach of starting with a standard spending assessment and then damping any increase that it could give rise to, especially impacting on outer London boroughs with a very significant level of social need, has had a significant long-term impact. If there is an apology to be made from the Opposition about our approach to finances in local government, it is that we did not go as far as we would have wished to, as set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez), in redressing some of those imbalances.

The very first council meeting I attended as a member of the public was the last one at which a Labour council ever set a budget in Hillingdon. An 18% council tax rise hit local residents, and the council made £40 million—then around 10% of its budget—in unspecified savings. Let us not succumb to any fiction that somehow we are entering a gilded age for the local authorities of our capital city. And of course, it comes at a time when we know that the pressures on local authorities are rising sharply. According to the charity St Mungo's, there has been a 29% increase in rough sleeping in the capital compared with the equivalent period under the last Conservative Government. A huge impact on our economy—not just the business rate rises, but the loss of confidence and the lack of investment.

Many Members have spoken eloquently about the pressures around homelessness—the shortage of housing. We have all been ambitious about that, but it is very striking if we look simply at the numbers. The serving Mayor, Sir Sadiq, was set a target by the last Government of around 100,000 new affordable homes. He set himself a target of 52,000—around half what central Government said he should be able to deliver. He actually delivered 35,000 new affordable homes. In total, in equivalent periods, the current Mayor has delivered 65,000 affordable homes, compared with 90,000 under his Conservative predecessor.

Although we all share the ambition, we need the shared starting point as well, of recognising the challenges, including the impact of damping and the inner/outer London inequality. Those things have existed in our funding formula for a very long time, and they are part of a complex set of interactions that arise from not just the current Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, but the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Transport and the Home Office. Many, many London local authorities are supporting significant numbers of asylum seekers. Hillingdon has the highest number of asylum seekers per capita of any local authority in the whole country—a cost not currently funded at all by central Government, but contributing very significantly to the numbers of people needing to be housed and children to be cared for. That complex picture needs to be taken into account when we debate this issue.

I have some asks and some requests to put to the Minister. Like others, I thank London Councils for its excellent work to consider not just the big picture of the quantum of financing, but the things that could be done, such as removing some of the ringfences that the Government have imposed on how those resources are deployed. The first ask is that, as the Government proceed with their processes on devolution, we look at a true shared decision-making arrangement. There is a risk that the devolution settlement will leave London as the only major devolved area with no formal agreement between the Mayor and the boroughs on shared decision making. We see much of that tension around housing.

I ask the Government once again to look at a process around fairer funding, which has been worked on in the past, to begin to address the inequality of funding between inner and outer London. We know the origins of that lie in assumptions that are made about deprivation, but it manifests in almost every area of local government finance in London.

[David Simmonds]

We still see relatively very large amounts of grant going into inner-London local authorities with low-level council tax, which are also often the ones that are most able to raise revenue in other ways. If we compare parking revenue accounts, for example, London borough of Bexley raises £6 million a year and Hillingdon raises £3.8 million a year, all of which can contribute, to a limited extent, to things such as environmental and road improvements. The London borough of Westminster raises £70 million a year—a net contribution of over £40 million just for environmental projects alone. The capacity of local authorities in London to raise revenue is hugely variable, and not just about the costs imposed by the demographics. We need to make sure that we take that fully into account.

I know that the Minister has been asked for this before on the Floor of the House, so I want to ask him to reconsider the position around national insurance contributions. We have just had an emergency Budget, and have been through a period of six months where it has become clear that the sums do not add up, but its impact—driving up the cost of children's and adult's social care, as well as every other part of public service in the capital—has been absolutely enormous. We have had representations from every single London borough about the impact of that. There were promises made that that would be mitigated, and we need to see them fulfilled.

Let me finish with an important point. It seems to me that all Members here, on a cross-party basis, have done their best to speak up from east to west, from inner to outer, for the interests of residents in the capital. We know that those challenges will be significant. I say gently to my neighbour, the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales), the rises in charges are 5%, not exponential.

**Danny Beales:** Does the hon. Gentleman welcome the significant uplift in public health funding from this Government? Or the fact that there is a third more homelessness funding, a significant and additional uplift in local government funding and millions more to be spent on potholes, one of the biggest levels in London? I could go on. That is a significant increase compared with what happened under the last Government, of which he was part. At the same time, our council is increasing council tax for many people, introducing a garden tax and making significant increases in fees and charges, as well as cutting council tax support to many. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is an acceptable record?

**David Simmonds:** I think I will probably avoid descending too much into parochial politics, but it is important to recognise that I will have to pay the garden tax—I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman will—because I live in the London borough of Hillingdon.

All our local authorities are facing elements of those challenges, and are addressing them as best they can. London local authorities have demonstrated probably the greatest financial resilience of any group of local authorities in the country. We have seen a considerable increase in balances held by local authorities across the capital, but that masks significant variations. In particular,

significant financial pressures are being created in outer London, partly because of the significant numbers of unfunded costs around things such as asylum and the long-term impact of the very rapid rise in rough sleeping. Set that alongside the fact that the long-standing structural underfunding leaves them less able to deal with the impact of a massive increase in national insurance contributions and the devastating impact of the Budget on the local economy and its ability to pay those taxes, all of which support local services. Let us take all those things into account, and come out of this with a new funding settlement for London. I ask the Minister to give us an undertaking that this will not be one of those settlements where a Government simply give with one hand and take with the other.

**Emma Lewell (in the Chair):** I remind the Minister it would be decent of him to leave two minutes at the end for the Member leading the debate to wind up.

3.48 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Alex Norris):** It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Lewell, and to speak for the Government in this debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey) on securing it. All the interest from Members shows how important it was. He made a very thoughtful case on behalf of his community and local authority, and of everybody living across the capital. The themes that my hon. Friend pulled out—homelessness, the importance of exceptional financial support in some areas and the long-standing issues with the formula—were important, and I will perhaps reflect on them as the structure for my own speech, and cover other Member's contributions along the way, notwithstanding the time I must leave my hon. Friend at the end.

The debate has felt at some points like a bit of a recovering councillors' convention, and I add myself to that number. I know, as we all do, how important it is for local authorities that their Members of Parliament go and raise their issues in Parliament. It would be reasonable to think that it would be axiomatic that we would do so, but, sometimes, there might be a temptation for a person to finish their time in local government and think they perhaps want to do other things. It is important that we advocate on behalf of our local authorities, and I think that that has been done excellently by colleagues across this place.

We should hold on to the common understanding, which I think was expressed by colleagues, of just how good a job councillors and officers are doing across the city to keep vital public services running. I want to add my thanks to them for their dedication and incredible work in the 800-plus ways in which they touch local people's lives every day. One of the differences between my previous and current political lives is that there is so much interest in what we do in this place, and there never seems to be enough in what goes on in local government, when actually, that can be more fundamental to individuals' daily lives.

I want to give some context about the financial settlement because it starts with a conversation about money, which has happened throughout the debate. The settlement for this year makes available a total core spending power for London, including the GLA, of up



to £11.35 billion. That is a £726 million increase on last year, and it represents a 5.8% cash-terms increase. That is a start on fixing the foundations of local government and providing significant investment for those services and places that need it most.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) eloquently set out just how hard the challenges were in the previous decade, and how hard those decisions were; that was a common experience for me when I was in local government at that time. No single Budget or intervention can reverse the damage and the harm done then, but this debate is our starting place, and I am pleased that it is under way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead mentioned the importance of homelessness and rough sleeping. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon East (Natasha Irons) also made some thoughtful points about that. We are very well aware of the particular issues facing councils in London. We know that that is a symptom and an aspect of the homelessness crisis across the country, but that London is particularly affected, for obvious reasons. The crisis is a national disgrace, which I think we should be angry about. There has been a sharp increase in rough sleeping, families stuck in temporary accommodation—perhaps not as visible but just as pernicious—and children growing up without a stable place to call home. Those points were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake). That is why we have taken action by allocating £233 million to councils directly for homelessness. That includes the largest ever investment in prevention services, enabling councils to intervene earlier with targeted support. The money available for that will be nearly £1 billion.

As it is an emergency, we have focused on getting money out of the door. However, there will be long-term fixes, and colleagues have talked about ways in which those fixes might happen. I point them towards the long-term housing strategy, which I think will be a huge opportunity to grip the issue. I encourage them to play their part in whatever way they can.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead also mentioned exceptional financial support. We have made it clear that while we continue to expect councils to do what they can to deliver for their residents, we do know—and we have heard it in the debate—that the sector is in a fragile state and that some London councils are really struggling. The hon. Member for Bromley and Biggin Hill (Peter Fortune) tried to tempt me back to 1997 in relation to where the origins of that might lie, and the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), tried a little bit of that, too. I gently say that I was just about out of short trousers at that time, so they will struggle to make me take the blame. I also say to the shadow Minister that maybe we should stand at the Local Government Association conference and ask colleagues there whether they think that the last decade or the one before was better. I have a sense of what the answer might be, and I know he does too.

However, the exceptional financial support process will be there when councils need it. We have been clear that we want to reset how that works so that it is more collaborative and supportive—unlike the previous Government, which perhaps took a more punitive approach to it. One aspect of that is that when additional borrowing

is needed to support recovery, we will not make that more expensive with the additional 1% premium, which the previous Government did. We will also take steps to prevent the disposal of community and heritage assets, when that is considered as a route to financing capitalisation support. We know how important that is to local communities.

As has been said, seven London councils have requested support this year and we are working with them to drive improvements. Exactly as my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales) said, those improvements must happen now, and I have been through the process in my own city. It is a moment to grapple with and grasp that transformation process, to take those difficult decisions, and to get local authorities on to a stronger footing.

I want to talk a bit about reform more generally. On the multi-year settlement, the year-by-year decisions are driven by settlement decisions, and we always used to get on Christmas eve. It used to drive us mad, because there was not much we could do on Christmas eve. We need to do much better, which is why we are committed to the first multi-year settlement in a decade to give councils time to plan.

We recognise that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Jas Athwal), the hon. Members for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) and for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), and my hon. Friends the Members for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) and for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) said, the formula has been out of date for years and years. That is a point of political consensus. Of course, under the previous Administration there was the fair funding review, but that was not delivered, so what we have today is a system that does not represent the best value for taxpayers and does not get money to where it is needed most. We are implementing a comprehensive and up-to-date assessment of needs and resources as part of the multi-year settlement from 2026-27, so it is coming soon.

I thank those who contributed to the recent consultation—I know London Councils will have done so. There will be more discussion when we consult in further detail later in the spring. I ask colleagues to engage with the consultation in the spirit in which this debate has been conducted, based on the cold, hard facts. We will be very clear about the formulas that we use and what the assumptions are based on. I hope we can have the consultation on that level. The hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner said we should steer away from the parochial, and I think that is probably right.

This is probably a good moment to address the point about the recovery grant. It went to places where, weighted by population, deprivation outweighs council tax recovery. That was emergency money to prop up the dangerous state of local authority funding. It was a difficult decision, but we have been very clear about why we took it and the formula is publicly available. I hope we can engage in those sorts of difficult decisions in that spirit, because the alternative is to have senior leaders of Governments boasting at party events about how they have been able to tilt formulas to get money intended for deprived communities to other places. That was a particularly discrediting experience for the previous Government, and we will not replicate it.

[Alex Norris]

Hon. Members mentioned national insurance contributions. As part of the settlement, we announced an extra £550 million of support for local government, but we have needed to make difficult decisions to balance the nation's finances. The challenge for the Opposition is that they can only say what they are against; they cannot say that they do not want money to go into the national health service, local government and the police. Until and unless they are able to address that fundamental balance—"If not this, then what?"—I fear it looks like their points are political rather than substantial.

I want to end on a positive note. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead for setting a great tone for the debate, and other hon. Members for populating it with their own thoughtful views and experiences. The Government are committed to resetting the relationship with local government; we want to work with it as partners. Similarly, I hope Members of Parliament of any political party or none, on their own behalf and on behalf of their communities and council, feel they can contribute to the policy process and have their say on what formulas we might use and what priorities we might have. We have a common goal: we want vibrant local authorities that deliver for their local communities day in, day out. That is what councillors, council officers and MPs want, and the Government certainly want the same.

3.58 pm

**Mr Calvin Bailey:** I thank everyone who has contributed to the debate. It will be interesting to see where I go with my first winding-up speech—I will take feedback later.

I thank the councils and councillors of London, who deliver the outputs that we need. I thank Councillor Williams and Councillor Rai and all the council leaders of London for showing leadership in a very challenging time. I thank the Mayor, and I also thank the Minister for the £11.3 billion—5.8%—core increase.

I will steal the words from my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales): London is special. It is different. Local government is the gateway; it is everyone's front door. I secured this debate not to draw out ideological challenges and bring up some of the unpleasant aspects of the subject that we have discussed, but to tackle the structural problems that have been languishing untouched for so long. I come back to the point that I should be wary of what I wish for when I secure a debate, but I am not: I am wary of Conservative leadership. I welcome partnership and the Government's approach, which allows us to have these debates knowing that we will bring better settlements—

**Emma Lewell (in the Chair):** Order.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## Fly-tipping: Tatton

4 pm

**Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered fly-tipping in Tatton constituency.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Lewell, and I am grateful for the opportunity to talk about this matter. Hardly a week goes by without someone contacting my office about the scourge of fly-tipping, and I am sure that is an experience shared by many hon. Members.

The name fly-tipping belies the seriousness of the issue: it is a grave matter of someone dumping their waste on someone else's land. That person has not bothered to dispose of the waste properly and so they think they will dump it on somebody else's land. The problems it causes cannot be overestimated. I want to focus on the impact on local communities and consider what practical measures can be taken to ensure the problem does not continue to grow.

This is not a new problem—fly-tipping has plagued communities for years—but it is a growing problem. In 2023-24, local authorities in England reported 1.15 million fly-tipping incidents, a 6% increase on the previous year, and I have heard that that is rising even further. Hon. Members will be aware that under current provisions, small-scale fly-tipping on public land is the responsibility of local authorities, while larger-scale fly-tipping falls under the responsibility of the Environment Agency and on private land the responsibility generally falls to the landowner to remove somebody else's waste.

Statistics from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs show that in 2023-24 the most common size category for fly-tipping incidents was equivalent to a small vanload, making up 31% of incidents, followed by the equivalent of a car boot load or less, which accounted for 28%. Whether beside a road, in a car park, on a public footpath or in open fields, we have all seen it. I share the frustration and upset felt by residents at the impact that dumping rubbish, no matter how big or small, has on their communities.

Fly-tipping is rising across Tatton, from household rubbish to dumped tyres on Crowders Lane, Lach Dennis; waste on the side of the A556 at Lostock Gralam towards Plumley; household items such as mattresses on Holmes Chapel Road, Allstock; and waste dumped in the woodlands of Broad Lane, Sproston, the Sainsbury's car park in Wilmslow and the Marston playground. That list is growing.

The process to report fly-tipping to local councils is unnecessarily difficult, requiring excessive back-and-forth communication. For example, when I reported a fly-tipping incident on School Lane, Pickmere late last year, it turned out to be a veritable ping-pong of emails between departments and then a trawl of website pages just to report the incident.

Only last month, I met residents from Colshaw Farm in Wilmslow, who lamented the whole process. They are now seeing an increase in fly-tipping, which has become a regular occurrence, and they have to use this system all the time. Those people, who are proud of their local community, want to keep their community tidy, but thoughtless, reckless people dump rubbish in their area.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the right hon. Lady for securing this debate. She is right to highlight the issue in her Tatton constituency, which is similar to that in my constituency. One of the ideas mooted back home in Northern Ireland is putting CCTV where there is habitual fly-tipping. One of the requests was for the Government back home, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, local policing and community safety partnerships to make money available for CCTV. Does she agree that that might be a way of catching those who are fly-tipping regularly?

**Esther McVey:** That could well be a solution, or at least part of the solution. This issue impacts Members across the House, and I know that the Minister will have some thoughtful responses and will take that into consideration. We need to use all tools at our disposal to stop fly-tipping.

My residents are gravely upset about what goes on. Sometimes, no sooner have they cleared up the mess than it is back, and it keeps reappearing. Residents of Colshaw Farm tell me that what adds to the problem is that, particularly of late, the local council is not maintaining the area: grass is not being cut, verges are becoming overgrown and broken streetlights are not being mended. That can make matters worse by attracting people to the area; they think that they can tip under cover of darkness or hide their rubbish in overgrown grass or bushes. That needs to be resolved to remove their ability to do those things. Repairing streetlights and cutting grass and hedges are not complex matters to solve. We could all make sure that they are resolved.

The Countryside Alliance's 2023 rural crime survey found that 35% of those surveyed had experienced some sort of crime within the past year, and the top reported rural crime was fly-tipping, at 37%. Residents tell me that fly-tipping is not pursued, even when there is photographic evidence—often with proof of the culprits. That corresponds with the latest figures: data for 2022-23 shows that only 110 people received a fine of more than £1,000, while more than 50% of the fines were between £200 and £500.

Tougher action needs to be taken. Police must investigate these incidents, and there must be tougher penalties. If perpetrators think they can get away with it, that they will not be investigated and that it will not be taken seriously—and if the penalties are not high enough—they will do the calculation for themselves: it is easier to dump their waste rather than disposing of it properly. The fines do not go far enough. They need to be higher and more severe.

In the last Parliament, the previous Government announced some sensible policies on this matter, not least putting points on the driving licences of individuals found guilty of this crime. I ask the Minister, in a constructive spirit, if she would revisit some of those suggestions and seek an agreement to further this policy. It could act as a deterrent, even a small one. There is no silver bullet, but a combination of different deterrents might work.

It is becoming painfully clear, even if local councils cannot see it, that the limits on council waste sites are adding to this problem, along with limits on bin collection services and new costs for bin collection. For example, Cheshire East council has recently taken the disastrous decision to close waste centres, reduce bin collections

and require an additional payment for green bin collections. If a tip remains in their area, residents seeking to visit it at the weekend or on a bank holiday need to book. Again, it creates a barrier to doing the right thing if someone has to go through all these hurdles to dispose of their rubbish properly. Starting next year, bin collections will change from fortnightly to three-weekly, as well as the council charging for green bins. In Knutsford, since changing the green bin collection, we are seeing more and more garden waste being dumped. One resident told me that is because people cannot afford the green bin charge, which has locally been called the green bin tax.

On top of that, Cheshire West and Chester council launched a consultation in July on its proposals to change the way waste disposal is managed. Among the proposals is a change to limit the amount of DIY waste that can be brought to tips without charge, and a pre-registration of vehicles arriving at the tip. Councils say they are closing their tips and reducing access to waste collection because it will save them money. Cheshire West and Chester council says that the changes will help them reach their climate goals. In reality, local authorities spent an estimated £64 million in 2023 clearing up fly-tipped waste from public areas, which is an enormous burden on the public purse. These measures are more likely to act as a catalyst for fly-tippers, and any savings from the cost of green bins and closing down tips are likely to be eaten away by the cost of fly-tipping. Once again, I believe that shows a lack of foresight.

The latest available data shows that there were 4,108 incidents of fly-tipping reported in Cheshire East in the year leading up to March 2023, which is 79 a week. Residents cannot afford for that number to keep growing. We need better financial management and a deeper understanding of how to prevent the issue. Fly-tipping is not a victimless crime; the victims are the landowners, the local communities and taxpayers who are left to shoulder the cost. If someone dumps on private land, it is the private owner who has to clear that up.

We need a joined-up approach that aligns Government policy with councils, and consistent enforcement measures and deterrents for potential offenders. We cannot continue to pay the price for other people deliberately leaving their rubbish on somebody else's land. It is not just the cost to remove the rubbish; dumping waste presents a risk to public health. Some people do not know what has actually been dumped—it could be toxic waste—and if it is left there for some time, it will attract vermin.

There is also a concerning increase in levels of large-scale commercial tipping on our farmlands and in our countryside, which is growing to an alarming scale. I do not know why people are doing it; I do not know the root causes. I am not saying it is an escalation of fly-tipping—although we are seeing an escalation of fly-tipping in its size and regularity. Instead, it is people buying land in the countryside under the guise of doing something else, opening illegal tips as if they were commercial tips, and charging people to bring their rubbish to dump on agricultural land. That will be toxic waste—it should have been disposed of elsewhere, but it would have been much more expensive to do so, so they are dumping it on our rural land.

This issue is not being taken seriously enough. It is a major problem now arising in Tatton, High Legh, Mobberley, Sproston and Little Leigh. Even if the Minister cannot mention that particular problem today,



[*Esther McVey*]

I would like her to think about what we can do to stop all types of tipping and fly-tipping. This is serious criminal activity. We must break the pattern of crime to ensure the environment and local residents are protected, improve access to our tips and local amenities, and extend their opening hours to enable people to get rid of their waste.

I have some questions for the Minister. What steps can the Government take to ensure that the police force, the councils and the environment agencies work together and escalate this crime to the level of seriousness and importance that it deserves, so that we can work actively to rectify the issue, clear up the mess and bring the perpetrators to justice? Will she consider implementing a national strategy on waste disposal, ensuring that tips remain open and accessible and that bin collections are regular, to prevent councils from reducing access to those services? Finally, what actions can the Government take to tackle large-scale commercial fly-tipping, particularly when it is linked to organised crime?

4.16 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh):** It is a pleasure to serve for the first time under you chairship, Ms Lewell. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Tatton (*Esther McVey*) on securing today's debate, and I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (*Jim Shannon*) for his intervention.

Fly-tipping is not just a load of rubbish; it is a serious environmental crime. As the right hon. Lady set out, it blights communities and the environment and harms wildlife, and it can lead to people not feeling safe where they live. We appreciate the difficulty that it poses for councils, farmers, landowners and private businesses, such as the Sainsbury's whose car park she discussed in her speech. Local councils reported over a million fly-tipping incidents in 2023-24, which represents a significant cost burden to the economy. Over the last five years, these incidents have increased by 20%, so something is going wrong.

That is completely unacceptable, and this Government are serious about taking back control of our streets and our countryside. We have committed to forcing fly-tippers and vandals to clean up the mess they have created, as part of a crackdown on antisocial behaviour, and I look forward to providing further details on that commitment in due course. I take on board the point the right hon. Lady raised about the previous Government looking at putting points on driving licences, and I will find out where the DEFRA machine got to on that.

We recognise the role that councils have in tackling fly-tipping, which can happen for a variety of reasons. That can include people trying to do the right thing with their waste and inadvertently handing it over to hardened criminals seeking to make money from the co-ordinated dumping of large amounts of waste. The response has to be appropriate to the circumstances, but we want to see an effective enforcement strategy at the heart of local authority efforts to combat fly-tipping.

I encourage all councils to make good use of their powers, which include prosecution. As the right hon. Lady said, prosecution can lead to significant fines, a community sentence and even imprisonment and

compensation for landowners' clearance costs—those can also be secured through the courts. Although sentencing is a matter for the courts, the national fly-tipping prevention group, chaired by DEFRA officials, has previously produced guidance to support councils to present robust cases in court. Cheshire East is not currently a member of that group, and I encourage it and any other councils that wish to join to crowd in any good work that they might be doing.

Instead of prosecuting, local authorities can issue fixed penalty notices of up to £1,000, or £600 for those who pass their household waste to someone without the proper licence. They also have powers to stop, search and seize the vehicles of suspected fly-tippers. To help councils make full and proper use of their enforcement powers, we are seeking powers through the Crime and Policing Bill to provide statutory enforcement guidance that councils will need to have regard to. So it is a much more directional approach.

We need to get a grip on this issue because, as the right hon. Lady said, it affects both rural and inner-city areas. In rural areas, over 80% of farmers say they have been affected by fly-tipping on their land. We continue to work with the National Farmers Union and others through our fly-tipping prevention group to promote and disseminate good practice on how to prevent fly-tipping on private land.

I visited Watery Lane in Lichfield, where an entire van load was emptied one night, exactly as the right hon. Lady described. Those responsible knew that the other part of the road was closed, that there would be no passers-by and that there was no CCTV, so they just dumped the waste in the middle of the road, trapping people in their houses for a couple of days until that waste was shifted. I met the people affected and heard their anxiety about what they would do in a medical emergency and about how their kids would get to school. It is absolutely dreadful. I was curious about the fact that this was seen not as a nationally significant incident but as a local authority incident. That has provoked a series of questions in my mind about what qualifies as a significant incident.

We had a very good debate on fly-tipping last week at DEFRA oral questions—I am sorry the right hon. Lady was not able to join us for that. We heard about a series of excellent pieces of work being done by Luton council, which has had 32 prosecutions, and by Wolverhampton council, which uses store cards. In that case, if someone spots a fly-tipper, or they know somebody is doing something, and they report it to the council, they are rewarded with what is essentially a gift voucher. So there is some quite innovative work is going on.

Stoke-on-Trent council—a newly elected Labour council—has put this issue right at the top of its agenda. Having had 5,000 fly-tipping incidents, it has issued 4,800 enforcement notices and 1,974 fixed penalty notices, and there have been nine prosecutions. It is a kind of zero-tolerance approach. That does not necessarily mean that the issue goes away—often it goes somewhere else—but that approach in Stoke-on-Trent is delivering some really interesting wins. Another council is using drones as well; if someone thinks they are being watched, the disincentive is massive. So there is lots of innovation is going on, and nobody has a monopoly on wisdom when it comes to this issue.

The public also have a role to play, because approximately 60% of fly-tips involve household waste. We know where it happens—along the flank walls at the ends of terraces. I was out canvassing in Foleshill, and somebody was literally just about to do some fly-tipping in broad daylight in the middle of Coventry. The householder I was talking to spotted it and came out, and the guy got back in his van. Householders should check the register of waste carriers to avoid giving their waste to environmental criminals who promise quick, cheap waste collection but then dump the waste in our communities.

I would just say that Cheshire East's 2022-23 recycling statistics place it in the top 25% of local authorities—it is at 52%. Fresh statistics will be published tomorrow, but it is in the top quartile of local authorities when it comes to people's recycling rates, so it is clear that the local community really wants to do the right thing.

The right hon. Lady talked about waste carriers, which is a massive weakness. The Conservative Government left us with a system that is frankly not fit for purpose—it is essentially paper-based—so I have asked officials to look at how we can strengthen the current waste carriers, brokers and dealers regulatory regime to crack down on waste criminals. I will hopefully be saying something about that shortly—not today, but very soon.

The right hon. Lady raised the issue of householders getting rid of their rubbish. I do not really like the word “rubbish”; the word should be “materials”, because everything has a purpose. If we can repair it, reuse it or pass it on to friends and family, that is much better than simply giving it to the tip and saying, “Over to you—work out which waste stream it goes into.” DEFRA recently published guidance to ensure that local authorities consider certain factors when they review the frequency of residual waste collections, to ensure that reasonable standards are maintained. Part of that is to ensure that there is no increase in fly-tipping, so we expect local authorities to monitor any changes to collection frequencies to ensure that there are no adverse consequences. I hope that that reassures the right hon. Lady that that will be being done.

We recognise the importance of household waste recycling centres. It is down to individual local authorities to handle the operation and management of those in their areas. Previous research found that a link between fly-tipping and booking systems could not be ruled out. However, based on recent data, there appears to be no indication that such a link exists. There are some really interesting behaviour changes going on. Perhaps in the past, if people had to book, that made life more difficult. Perhaps, as we all get a bit more digitally savvy, people are getting used to the new way of doing things. There is conflicting research, but we will keep an eye on what we are hearing and whatever research we have on the

ground. It is down to councils to decide whether they will continue to charge for collection of garden waste.

We need to work together to tackle this issue. Keep Britain Tidy's Great British Spring Clean campaign is under way, and I am sure all Members will be out, as I will be, at a litter-pick. I will be cleaning up in Camden next week, and I will be out in Coventry this weekend, tackling waste one bin bag at a time.

We are also working with the national fly-tipping prevention group, which includes councils, the Environment Agency and police, to look at innovative ways of tackling fly-tipping. For Coventry, we have a Facebook wall of shame, which shows footage from CCTV that has been installed—I can see the hon. Member for Strangford thinking about how this can be used. It basically says, “Does anyone know these criminals? Pass the information on.”

Of course, reducing waste in the first place should mean that there is less of it to be dumped unlawfully. We have our circular economy taskforce of experts from industry, academia, civil society and beyond to help us develop a circular economy strategy for England. We are going to have a series of road maps for the interventions that the Government and others will make to support economic growth as part of our plan for change and to tackle the threats to our environment and circularity, such as those we see with fly-tipping.

The right hon. Lady is right to say that serious organised crime groups are involved. They are taking money at the top end and charging full price, but then doing something different and pocketing the fees. There is an awful lot of organised crime going on, and I am having weekly updates from the Environment Agency about enforcement and what steps we are taking to tackle that serious organised crime. We know that what gets tipped is often landfilled rather than recycled, remanufactured or repurposed.

Wherever people live, whether in a city, a town, a village or the country, they should be able to walk through their area without seeing litter. That includes Parliament; the other day I saw a Costa Coffee cup dumped by one of our Carriage Gates, which deeply annoyed me. People should be able to feel proud of their environment. That is why we are committed to stamping out antisocial behaviour such as fly-tipping from our streets and countryside.

It is time to dump the excuses. Working with councils, regulators and others, we will force the offenders to clean up their mess, we will tighten our systems to put a stop to the waste criminals and, together, we will keep our communities clean.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## UK-China Relations

4.30 pm

**Gregory Stafford** (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK-China relations.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Lewell. I welcome the opportunity to raise in this House the opportunities and implications of our relationship with China. I declare an interest as a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, alongside other colleagues in attendance today, who have consistently raised concerns over the UK's relationship with China.

Since Brexit, the UK has rightly sought to establish new economic and trade relationships beyond Europe, aiming to diversify access to key commodities. As a result, China has become the UK's third largest trading partner. This economic interdependence presents both an opportunity and a risk, which we must navigate carefully to uphold security, human rights and our fundamental values. Yet we have already seen how economic leverage can be misused. The UK-China economic and financial dialogue in January resulted in a rather uninspiring £600 million deal—hardly the sign of a robust, or indeed equitable, economic relationship. This is not a partnership; it is dependency, and dependency makes us vulnerable.

Take the UK's reliance on China for renewable energy components, for example. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition made it clear in her policy renewal speech last Tuesday that the best way to deliver clear energy and a better environment is with the markets. However, the reality is that much of our push for net zero is built on Chinese supply chains, particularly in solar panels, wind farms and electric vehicles. A long-term net zero strategy cannot mean long-term reliance on China.

**Tony Vaughan** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Lab): If the mechanisms and safeguards were robust enough to ensure that there is not slave labour in supply chains, would that address the hon. Member's concern?

**Gregory Stafford:** I will come on to slave labour almost immediately, but to answer the hon. Member directly, I think the security concerns are too great. I welcome safeguards to remove slave labour, but there are still concerns beyond that that we should be looking at.

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Of course, that is a wish, not a reality. We have no way of ascertaining whether suppliers are buying from slave labour, and there is no punishment available should they be doing so. The situation is quite the opposite in the United States, which sanctions companies that have been using slave labour. That has made a big difference. The Government have to get their head around this, otherwise we are just going to get slave labour-made products all over.

**Gregory Stafford:** My right hon. Friend, who has considerable and lengthy experience of dealing with China, makes a crucial point. There is no point in having a wish list if there is no sanction or enforcement to back it up.

Trade with China is tainted by human rights abuses. I will give an example. Over 1 million Uyghur Muslims are imprisoned in a vast network of forced labour camps in Xinjiang; it is the largest mass arbitrary detention

since the second world war. Despite China's denials, we know that UK industries, from textiles to electronics, remain dependent on materials from that region. Xinjiang produces between 20% and 25% of the world's cotton and polysilicon, which is a critical component in solar panels. That is why Lord Alton's amendment 18 to the Great British Energy Bill, which secured cross-party support, was so significant in ensuring that our supply chains align with human rights standards.

On 25 March 1807, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act received Royal Assent, yet 218 years later, Labour MPs blocked a ban on buying solar panels from China.

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:** My hon. Friend is making a very good speech, but this is not just about human rights abuses. There is a reason that China uses slave labour—and it came from nowhere 10 or 12 years ago to now be the dominant player in the business. It is because it does not pay salaries, which makes the arrays cheaper. British companies go rushing over to get them because they are cheaper, and the Government do not mind too much because they do not have to pay so much. The key is that it has to be proper and functional.

**Gregory Stafford:** I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. I will make similar remarks later in my speech, but that is key. Not only is it the use of slave labour, which should be enough to get the Government to start thinking seriously, but it is a complete undercutting of our market.

**Luke Taylor** (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): The hon. Gentleman is being generous with his time. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) almost took the words out of my mouth. Is it not critical to exclude slave labour from the supply chain for solar panels, in particular, not only on moral grounds, but in order to enable alternative producers in Europe, South America and North America to compete on a fair playing field?

**Gregory Stafford:** The hon. Member is entirely right. I would be very surprised if anyone in the Chamber did not agree with him. The key point is how we move from what I think is relatively universal agreement to actual sanctions and enforcement, to make sure that our manufacturers are competing on a level playing field.

As an example of that, a 2023 report from the Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice at Sheffield Hallam University noted that in 2020, China produced 75% of the global supply of solar grade polysilicon, and 45% of that was manufactured in Xinjiang. That is why the amendment that I alluded to earlier was crucial to cleaning up the supply chains and preventing the UK from becoming core to Chinese consumption.

**Tony Vaughan:** Will the hon. Member give way?

**Gregory Stafford:** I will in a minute; I just want to make a bit of progress.

On Times Radio, the Housing Minister gave his "absolute" guarantee that solar panels for GB Energy projects on hospitals and schools will not include slave labour. But without legal requirements for companies to comply, will the Minister outline how she can be sure that such labour will not be involved?



China's dominance in trade also extends to industrial production. The Intelligence and Security Committee report in July 2023 warned that the Chinese Communist party had penetrated "every sector" of the UK economy, leaving us with a £32 billion trade deficit. The consequences of this economic entanglement are already apparent. When a recent shipment from Xinjiang entered UK airports via European Cargo, neither Border Force nor the responsible Government Departments took the necessary steps to intervene. The failure to act leaves our economy exposed and less competitive.

Meanwhile, China remains the world's largest carbon emitter: it emits 15 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> annually and powers industries with coal while exporting steel and electric vehicles at artificially low prices. What is the UK doing? I urge the Minister to clarify whether the Government are considering measures similar to those that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) pointed out, the US is taking.

**Tony Vaughan:** Does the hon. Member not agree that the correct characterisation of the amendment to the Great British Energy Bill that he mentioned is that it was about restricting how the Government spend money on GB Energy? If it had been about a whole of industry approach, and stopping both private companies and the Government purchasing solar panels tainted by slave labour, that might have made sense.

**Gregory Stafford:** I fear that the hon. Member is dancing on the head of a pin there. To be frank, I do not agree with him on that. I think the Government should be really clear about what they are actually going to do to—

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Gregory Stafford:** Yes, but then I will make some progress.

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:** I need to deal with this point through my hon. Friend. The reality is that the Government already accept something on which I worked with them when they were in opposition, which is to get to exactly the same position as in the Health and Care Act 2022. The NHS is not allowed to buy anything made by slave labour—it encompasses everything. The amendment to the Great British Energy Bill would have done the same. To those who say, "It's too narrow because it's only one sector of the economy," I say that we have already done it with health and care, and Labour voted for that at the time. I was rather proud of that.

**Gregory Stafford:** My right hon. Friend should be very proud of that and everything that he has done to stand up to Chinese aggression, on trade and on a number of the other issues that we will touch on during the debate.

Let me move on to the security and rule of law elements that I have concerns about. Economic interdependence is only one dimension of our vulnerability. The UK must also confront China's growing efforts to exert influence and repress dissidents on British soil. The proposed Chinese mega-embassy at Royal Mint Court epitomises that threat. Despite being firmly opposed by the previous

Conservative Government, it is now likely to proceed, apparently due to lobbying by the Home Secretary, the Foreign Secretary and even the Prime Minister. Housing 700 diplomatic staff, the complex could become a hub for transnational repression and espionage, putting at risk Hongkongers, Tibetans, Uyghurs and Taiwanese individuals who have sought refuge in the UK. The brutal 2022 assault on Hong Kong protester Bob Chan in Manchester, perpetrated by Chinese diplomats who escaped justice under diplomatic immunity, should serve as a stark warning to us all.

Beyond our borders, China continues its assault on democracy and human rights. Some 2,000 political prisoners remain in arbitrary detention under Hong Kong's draconian national security law. One such prisoner, with whom I am sure we are all familiar—Jimmy Lai, a British citizen—has spent more than 1,500 days in solitary confinement without access to British consular support. The Government's failure to assist him speaks of a broader pattern of weakness in standing up to the Chinese regime.

I therefore support the Bill promoted by the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Blair McDougall), which would legally enforce stronger consular protections for British journalists detained abroad. I hope that the Government will start to support it as well.

**Mr Connor Rand** (Altrincham and Sale West) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the scale of fear in the Hong Kong community in this country is extremely concerning? Every aggressive act by the Chinese state, whether sanctions, violence against protesters or bounties, only increases the fear of the long arm of the Chinese state and of transnational repression, including among the Hong Kong diaspora I am fortunate to represent.

**Gregory Stafford:** The hon. Gentleman is entirely correct. The more the British Government and British agencies allow this to continue, the more China will believe it can get away with. As he says, that will put further fear into Hongkongers and others who are trying to escape the repression of China.

As China's domestic repression intensifies, so does its global influence. Its growing control over international institutions, use of economic coercion and unchecked expansion of surveillance technologies all undermine democratic norms worldwide. The UK must be proactive in countering that. Our commitment to democratic values and ethical trade should serve as a counterweight to Chinese authoritarianism. Yet, despite our growing presence in international forums, we have been hesitant to challenge China directly. The Minister must clarify what discussions have taken place with Beijing regarding its blatant contradictions on freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and political rights, in China and abroad.

The pattern is clear: the UK is being drawn into China's orbit economically, politically and strategically, while turning a blind eye, I am afraid, to its human rights abuses and security threats. We are facing not merely complacency from this Government, but complicity. Whether it is the approval of the Chinese mega-embassy, the failure to act on forced labour supply chains, or the refusal to stand up for British citizens unjustly imprisoned, this Labour Government have consistently chosen appeasement over action. The United States, and indeed

[Gregory Stafford]

the European Union, have already taken decisive steps to protect their economies, their security and their values. I ask the Minister, why is Britain lagging behind?

**Luke Taylor:** The hon. Gentleman is being generous with his time. Yesterday, I was lucky enough to meet Sebastien Lai, son of Jimmy Lai, who is still being held in Hong Kong by the Chinese authorities. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government must take every opportunity available to them—every visit, every meeting with Chinese authorities—to raise the case of Jimmy Lai and demand that he is released as soon as possible?

**Gregory Stafford:** The hon. Gentleman is right. I met Sebastien Lai myself a few weeks ago and he made similar points to me, which I entirely agree with. To put it at its mildest, it is regrettable that the Prime Minister has not made this a priority. I hope that the Government's decision not to engage with Sebastien Lai on this changes rapidly, because if it does not, it will send a dreadful message to others who are in similar situations and—as I said to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Rand)—will allow China to continue without check.

We must wake up. The CCP does not seek partnership with us: it seeks control. The UK must take urgent steps to decouple from economic dependency, to strengthen our national security and to reclaim our sovereignty before it is too late. I look forward to the Minister's response and, more importantly, to seeing real action from the Government.

**Emma Lewell (in the Chair):** I remind hon. Members to bob if they wish to be called in the debate.

4.45 pm

**Chris McDonald** (Stockton North) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Lewell. I thank the hon. Member for Farnham and Bordon (Gregory Stafford) for securing the debate. It is a pleasure to follow him, because I want to expand on some of the points he made about the dependence of our industry and economy on China.

I have worked in China and have friends there. I am certainly no Sinophobe, but I do think we need to be clear-eyed about the fact that we are in economic competition with China. The hon. Member for Farnham and Bordon described it as a relationship of dependency, and I fear that that is the position. An inter-dependent relationship would be fine, but we are in more of a dependent relationship.

I remember being in China in 2015, at the launch of the 13th five-year plan. I was shocked at what I saw as a big competitive threat to the UK. At that time, President Xi was in London—we had done a bit of a swap—and was meeting the Prime Minister here. The Prime Minister said he was enthused by President Xi's plan for the belt and road initiative, and he directed the City of London to fund it. From where I was sitting, that seemed like an extremely bad idea.

I was talking to British engineering companies that had been told they would get three contracts in China. In the first contract they would deliver a machine, in the

second contract they would deliver the drawing, and in the third contract they would supervise the Chinese company that would do the installation on their behalf. Many of those companies no longer exist because they have been competed out of the market by China.

It is the job of the UK Government to make sure that we site jobs in south Wales rather than Wuhan, and in Teesside rather than Tianjin. I fear that over the past couple of decades we have been too keen to pursue lower-cost goods rather than invest in our own industries.

The industry that I know best is materials. Some of the critical raw materials we need for our future are gallium, germanium and neodymium—I apologise to *Hansard* reporters for sounding like a Tom Lehrer song. Those are incredibly serious minerals that are essential for our future. For most of them, China either dominates the mining or has the materials processing capability for about 90% of the global market. It is important for us to consider how we can secure materials processing in future.

Just this week Richard Holtum, the chief executive of Trafigura, the world's biggest private metals trading company, recommended that Governments nationalise their metals-processing industries in order to compete with China.

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:** The hon. Member is talking about a critical area for us all. Those minerals are best described as the oil of the 21st century: who controls them controls the way we live our lives. Surely we cannot consider that China is benign in this market. Quite recently—about two years ago—China blocked Japan from access to the market, so Japan then set up its own position. That attitude shows us what the Chinese intend to use this for if they have to deal with countries like the UK. If they blocked us off, it would cause us chaos.

**Chris McDonald:** The right hon. Gentleman is exactly right. We heard the Chancellor of the Exchequer say a few hours ago that economic security was national security. The two cannot be divided. Because of our belief in the free market, we thought that as long as we have a trading partner we can buy goods from, we are left in a secure position. But we must why—why does China choose to dominate these markets? Because it is an extension of Chinese foreign policy. The same is true of trade. The Chinese belt and road initiative seems to me to be a deliberate policy to bypass the traditional trading ports of Goa, Aden and Hong Kong, where the UK has historically had a strong foothold, to ensure that China dominates trade routes.

The real question is what we do about this. The mindset we need to have is that China has the first-mover advantage in this new industrial revolution. We had the first-mover advantage in the last industrial revolution. How could a country have competed with us in the late 19th century? That mindset means investing in our own industries, and using our own market to do so. We can learn from China in this sense: we can use our own public procurement and invest in our industries. We have a great nickel producer at Clydach; the Chinese tried to copy that process but were unable to do so. Our Lochaber aluminium plant was set up to serve the nation in the late 1920s, and it still exists and is worthy of further investment. The UK also has one of the six cobalt refineries in Europe.

But what of copper? We cannot achieve anything without copper, yet we have no copper-refining capacity in the UK, despite being the fifth largest exporter of copper in the world. These are the issues that we need to take seriously to ensure that we can have an independent economic policy and an independent foreign policy when it comes to China. That is important for our industries and our foreign policy, but it is also important for the communities like the one I represent, where people have relied on good jobs in these industries. We should prize those jobs being in the UK.

4.50 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Lewell. I congratulate the hon. Member for Farnham and Bordon (Gregory Stafford) on setting the scene so well. Those who have intervened have undermined the issue.

I declare an interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief. I want to address one of the pressing moral imperatives of our time: the systematic persecution of religious minorities in China and its implication for the right to freedom of religion or belief. The Minister understands these issues incredibly well, and I know that her answers will encapsulate our thoughts, and particularly mine, in relation to freedom of religion or belief.

The human right to freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in international law, but China continues to trample on it with impunity. If we as a nation truly stand for these freedoms for all mankind—as we should and, I believe, as we do—we must take a firmer stance against China's systematic campaign to erase religious identity.

The United Kingdom Government champion FORB through their envoy and through their position at the UN, the G7 and other multilateral bodies. The UK Government have a firm stance on human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief. The Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor and, indeed, the Minister have all raised human rights issues with their Chinese counterparts, and those concerns must be amplified when discussing the blatant violation of religious freedoms in China. On behalf of all those persecuted and forgotten, I thank them for their efforts.

Today, I speak for those who have no voice—there are a great many in China at this moment. The Uyghur population in Xinjiang continue to face relentless oppression for their religious identity, and this targeting is part of a broader state-sponsored campaign against religious communities across China, Tibet, Hong Kong, Taiwan and, indeed, any other area that potentially interests the Chinese Government. It is my hope that the international community will not allow such blatant violations of religious freedom to continue unchecked.

China has continued to crack down on any form of free expression in Hong Kong. Journalists, activists and religious leaders have been silenced, arrested and forced into exile. Churches and religious organisations have been pressured to align with the Communist party's ideology, which is completely alien to, for instance, being a Christian—it just does not work out.

The systematic erosion of religious freedom and civil liberties in Hong Kong is yet another sign of the Chinese Communist party's wider goal of imposing absolute ideological control over every aspect of life in China.

There are confirmed reports that hundreds of thousands—possibly more—have been forced to renounce their faith in so-called re-education camps. Some Uyghur Muslims have been instructed to re-educate themselves, and forced to pledge loyalty to the Communist party and endure physical and psychological abuse.

If we in this House stand for FORB, and I believe we do, we must unequivocally condemn this assault on not only the Uyghur people's right to worship freely, but everyone's right to worship freely. It is a direct attack on mankind's faculty of free agency. It is not just the Uyghur Muslims but Christians, Buddhists and the Falun Gong. It is any person who does not happen to conform to what the Chinese Communist party wants them to conform to.

The Chinese Communist party has moved from a nominal acceptance of ethnic diversity to an active campaign of assimilation in Tibet and Xinjiang, where religion is central to culture and national identity. The CCP aims to bring religious practice under total party control, replacing spiritual and personal beliefs with loyalty to Chinese cultural nationalism. The state is not merely suppressing faith: it is attempting to supplant it with devotion to the great Communist party—or they say it is anyway. The Bible tells us very clearly that the great will fall and the mighty will be struck down, and their day is coming.

The right to freedom of religion or belief is the bedrock of a just society and transcends political and economic interests. The UK cannot stand by as an authoritarian hand passes over what was once a peaceful society, turning every community neighbouring China into an ideological machine, as we see operating in North Korea. Should we allow it to continue, we will have not only failed those who suffer under the regime but emboldened the CCP to expand its repression even further. The time for stronger action is now.

The UK has long championed the right to FORB on the world stage, but our response to these abuses must be stronger. The UK Government have consistently raised issues and concerns about religious freedom in China with their counterparts, as the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and others have made clear. However, it is now time for stronger, more decisive action.

I conclude by calling on the Government to take steps to impose sanctions on all individuals and entities—the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) has said it on numerous occasions—responsible for FORB violations in China. I also call on them to strengthen UK import regulations to ensure that goods produced through forced labour linked to religious persecution, whether in Xinjiang or elsewhere, do not ever enter our markets.

4.56 pm

**Tony Vaughan** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Lewell.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Farnham and Bordon (Gregory Stafford) on securing this important debate. I acknowledge my interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary China group. I pay tribute to the Minister for her role in improving the UK-China relationship and the UK's bilateral relationships with other Asian nations such as the Philippines and Thailand. These are the fastest-growing economies in the world, and we need to trade and invest where the economic action is.



[Tony Vaughan]

I participated in a cross-party delegation trip to Beijing at the start of this year. During the trip, it was clear to me—with my eyes wide open—that there is much that the UK and China can co-operate on. The focus of the delegation was on how the UK and China can strengthen global artificial intelligence safety regulations, and what learning we should share regarding our domestic approaches to that issue. It was clear that the UK and China can also increase co-operation on trade, especially by increasing trade in agrifood, life sciences, pharmaceuticals, education and professional services. There is also more we can do together to tackle climate change, promote biodiversity and strengthen global pandemic preparedness.

**Gregory Stafford:** I am fascinated by the argument the hon. Member is developing. Could he point to anything significant that China is doing to reduce its footprint?

**Tony Vaughan:** It is difficult to see how we are going to address these huge global challenges without involving China. I am not advocating for China, but relevant to the hon. Member's question is the fact that it has a hugely fast-growing green energy technology sector. Of course China has huge carbon omissions as well, and that is another issue.

**Edward Morello** (West Dorset) (LD): To answer the question from the hon. Member for Farnham and Bordon, 35% of China's energy is renewable energy, which is up from 0% 15 years ago. By the end of this decade, given the rate at which it is expanding, China will be responsible for 60% of the globe's renewable energy production.

**Tony Vaughan:** I am grateful for the hon. Member's intervention; he is more on top of the statistics than I am.

With China being a member of the G20 and the UN Security Council, and the third-largest trading partner for the UK—if one includes Hong Kong—it is entirely logical that the Government should aspire to a more stable and consistent relationship. To do anything different would not be in the UK's national interests.

**Mike Martin** (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): There are well-documented links between Russia and China. It is publicised and well-known that China buys Russia's oil and all the rest of it. We are fighting Russia at the moment in Europe; it is our primary adversary. Why on earth would we want to have a close and stable relationship with China?

**Tony Vaughan:** As I said, I am not advocating for China; I am saying that, as the third-largest trading partner with Hong Kong, we cannot pretend that it does not exist. We cannot pretend that there is no role for building dialogue and engagement. The reality is that, given the way the tectonic plates of global affairs are moving, it is in China's interests to have a stable Europe. Who else will buy its electric cars, for example? There is an evolution in the way we should look at these things, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman's general point.

Over the last 14 years, British foreign policy towards China resembled a rollercoaster. We had the golden era under the Cameron Government, when President Xi enjoyed a

state visit and, as the Foreign Secretary recently reminded us, had a beer in a pub with the Prime Minister. We had the May Government's justified scepticism about China General Nuclear Power Corporation's involvement in Hinkley, and then the Johnson Government's confused China policy, culminating in Liz Truss's cold war 2.0-style policy. No serious nation should aim to have a bilateral relationship with the world's second-largest economy that resembles a fairground ride. The Chancellor's trip to China for the economic and financial dialogue in January, concluding agreements of up to £1 billion for the UK economy over five years, is an example of how taking a grown-up relationship to China is in our national interest.

**Richard Foord** (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): The Intelligence and Security Committee published a report on China in 2023. The public version said that it is China's

"ambition at a global level—to become a technological and economic superpower, on which other countries are reliant—that poses a national security threat to the UK."

How does the hon. Gentleman see it?

**Tony Vaughan:** I completely agree that a national security-first approach to China must be the position. As I understand it, that is the position of the Government. That is why the position taken on the embassy is a national security issue; I know that there has been some debate about that, but I am not in a position to second-guess MI6, MI5 and the security services, and that has to be the lens through which we look at these issues.

I have referred to the EFD outcomes. Critics of engagement overlook the fact that some nations who took a robust approach to China were still engaging in the background. If we step back while competitors—including the United States, which has also taken a robust approach to China—are engaging, we are missing a trick. The UK had not sent a Prime Minister to China in many years. I am pleased that the Government aim to have a relationship with China based on what I understand to be a national security approach, while also co-operating with, competing with and challenging China where appropriate. Engaging with does not, of course, mean agreeing with.

**Jim Shannon:** I have listened to what the hon. Gentleman has said. I am conscious of what he is putting forward, but I do not hear anything in his speech to do with human rights or religious persecution. We must make that central to our economic business with China. That is the Minister's mission, and I hope the hon. Gentleman will come on to that shortly and reassure us that those are also his thoughts.

**Tony Vaughan:** That is exactly what I am now moving on to. As I said, engaging with does not mean agreeing with. Part of our stable and consistent relationship with China involves raising human rights concerns with it, stably and consistently, as the Prime Minister did with the case of Jimmy Lai when he met President Xi last year. I recently met Jimmy Lai's son Sebastien and the barristers representing his father and I was very concerned to hear of Jimmy Lai's deteriorating medical situation. I urge the Prime Minister to meet his team to discuss what the British Government can do to effect his release.

Another example is the compelling evidence of the use of forced labour in energy supply chains in China, especially polysilicon. I do not believe our green energy transition should be built from solar panels built using forced labour. We must take a whole-of-industry approach, with robust safeguards against the import of solar panels when it cannot be shown that they are free from forced labour. In the long term, our country needs to become self-sufficient in our industrial supply chains, such as renewable technology production. I completely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Chris McDonald) said about protecting UK domestic industries and jobs, which must be prioritised.

A grown-up relationship with China means believing that we should work with China on areas that do not impact national security and human rights, while also putting our foot down in areas that do. It will always be a highly complex bilateral relationship, with tricky trade-offs and tensions, and I fully accept that there is a role for pressing China extremely hard, as some in this Chamber have done. I am pleased to see the Government's success so far in bringing stability and pragmatism to that relationship.

5.5 pm

**Calum Miller** (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Lewell. I thank the hon. Member for Farnham and Bordon (Gregory Stafford) for securing this important debate. On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I concur with the view expressed in the integrated review refresh 2023 that China represents a strategic challenge to the UK, “across almost every aspect of national life and government policy.”

This debate has been a chance to consider how the Government are focusing on meeting that challenge. Suffice to say, from my and my party's perspective, at this stage it is disappointing. I accept that it is not easy, as the hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Tony Vaughan) just set out; the Conservative party lurched from sharing pints with the President of China to in 2021 designating China as, “the biggest state-based threat to the UK's economic security”.

Xi is able to think strategically over many years, now that he has such great control of the Chinese apparatus, so the UK needs to do better and be more constant.

First, we need to be more clear-sighted about the threat that China poses. Secondly, we need to make use of the full apparatus available to us. Thirdly, we must set out some red lines, and show the Chinese Government that breaching them will have consequences. The hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe is right to highlight the scale that China has when it comes to the global economy, but the hon. Member for Stockton North (Chris McDonald) is also right to point out, from his position of experience, the importance that that has for UK industry. However, we must balance those economic interests with the threat, and it is my view that, at the moment, the Government's position is too accommodating and not sufficiently robust.

**Lincoln Jopp** (Spelthorne) (Con): We may disagree about what we heard earlier on today in the spring statement about whether the economy is growing, but we are certain that this Government will grasp ever

more desperately at the will-o'-the-wisp of growth in the months and years to come. Does he agree that—unlike the hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe, who said he went to China with his eyes wide open—we might as a country end up turning a Nelsonian eye to human rights abuse, to the fact we are exporting our net zero to a highly carbonised economy and to the cyber-attacks we experience daily from China in order to chase after growth that is not coming?

**Calum Miller:** I agree with the hon. Member on two fronts. First, he and I agree more on our disappointment with today's growth figure than he gives me credit for. Secondly, the Government have set out that they wish at times to challenge, at times to co-operate and at other times to compete with China, but it is my contention that, as he set out, they are too intent on co-operation and not sufficiently intent on challenge.

I will briefly set out three areas of threat, starting with security and echoing the comments made by others. We face direct threats in the form of cyber-attacks, the threat of China as an ally to our enemies and see China threatening some of our own allies, including Taiwan, South Korea and Japan. Secondly, we face threats in terms of economic vulnerability. Many other Members have spoken about our dependency. In addition, the Government's regrettable decision to cut the UK's overseas aid budget creates an opening space for China in the global south, through its belt and road initiative, to increase the debt dependency of countries on itself, and therefore to increase its influence in the world. On the economic side, there are credible reports of China's attempts to steal intellectual property from the United Kingdom's university and tech sectors, and I am concerned that the Government are not doing enough to stop that.

**Chris McDonald:** The hon. Member mentions Chinese theft of intellectual property. Does he agree that it is also concerning when we give it away, such as when UK universities set up campuses in China to train Chinese technicians to outcompete British industry?

**Calum Miller:** It is a delicate balancing act, as the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members have articulated. If we want collaboration and co-operation then information will inevitably flow, but it is important that there is transparency about that and that the right economic benefit is derived from any intellectual property, if it is transferred.

The third, and perhaps most important, area of threat is around human rights and political interference—other hon. Members have spoken about this, so I shall be brief. I too have met with the team supporting Jimmy Lai and his son Sebastien and I call on the Government to reassure us that his case is being upheld. I also had the opportunity to meet with two of those people in the United Kingdom who, in return for campaigning for real democracy in Hong Kong, have suffered being placed under bounties by the Hong Kong authorities—I know that one such person, Carmen Lau, is in the Public Gallery.

The fact that the Hong Kong authorities see fit to distribute posters and letters on UK soil to neighbours, in order to intimidate those who have stood up for political rights in Hong Kong, is appalling. I would like reassurance from the Government that much more is

[Calum Miller]

being done, including through our police forces, to identify who, within the allegedly diplomatic team from China, has done that. It is critical that we take these items together, see them as part of one entity and take a holistic approach to China. Too often, the Government have treated such things in compartments, spoken briefly about human rights and then failed to address other issues.

To conclude, I call on the Government to use the apparatus available to them, to generate a human rights and democracy report, to conduct the audit on China that they have promised, to fully introduce the foreign influence registration scheme and place China in the enhanced tier, and to ensure that China is fully considered in the strategic defence review. We cannot allow China to dominate our relationship with it. The Government must be prepared to set out red lines, and to demonstrate the consequences if China does not observe them.

5.12 pm

**Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Farnham and Bordon (Gregory Stafford) for securing this important debate. UK-China relations will be increasingly important as we progress, and as the threat of China becomes more evident. I thank all hon. Members for their contributions. It seems there is a consensus about the threat that China poses, although it is not entirely unanimous; the hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Tony Vaughan) seems to have a slightly different approach. I believe that China is one of the greatest threats—if not the greatest threat—to our freedom and security, which is why it is vital to address this issue.

China is a nation with a proud history and a rich civilisation, deserving of respect—but that respect cannot come at the expense of turning a blind eye to aggression, human rights abuses and attempts to undermine the international order. The Government have announced that they are conducting a China audit, but we are yet to hear what that actually entails. It is not enough for Ministers to review our policy towards China behind closed doors; the British people deserve transparency and Parliament deserves answers.

**Edward Morello:** Will the hon. Member give way?

**Andrew Rosindell:** I will make some progress, then come to the hon. Member if there is time.

I begin with the issue of Taiwan-Republic of China. Beijing's increasingly assertive behaviour towards Taiwan—including military activity around the island, airspace incursions and naval operations—is a cause of growing concern. I ask the Minister: does the UK remain committed to the One China policy? If so, how do the Government intend to balance that position with our strong interest in supporting Taiwan's democracy and the principle that the future of Taiwan should be determined peacefully and without coercion? The people of Taiwan should have the freedom to shape their own future without the threat of force. What steps are the Government taking, alongside the United States, Japan and Australia, to reduce tensions and deter any escalation in the Taiwan strait? Taiwan is a proud democracy and deserves to have its freedom. It should not be coerced—and, as an ally of Taiwan, we should certainly be standing shoulder to shoulder with it.

Next, I would like to say a few words about the belt and road initiative. Beijing claims that that programme is about infrastructure and development, but in reality it serves as a tool for strategic dominance and debt entrapment across Africa, Asia, and even parts of Europe. We have seen the consequences of that so-called investment: developing nations find themselves shackled by unsustainable debt, forced to hand over key infrastructure and strategic assets when they cannot meet Beijing's demands. What is the Government's strategy to counter that growing influence? How are we supporting our Commonwealth partners and other vulnerable nations to resist that economic model, and will the Minister tell us what alternative we are offering to the developing world, to avoid those nations being trapped in Beijing's orbit?

Turning to Hong Kong, the Chinese Communist party's flagrant violation of the Sino-British joint declaration is seriously jeopardising the "one nation, two systems" framework. Beijing has crushed political opposition, tried to silence the free press, and criminalised dissent. In light of that, I ask the Minister what our long-term strategy is for holding Beijing accountable for breaking its treaty obligations. How are we supporting British nationals overseas who have made the courageous decision to leave Hong Kong and settle in the United Kingdom, and who may be at risk of transitional repression?

The case of Jimmy Lai stands as a stark symbol of Beijing's assault on press freedom and political dissent in Hong Kong. Lai, a British citizen and a founder of *Apple Daily*, has been targeted under Hong Kong's draconian national security law for the so-called crime of defending democracy. His prosecution is not just an attack on an individual, but an attempt to silence independent journalism and intimidate anyone who dares to criticise the CCP's actions in Hong Kong. What steps are the Government taking to protect the rights of British citizens such as Jimmy Lai who are facing politically motivated prosecutions in Hong Kong? Does the Minister agree that this politically motivated trial must end and that Jimmy Lai must be released, and what is the Government's strategy for making the case that the national security law should be replaced?

The CCP's human rights abuses in Xinjiang are well documented, with forced labour, mass internment, and systematic persecution of the Uyghur population. It is therefore deeply concerning that the Government appear to be resisting efforts to block the procurement of Chinese solar panels linked to forced labour through the Great British Energy Bill. I ask the Government directly: what assurances can Ministers provide that the UK's transition to net zero will not come at the cost of complicity in modern slavery? How will the Government ensure that supply chains for renewable energy infrastructure are free from forced labour and other human rights abuses?

As the Leader of the Opposition rightly pointed out in her recent speech, the idea of achieving net zero by 2050 while relying heavily on Chinese technology and supply chains is "fantasy politics". We cannot afford an over-reliance on China, as should have become clear following the pandemic. What steps are the Government taking to reduce strategic dependence on China, particularly in critical industries such as energy, telecommunications and rare earth minerals?



The proposed Chinese super-embassy in London raises concerns about Beijing's growing influence in the UK. The unprecedented size and scope of that facility has prompted worries about potential security risks and pressure on Chinese dissidents. Reports of covert Chinese police stations in the UK add to those fears. Have the Government assessed the national security risks involved, and will they consider restricting or scaling down that proposal? More broadly, what steps are the Government taking to prevent foreign powers from using British soil for covert operations or political intimidation? I want to make the case again—as my party has said before—that China should be on the enhanced tier of the foreign influence registration scheme.

Finally, I must raise the Chancellor of the Exchequer's recent visit to China. What, if any, assurances did the Chancellor seek on human rights during her visit on Hong Kong, the Uyghurs or Taiwan and how do the Government intend to ensure that any future economic engagement with China does not compromise our strategic interests? China presents one of the big geopolitical challenges of our age, not just to Britain, but to the entire free world; we cannot afford to be naive. Engagement must be grounded in realism, not wishful thinking. We must work with our allies to check aggression and defend our democratic values. The British people deserve to know where their Government stand, and the Government must be prepared to act and not just talk.

5.20 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Catherine West):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Lewell, in such a crucial debate. I thank the hon. Member for Farnham and Bordon (Gregory Stafford) for securing it and all hon. Members for their valuable contributions. I will try to respond to the points raised after setting out the Government's strategic approach to China.

The Government will always put the UK national interest first. Our approach will be consistent, long term and pragmatic. In an ever changing geopolitical context, our relations are critical in ensuring the UK's resilient growth, maintaining our position as a responsible global actor and defending our security and values. That means co-operating where we can on issues including net zero, health and trade, competing where our interests differ and challenging where we must to protect our national security and values.

Engaging with China is both pragmatic and necessary to support our domestic and international priorities, not least because we are both global players with large economies and permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council. We must engage regularly to advance our national interests, whether it is on issues of co-operation such as the global green transition or issues where we firmly disagree, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine. That is why the Prime Minister met President Xi at the G20 last year, and the Foreign Secretary held meetings with Foreign Minister Wang Yi in the UK last month and in Beijing last year.

The Chancellor and Energy Secretary have also visited China, and I visited Hong Kong in November of last year. Across all these meetings, the Government have pressed, and will continue to press, the Chinese Government on

issues which matter to us and this House, such as calling for the unacceptable sanctions on our parliamentarians to be lifted and demanding British national Jimmy Lai's immediate release. I have been meeting with Jimmy Lai's family since before the hon. Member for Farnham and Bordon was elected to this House, and we remain robust in the defence of his freedom of speech and defend his family as British citizens.

We consistently raise human rights concerns, including on Xinjiang cotton production and solar panels, which have been mentioned, have called for the repeal of the national security law and sanctioned Chinese companies over their supply of dual-use and military goods to Russia's military-industrial complex. The stark truth is that under the previous Government, we did not have the channels in place to pursue and protect UK interests sufficiently and to raise these important issues at the highest levels in the Chinese Government.

**Calum Miller:** I am very grateful to the Minister for bringing her expertise to the topic. She has highlighted the way in which the Government is trying to deepen that relationship with China, in the belief that by having a better relationship, we can better serve UK interests. However, I think she will recognise that whether it is in the case of Jimmy Lai or in the bounties placed on Hong Kong activists, the relationship goes only one way. Could she say a little bit more about the sticks that the Government are prepared to use if they do not get the outcomes that we are looking for?

**Catherine West:** National security is paramount, and any engagement will be encased in that metal case of national security.

Turning to the Government's China audit, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Tony Vaughan) has said, under the last Government, our China policy was inconsistent, swinging back and forth—from David Cameron's golden era to Liz Truss's confrontational approach—as often as they changed Prime Minister. That is why a team in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has been conducting the China audit. It has consulted widely across Government and with a wide range of external stakeholders, including with some hon. Members in this room, who have been to see the Foreign Secretary to discuss their concerns. That is already proving valuable in developing policies and planning engagement.

**Edward Morello:** The China audit was due to be published earlier this year. I understand it is now slated for the summer. Will the Minister take this opportunity to confirm when it will be published? Will she also, moreover, confirm that the Foreign Secretary will appear before the Foreign Affairs Committee to answer questions about it?

**Catherine West:** I can certainly confirm that the audit will be made public before the end of the spring. Dates in the diary with the Foreign Affairs Committee are a matter for the Chair of that Committee, and anyone who dares to go against that Chair will be a very frightened individual indeed! I am sure that at any invitation, the Foreign Secretary will appear before the Committee, to speak on any topic. The House will have seen the marked difference between this Government, who are

[Catherine West]

working hard to protect and pursue our interests, and the previous Government, who failed to stand up for British interests by having the difficult conversations with China that are so necessary.

I turn to national security. Any Government's first duty is to keep the country safe, and we remain fully committed to that mission. We have taken strong action through the National Security Act 2023, which gives us robust powers to protect our industries and institutions. The UK is clear that attempts by foreign Governments to coerce, intimidate, harass or harm their critics overseas, undermining democracy and the rule of law, are utterly unacceptable. That is why we invited some of the British national overseas passport holders who have personally been put at risk by those sorts of disgraceful actions. That is why our defending democracy taskforce is driving a robust and co-ordinated response across Government and law enforcement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Rand), who is a doughty campaigner for British national overseas passport holders, made a very important point. The Government are taking a reasonable and proportionate approach to creating secure and resilient growth for the UK. With careful handling, national security and growth can be mutually reinforcing. We will continue to bolster resilience to economic shocks and tackle economic-based threats to national security. I ask anybody who has personal experiences and is concerned about any BNO passport holder in their constituency to write to me or to the Minister for Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley North (Dan Jarvis), immediately.

Growth and economic security, of course, are crucial and we cannot ignore China, given that it is the world's second-largest economy and our fourth-largest trading partner, worth over £110 billion per annum. That shows why the partnership is so crucial for UK and global growth. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Chris McDonald) said, it is so important that that growth must be secure and resilient. He was quite right to point out a number of threats to that growth—including questions about public procurement,

intellectual property and tech—and how it dovetails with our domestic industrial strategy. As he is aware through the role that he has here in Parliament, the domestic industrial strategy will be developed in concert with the China audit. I welcome his experience in understanding the depth of complexity around materials, in particular, and I look forward to hearing more about his expertise in that area.

On climate, in particular, and net zero, it is also essential that we engage China on global challenges. As the world's largest investor in sustainable energy, the largest emitter of greenhouse gases and the largest producer of coal, the choices that China makes are critical to global efforts to tackle climate change, not just in China but across the world.

On human rights, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) raised issues on which we need to challenge China. He is aware that it is our duty, as the Government, to hold China to account on its human rights record, including its repression of people in Xinjiang and Tibet. I refer him to the item 4 statement at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, fresh off the press, which reflects his concerns about freedom of religion or belief, which he has raised in this House on a number of occasions.

I turn to the UK's long and historic relationship with Hong Kong. Forgive me if I run out of time, Ms Lewell. I hardly need to tell the House how deep and strong our people-to-people and trade links with Hong Kong are. That is why the Government will continue to stand with the people of Hong Kong. Since the launch of the British national overseas visa route, we have granted more than 219,000 applications, and we will continue to welcome and protect all Hongkongers who have made the UK their home in recent years. The Government recognise the ongoing erosion of rights and freedoms that are threatening Hong Kong's way of life.

I briefly turn to Taiwan, which the Opposition spokesman raised. The UK—

**Emma Lewell (in the Chair):** Order.

5.30 pm

*Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).*

# Written Statements

Wednesday 26 March 2025

## DEFENCE

### Vulcan Handover Date

**The Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry (Maria Eagle):** The Vulcan Naval Reactor Test Establishment in Caithness, Scotland, has been used for prototype testing of nuclear propulsion plants for more than 50 years. The last test reactor was shut down in 2015 and more recent activity at the site is focused on fuel management to support the ongoing safe operation of our current nuclear submarines.

The site continues to provide valuable support to the submarine enterprise, ensuring our submarines remain safe to operate in meeting our national security requirements, including the continuous at-sea deterrent, and we expect this to continue until at least April 2027. This maintains around 280 highly skilled jobs for the contractor Rolls-Royce Submarines and the Ministry of Defence.

Once complete, the plan is to hand over the management of the Vulcan site from the MOD to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority for decommissioning to commence. Synergies are being sought between the NRTE site and the neighbouring Dounreay civil nuclear site, which is also being decommissioned, to ensure we deliver value for taxpayers' money.

In the longer term, the MOD remains committed to decommissioning of the Vulcan site and to remove fuel from the site as soon as is reasonably practicable.

[HCWS551]

## SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

### Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council Report: Government Response

**The Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms (Chris Bryant):** The security and resilience of the UK's digital infrastructure is of central importance to the Government's strategic objectives. This statement provides an update on the Government's response to the Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council's report and recommendations. It outlines the Government's approach to addressing the risks to supply chains that support advanced connectivity technologies.

I am grateful to the Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council for its report and recommendations, setting out the risks we still carry and what the Government, working with industry, should do to address them.

Ensuring that individuals and businesses have access to high-quality connectivity serves as the foundation of our modern, digital economy. Given our current and future reliance on this connectivity, it is essential that these technologies are secure and resilient. This includes ensuring that we have a healthy, competitive telecoms supply chain, both to drive innovation and to avoid the risks that may arise from acute market concentration. In the broader digital sector, last year's Crowdstrike incident, which led to IT outages worldwide, showed just how disruptive it can be when something goes wrong with a supplier to which we have high exposure.

I accept the Council's recommendations. The previous Government took steps to begin addressing these risks, but Government and industry still have more to do. In the Government's response, we reaffirm our commitment to secure and resilient digital infrastructure. We outline the steps we will take to manage risks in the short term, transition to a healthier supply chain in the medium term, and prevent similar risks from emerging in the long term.

By addressing these issues, we can drive growth and build sovereign capability by increasing the share of technologies developed within the UK. With a strong research base and a range of suppliers of advanced connectivity solutions based here, we aim to expand the UK's role in the global supply chain and influence the next generation of technologies to meet our connectivity needs.

To seize this opportunity, the Government have committed to advanced connectivity technologies as a key growth market in the forthcoming industrial strategy, utilising our available levers to maximise our potential. We will work in partnership with the mobile network operators to deliver the measures set out in this response. To ensure all our efforts are well-targeted and informed by those both developing and deploying these technologies, we will also establish a new Advanced Connectivity Technologies Council.

The security and resilience risks to our digital infrastructure are significant, but the economic potential that will be unlocked by cutting-edge connectivity is vast. Guided by the Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council's recommendations, the Government will work to advance secure, resilient and innovative digital infrastructure and the technologies that enable this, now and in the future.

The Government response will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

I look forward to continuing work to strengthen, secure and expand our digital infrastructure, working with stakeholders across the economy and international partners.

[HCWS552]





# Written Correction

*Wednesday 26 March 2025*

## Ministerial Correction

### EDUCATION

#### **Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill [Lords]**

*The following extract is from Second Reading of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill [Lords] on 25 February 2025.*

**Bridget Phillipson:** ... This Bill will bring together the many disparate parts of a very fragmented system, which employers, particularly smaller employers, often

find hard to navigate the right way through, and are not always clear about the best training and qualification routes in order to find the people that they need. Also, the changes we have made to English and maths in particular will support employers to create 10,000 additional apprenticeships every single year.

[*Official Report*, 25 February 2025; Vol. 762, c. 680.]

*Written correction submitted by the Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson):*

**Bridget Phillipson:** ... This Bill will bring together the many disparate parts of a very fragmented system, which employers, particularly smaller employers, often find hard to navigate the right way through, and are not always clear about the best training and qualification routes in order to find the people that they need. Also, the changes we have made to English and maths in particular will support employers to **unlock 10,000 additional apprenticeship completions** every single year.

# ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 26 March 2025

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[Lords].....	5WC



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**not later than  
Wednesday 2 April 2025**

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