

**Tuesday  
3 September 2024**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**Tuesday 3 September 2024**

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# House of Commons

*Tuesday 3 September 2024*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Speaker's Statement

**Mr Speaker:** I would like to draw Members' attention to the fact that the book for entering the private Members' Bill ballot is now open in the No Lobby. It will be open until the House rises today, and while the House is sitting tomorrow. The book will be available for Members to sign in the No Lobby until 6 pm on both days, at which point it will be taken to the Public Bill Office and remain open for signatures until the rise of the House. The ballot itself will be drawn at 9 am this Thursday, in Committee Room 8. An announcement setting out these and other arrangements, and the dates when ten-minute rule motions can be made and presentation Bills introduced, is published in the Order Paper.

## BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

### SESSIONAL RETURNS

*Ordered,*

That there be laid before the House Returns for Session 2023-24 of information and statistics relating to:

- (1) Business of the House
- (2) Closure of Debate, Proposal of Question, Allocation of Time and programming of Bills
- (3) Sittings of the House
- (4) Private Bills and Private Business
- (5) Public Bills
- (6) Delegated Legislation and Legislative Reform Orders
- (7) European Legislation, etc
- (8) Grand Committees and the Regional Affairs Committee
- (9) Panel of Chairs
- (10) Select Committees.—(*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

## Oral Answers to Questions

### TREASURY

*The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—*

#### Occupational Pensions: Tax Relief

1. **Mr Peter Bedford** (Mid Leicestershire) (Con): What assessment she has made of the adequacy of the level of tax relief for occupational pension contributions. [900205]

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves):** I welcome the hon. Member to his place.

The Government encourage savings to ensure that people have decent incomes in their retirement, for instance through pension tax relief. I welcome the strong cross-party support for automatic enrolment that has been received since 2005, and the fact that 11 million more people are now saving as a result. The Government have also launched a pensions review which will ensure that money set aside for retirement is working both for pensioners and for the UK economy.

I appreciate that Members on both sides of the House will have questions for me about the tax system today. I remind them that tax announcements will be made in the Budget on 30 October, alongside an independent forecast from the Office for Budget Responsibility. This will be a Budget to fix the foundations, to rebuild Britain, and to ensure that working people are better off.

**Mr Bedford:** Do the Government recognise the importance of workers' saving for their later years? Do they recognise that any moves to reduce the 25% tax-free drawdown, or reductions in tax relief on pension contributions, would be a disincentive, and would actually lead to more pensioner poverty?

**Rachel Reeves:** I recognise that for many people who work hard and save for retirement, that money is not enough. I believe that every penny saved in a pension should produce a decent return. Billions of pounds of investment could be unlocked in the UK economy and could work better for those saving for retirement, and we believe that the reforms we seek to introduce through the pensions review could increase their pension pots by £11,000. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is leading the review that I mentioned to ensure that pensioners receive a good deal in retirement, and that people who sacrifice and work hard to save for their retirement have a decent return on their investment.

**Jacob Collier** (Burton and Uttoxeter) (Lab): Pubs are the lifeblood of our local communities. In my constituency, the home of British brewing, we are blessed with wonderful pubs—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Unfortunately, supplementary questions must be linked to the main question.

**Jacob Collier:** Oh—sorry.

**Mr Speaker:** Don't worry. I now call the shadow Minister.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Droitwich and Evesham) (Con): I congratulate the Chancellor and the entire Treasury team on their appointments. We have always had civil, albeit occasionally robust, interactions, and I am sure that will continue, but it is now our job to hold them to account for the important decisions they make at the Treasury. During the election, Labour promised on more than 50 occasions not to increase taxes on working people. Does it now recognise that working people have pensions too, and can the Chancellor give those people, who are saving for the future, peace of mind by confirming that the Government will not increase taxes on pensions in the upcoming Budget?

**Rachel Reeves:** I am not going to speculate about what will be in the Budget, but I am absolutely determined to ensure that working people are better off. Under the last Government the tax burden reached its highest level for 70 years, and ordinary working people paid the price for that. This will be a Budget to fix the foundations of the economy after the mess left by the last Government, to rebuild Britain, and to make working people better off.

### Planning Reform: Fiscal Steps

2. **Alice Macdonald** (Norwich North) (Lab/Co-op): What fiscal steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to reform the planning system. [900206]

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Darren Jones):** We have committed ourselves to delivering 1.5 million new homes as part of our mission to achieve economic growth across the country, and we have already announced reforms of national planning policy that will help to get Britain building. They include the reintroduction of mandatory housing targets, and the removal of the effective ban on onshore wind in England.

**Alice Macdonald:** If unlocked, Anglia Square, a significant brownfield site in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), could provide more than 1,000 homes and many jobs. The last Government failed to support the progression of this important site. Can my right hon. Friend tell me what local authorities such as Norwich city council can expect from this Government's approach to delivering brownfield sites with partners?

**Darren Jones:** I thank my hon. Friend for her follow-up question and welcome her to her place. As she knows from the Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister, this Government take seriously our target to deliver 1.5 million new homes, and we will look at each and every opportunity across the country to do so. That includes making improvements to the system of developer contributions for community benefit to support the delivery of affordable housing and local infrastructure.

**Andrew George** (St Ives) (LD): The Minister knows that the planning system is built on the ability to make millionaires at the stroke of a pen as a result of passing planning permission, which does not necessarily result in developments that are in the best interests of a local community. Surely there is more that the Government can do to ensure that we tip the planning system towards meeting need, rather than greed.

**Darren Jones:** The issue of so-called hope value was referenced in the Labour party's manifesto, and the Government will set out further detail in due course.

### Inward Investment: Fiscal Steps

3. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): What fiscal steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to encourage inward investment. [900207]

8. **Alan Gemmell** (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): What fiscal steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to encourage inward investment. [900212]

13. **Uma Kumaran** (Stratford and Bow) (Lab): What fiscal steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to encourage inward investment. [900217]

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves):** Investment is at the heart of this Government's growth mission, alongside stability and reform. With robust fiscal rules and respect for economic institutions, the Government are building the confidence needed to deliver private sector investment. It is vital that the tax system also supports growth, and today I can confirm that the Government will outline a tax road map for business at the Budget to offer the certainty that encourages investment and gives business the confidence to grow, including our commitment to cap corporation tax at 25% for the duration of this Parliament and to retain full expensing.

**Chi Onwurah:** I thank the Chancellor for her response. Last year, the north-east attracted 67 foreign direct investment projects, creating over 4,000 jobs. In the key growth sectors, from advanced manufacturing to health and tech, those who know the north-east know our huge potential, and I know that the Chancellor recognises that too. What is she doing with the Mayor of the North East, Kim McGuinness, to ensure that more global investors are aware of the north-east's strengths and that we can attract more inward investment, creating more jobs?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend makes an important contribution on behalf of her constituents, based on her background of working in science and technology before entering this House. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the north-east has huge potential to grow the economy through sectors including advanced manufacturing, health, technology and our creative industries, and this Government will work with our local mayors, including Kim McGuinness, to develop ambitious, long-term local growth plans that reflect the north-east's strengths. We will look to address some of the barriers to growth and support delivery of our national industrial strategy, as well as narrowing some of the inequalities that have persisted for far too long.

**Alan Gemmell:** International investment is important for the aviation and aerospace sectors, and aviation and aerospace are important for my constituents in Central Ayrshire, with 55% of aerospace jobs based in Prestwick. Can my right hon. Friend tell me what more the Government will do to ensure continued international investment in these sectors?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and I know that his experience as His Majesty's trade commissioner in India means that he understands the importance of global trade and investment to the UK economy, including the Scottish economy. Last week, I had the opportunity to visit the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland and see at first hand the excellent work that is going on to promote innovation in a whole range of sectors, including aerospace and satellite technology. The UK already produces around half of the world's large civil aircraft wings and engines, and the aerospace sector added £11 billion to the UK economy last year. The Government are putting investment at the heart of our growth strategy, including by supporting advanced manufacturing in Scotland, and I look forward to working with my hon. Friend on this endeavour.

**Uma Kumaran:** I thank the Chancellor for her further reassurance to businesses this morning. London is the top choice in Europe for inward investment and is home to more headquarters than any other European city, including many based in Stratford, in my constituency. How will the Government support our capital city to continue its success on the global stage, and ensure that London can help encourage onward investment and support wider economic growth around the country?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question and welcome her to her place. The regeneration of Stratford after the Olympic games is truly phenomenal, and I know that she will be a strong voice for her constituency and help to deliver the growth mission, which is the No. 1 priority of this new Government. The success of London's economy will be integral to delivering that mission, and we will work with the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, and with our MPs to ensure that economic growth benefits people in the capital and across the country, ensuring that we narrow the gap between rich and poor and also showcase the huge opportunities that London has on the international stage. We will be hosting an international investment summit in London on 14 October, bringing together some of the biggest global investors in the world, to showcase everything our great country has to offer.

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Investment in our rural economy must focus heavily on rewarding our farmers for the food they produce and the environment they protect. The last Government ringfenced £2.4 billion a year for England to support our farming sector. Through indifference or incompetence, they underspent by £100 million last year and betrayed our farmers in doing so. Will the Chancellor confirm to me, my farmers and this House that she will not bake in that underspend, which was the fault of the last Conservative Government, and that she will at least commit to ringfencing what is already invested in farming? If not, hopefully she will back the Liberal Democrats' call to back £1 billion extra into farming so that we can feed our—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Mr Farron, please do not take complete advantage. I think you have slightly strayed from the original question. Chancellor, if you want to have a go at it, by all means do so, but I will understand if you do not.

**Rachel Reeves:** The rural economy plays an incredibly important role in our economic prosperity as a country, and boosting food security and biodiversity is obviously incredibly important to a whole range of this Government's objectives. I will ensure that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs hears loud and clear the message from the hon. Member, and I am sure he will include it as part of his submission to the spending review on 30 October.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Chancellor for that and I welcome her to her place. It is important to encourage inward investment. It is also important to address the issue of youth unemployment. As of the first quarter of 2024, the youth unemployment rate in Northern Ireland was 5%, compared with 3.8% the month before. What discussions has the Chancellor had

with the Northern Ireland Assembly Minister in charge to ensure that youth unemployment in Northern Ireland will be reduced to an acceptable figure, which should be zero?

**Rachel Reeves:** A huge amount of inward investment goes to Northern Ireland, as the hon. Gentleman knows, and it is important that young people are able to take advantage of those huge opportunities in our economy, whether in financial services, advanced manufacturing, shipbuilding or the many other sectors that are important to Northern Ireland. It is a travesty that something like one in five young people today are not in employment, education or training. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will be bringing forward a White Paper to ensure that everyone who can work does work and is given the support to succeed, both in Northern Ireland and across the United Kingdom.

### Economic Stability

**4. Noah Law** (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help ensure economic stability. [900208]

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Tulip Siddiq):** The Government are already taking action to fix Britain's economic foundations, with a new approach to growth with three pillars: stability, investment and reform. Sustainable public finances are necessary for economic stability and long-term growth, and the Government will set out the difficult decisions needed to secure the public finances in the Budget on 30 October. The Government have already announced a fiscal lock to support policy stability by ensuring that fiscally significant announcements are subject to an independent Office for Budget Responsibility assessment.

**Noah Law:** Given the fiscal inheritance that we have been left, the Chancellor has already had to make some difficult decisions to ensure that economic stability. Workers and pensioners just above the personal allowance threshold have already borne much of the brunt of the previous Government's cost of living crisis and fiscal drag, putting many in a precarious position. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that, if there is to be further fiscal drag, these groups are prevented from shouldering further burdens?

**Tulip Siddiq:** I should have welcomed my hon. Friend to his place.

It was the previous Government's decision to maintain tax thresholds at their current levels until 2028. We have inherited an extremely difficult fiscal situation, meaning that we cannot undo everything they did, but the Prime Minister has been clear that those with the broadest shoulders should bear the heavier burden. The Government are providing £0.5 billion, including the estimated Barnett consequential, to extend the household support fund in England for another six months, to 31 March 2025. It continues to be our aim to support those who are most in need. The household support fund is specifically used by local authorities to help the most vulnerable households cover the cost of essentials such as food, energy and water.



**Josh Babarinde** (Eastbourne) (LD): The cost of temporary accommodation is spiralling out of control, and it is a source of economic instability for local government. Eastbourne borough council leader Stephen Holt, together with 118 cross-party council leaders, wrote to the last Government to ask for urgent support and to propose a number of solutions, but they were completely ignored.

Will this Chancellor meet me and local government leaders, including Eastbourne's, to discuss what immediate support she can provide to help councils across the country to tackle the temporary accommodation crisis?

**Tulip Siddiq:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. Having served as a local councillor for many years, I very much recognise the problem that he describes. I am sorry to hear about this troubling situation, and I will refer his comments to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and make sure that he gets the response he should have had before.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Minister refers to the £22 billion black hole in the public finances left by the last Government, and which they hid from the British public. Does that not highlight just how important it is to ensure transparency and independent analysis of economic decisions?

**Tulip Siddiq:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. Upon taking office, as he says, we discovered a £22 billion black hole in the public finances that had been left by the previous Government, and we have now uncovered a litany of unfunded Conservative spending commitments. We recently learned that the deficit is now £4.7 billion higher than the OBR forecast in March because of the previous Government's economic recklessness. We will rectify this, and we will set out a clear spending plan, and an ambitious plan to get the country back into stable economic conditions, at the Budget.

**Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Given that the House of Commons Library estimates that the covid disaster cost the country between £315 billion and £415 billion, can the Minister explain how it is that even her own questionable figure of a £22 billion black hole is not a great deal higher?

**Tulip Siddiq:** I think I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question, but may I point out gently to him that, had our economy grown at the average rate of other OECD economies over the last 13 years, it would have been £140 billion larger? I also point out that under the Conservatives the tax burden rose to its highest level for 70 years. I will take no lessons from the Conservative party, because the last Government oversaw the biggest drop in household real disposable incomes since records began.

#### Cost of Living: Support for Pensioners

5. **Helen Morgan** (North Shropshire) (LD): What fiscal steps she is taking to support pensioners with the cost of living. [900209]

10. **Steve Darling** (Torbay) (LD): What fiscal steps she is taking to support pensioners with the cost of living. [900214]

12. **Caroline Voaden** (South Devon) (LD): What fiscal steps she is taking to support pensioners with the cost of living. [900216]

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves):** This Government support the triple lock. As a result, the state pension is worth £900 more than it was this time last year. In April, it will go up again by the highest of inflation, average wage growth or 2.5%. Our commitment to the triple lock is for not just one year but the duration of this Parliament. In addition, pensioners will continue to benefit from free eye tests, free prescriptions and free bus passes, and those pensioners most in need will continue to receive winter fuel payments alongside the pension credit.

**Helen Morgan:** I thank the Chancellor for her answer, but nearly 22,000 pensioners in North Shropshire are forecast to lose their winter fuel payments very soon, just as energy prices for the average household are about to go up by 10%. Many of my pensioners live in bungalows and older housing stock, which is expensive to heat. A lot of them have been in touch with me to say that they are worried sick about this winter. We know the Chancellor has difficult choices to make, and we accept that, but will she consider that the broadest shoulders are not those of pensioners who earn less than the minimum wage and are about to lose this vital support?

**Rachel Reeves:** I understand the concerns that the hon. Lady sets out. The state pension is worth £900 more than it was a year ago and energy bills are lower this winter than they were last winter. As she points out, we inherited a £22 billion black hole from the previous Government, who had made unfunded spending commitments with no idea how to pay for them. When I became Chancellor, I undertook an immediate audit of the spending situation to understand the scale of the challenge, and I made difficult decisions—some very difficult decisions—to put the public finances on a sustainable footing. They were tough decisions, but they were the right decisions in the circumstances we faced. They included the decision to make the winter fuel payment better targeted, so pensioners who need it most will still get it alongside pension credit. Targeting the winter fuel payment will save around £1.5 billion a year to support public finances.

**Steve Darling:** Some 21,000 pensioners in my constituency of Torbay will be impacted by the cut. In Devon and Cornwall, almost 90% of pensioners will be impacted by it. While many of us acknowledge that the Chancellor was left with a massive financial challenge when she came into the post, I remain extremely concerned about the residents who have reached out to me and colleagues with their major concerns about making ends meet as we enter the winter period. They have had no time to save and it is a complete shock to them. What assurances can the Chancellor give that the Government will support those who are most vulnerable? If those measures fail, what assurances can she give that she will scrap the proposal?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question and welcome him to his place. He will be a powerful representative for the people of Torbay. Like him, I want to ensure that the lowest income pensioners get the support they are entitled to. Under the previous Government, 800,000 pensioner households that were entitled to pension credit did not receive it. That is why this Government are taking action to encourage the uptake of pension credit to ensure that the poorest pensioners—those who are not even receiving the minimum income guarantee—are getting it.

We are working with organisations such as Age UK and local authorities. All local authorities, including those in Torbay, have been written to about how they can play their part in identifying those pensioners who are entitled to pension credit but are not getting it. The Department for Work and Pensions will also bring together the administration of pension credit and housing benefit, so that pensioner households receiving housing benefit will also receive any pension credit they are entitled to—something the previous Government deferred for years, despite knowing that the poorest pensioners were missing out.

**Caroline Voaden:** The Chancellor's announcement of cuts to the winter fuel payment was quickly followed by news of a 10% increase in the energy price cap. South Devon has a higher than average number of pensioners, many of whom, particularly those in rural areas, are living in fuel poverty. Many of my constituents are struggling to meet the cost of heating, but do not quite qualify for pension credit. They, and thousands of vulnerable people across the country, are deeply anxious about what this winter has in store for them. Will the Chancellor take this opportunity to spell out exactly how she plans to tackle fuel poverty among the elderly?

**Rachel Reeves:** I welcome the hon. Lady to her place. Pensioners in South Devon, in common with pensioners in all our constituencies, will receive a basic state pension that is worth £900 more than it was a year ago, and energy prices are lower this winter than they were last winter. Many of her constituents will be entitled to pension credit but, because of a failure to act by the last Government, are not currently receiving it. We all need to play our part in ensuring that everybody gets the help they are entitled to. We should all ensure that our poorest pensioners get that support from both pension credit and the winter fuel payment associated with it.

**Sam Rushworth (Bishop Auckland) (Lab):** The village of Copley, in my constituency, is the snowiest in England and we have many pensioners in receipt of the basic state pension who are, none the less, in fuel poverty. They are not entitled to pension credit. They live in cold, stone-built houses. What assurance can the Chancellor give to those pensioners that this Government will help to warm their homes and ensure they do not struggle to heat their homes this winter?

**Rachel Reeves:** This Government have committed to insulate an additional 5 million homes during the course of this Parliament to ensure that energy bills are as low as possible, saving people money and ensuring that their homes are warmer. That will help my hon. Friend's constituents in Copley and constituents across the country.

**Peter Swallow (Bracknell) (Lab):** Will the Chancellor explain to the House the damage done to pensioners' livelihoods by the previous Government's economic incompetence and their decision to cover up the £22 billion black hole in the public finances?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to remind us of the dire inheritance that this Government face. The previous Government made spending commitment after spending commitment with absolutely no idea of how to pay for them. From road and rail projects to A-levels and the Rwanda deal, we saw £22 billion of unfunded commitments. We will fix the foundations of the economy, rebuild Britain and ensure that working people are better off. We will fix the mess that the last Government left.

**Jim Dickson (Dartford) (Lab):** Will the Chancellor confirm that a state pension increase will be announced at the Budget and that it will be equivalent to wage growth, inflation or 2.5%—whichever is higher?

**Rachel Reeves:** The Government have committed to the triple lock not just for this year, but for the duration of this Parliament. That means that pensioners are £900 better off than they were a year ago. Based on September earnings and inflation data, we will uprate pensions next year by whichever is higher: 2.5%, inflation or average earnings. We are ensuring that pensioners get the pensions that they are entitled to and have contributed to.

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

**Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con):** Ten years ago, the now Chancellor argued in this House that winter fuel payments should be means-tested and cut for "the richest pensioners". The Chancellor's 10-year campaign has now come to fruition and she has proposed removing the winter fuel payment from pensioners on just £13,000 a year. Does she still think that a pensioner on £13,000 a year is rich?

**Rachel Reeves:** What came to an end in July was 14 years of a Conservative Government who presided over a fall in living standards, the highest tax burden in 70 years, a debt, as a share of our economy, of almost 100%, and a £22 billion black hole in the public finances just this year. What we have not heard from those on the Opposition Front Bench, or indeed from any Conservative Member of Parliament, is an apology for the mess that they have left this country in, which this Government are now picking up.

### Energy Bills: Support for Households

6. **Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD):** What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help support households with energy bills. [900210]

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (James Murray):** I welcome the hon. Member to his place. Since taking office, the Government have set up the clean energy mission board to enable progress towards the 2030 target. That will accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels to clean, home-grown power, and it will boost Britain's energy independence and security. The Government

will also set up a new publicly owned energy company, Great British Energy, which will save families money by ensuring that electricity bills are no longer exposed to gas price shocks, and a warm homes plan will improve energy efficiency in homes and cut bills.

**Dr Chambers:** Over the past few weeks, I have been inundated with questions from the people of Winchester about the cuts in the winter fuel allowance, and it seems as though people from all parts of the House are getting similar correspondence. Although I totally understand that there are many wealthy pensioners who do not rely on the winter fuel allowance to heat their homes, a large proportion of pensioners live on or near the poverty line and will be plunged into crisis this winter. Given the huge strength of feeling in all parts of the House, will the Chancellor reconsider her decision? If not, will she at least commit to a vote and a debate in the House about how we best protect our most vulnerable—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Sorry, I have to get through the Order Paper. Put in for an Adjournment debate. Minister, I think you got the gist.

**James Murray:** I thank the hon. Member for his comment, but as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor set out, the state pension is £900 more this year than it was last year, thanks to the triple lock. We have committed to maintaining the triple lock as the foundation of state support for pensioners throughout the rest of this Parliament. Energy bills are lower this year. It is crucial that he and other Members across the House support our goal to increase the take-up of pension credit. If we make sure that all pensioners who are eligible for pension credit take it up, they will thereby receive the other benefits, including the winter fuel payment, to which they are entitled.

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

**Gareth Davies** (Grantham and Bourne) (Con): During the general election, the Labour party committed to bring down energy bills by £300. Now that the election is over, energy bills are going up by some 10%. On behalf of the British electorate, especially the 10 million pensioners who are having their winter fuel payment taken away, I ask the Minister to confirm to the House that the £300 cut is still Labour policy. If it is, specifically how is the £300 calculated, and when will it be delivered?

**James Murray:** I thank the shadow Minister for his comment and welcome him to his new place. He referred to the cost of energy. As we know, the cost of energy is substantially lower than it was this time last year, but we are under no illusions about how much more we need to do to make sure that energy bills are truly affordable and that we tackle the cost of living crisis. That is why we have set to work straight away in establishing Great British Energy, alongside our national wealth fund, which will help to invest in the clean energy sources of the future and bring down energy bills for good.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Lib Dem spokesperson.

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): We know that the Government have inherited a mess, and that at the centre of that mess is a £22 billion hole left in the public finances by the previous Government, but that cannot

be allowed as cover for measures that cause suffering for the most vulnerable in society. The Chancellor will have heard Lib Dem colleagues talk about the hardship that the scrapping of the winter fuel allowance will mean for their constituents, so can she assure us that she will give her full support to measures to boost the uptake of pension credit? Most crucially, will she give the House the opportunity to have a proper debate and a vote on this cut, which will have such an impact on so many?

**James Murray:** I thank the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for her comments and for recognising the state of the finances that we inherited—the £22 billion in-year black hole that we need urgently to address to put our finances on a firm footing. It is essential to boost the uptake of pension credit, as the Chancellor set out. Some 800,000 pensioners who are eligible for pension credit are not taking it up. We saw a lack of action under the previous Government to drive up that uptake, and we are overseeing a campaign across Government to increase the number of pensioners who access pension credit and thereby the winter fuel payment.

**Sarah Olney:** I welcome that response, but if the Government are asking us all to make difficult sacrifices, people need to know that the Government are making the vital investments that will protect the vulnerable and help to deliver economic growth. Does the Chancellor agree that now is the time to work across Government to launch an emergency home energy upgrade programme to provide free insulation and heat pumps for low-income households?

**James Murray:** A crucial part of the manifesto commitments that we brought into Government is to increase the insulation of up to 5 million homes across the country. We will set out further details of our plans for insulation in due course, but we know that that is the kind of investment that brings down energy bills for good.

### Living Standards

7. **Chris Webb** (Blackpool South) (Lab): What steps she plans to take to help improve living standards. [900211]

15. **Dan Tomlinson** (Chipping Barnet) (Lab): What steps she plans to take to help improve living standards. [900219]

17. **Rachel Taylor** (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): What steps she plans to take to help improve living standards. [900221]

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (James Murray):** The Government are focused on improving living standards across the country, which is why growth is a key priority. If real household disposable income per capita had grown from 2010 to 2023 at the same rate as it did between 1997 and 2010, it would have been £4,000 higher last year. This Government's approach will centre on fostering good work. The Government will reform employment support to offer more people dignity and purpose in meaningful employment. The plan to make work pay sets out a significant and ambitious agenda to ensure that workplace rights are fit for the modern economy and to empower working people and deliver economic growth. We have launched a ministerial taskforce on child poverty and updated the Low Pay Commission's remit to consider the cost of living when making recommendations on the national living wage.



**Chris Webb:** I thank the Minister for that reply. Many of my Blackpool South constituents have contacted me regarding the means-testing of winter fuel allowance and the link to pension credit. There are probably thousands in my constituency who do not receive pension credit and are potentially missing out on £3,900 a year. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that all pensioners in my constituency and across the country receive what they are entitled to?

**James Murray:** I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. He is absolutely right to highlight how important it is to make sure that all those who are eligible for pension credit but are not claiming it sign up and thereby receive the benefits to which they are entitled, which now include the winter fuel payment. The Government are undertaking a new campaign to drive take-up, and the Department for Work and Pensions is holding a pension credit week of action in the first week of September, when promotional activities will be supported by organisations including Age UK and local authorities. There will be further action in the coming months, including on TV, in the press and on radio, and we will be writing directly to up to 120,000 pensioners who receive housing benefit but are not claiming pension credit to encourage a claim where they may be eligible.

**Dan Tomlinson:** The economic chaos of previous Conservative Governments pushed up interest rates, causing mortgage costs to rise by £500 a month for families in Barnet. What steps is the Chancellor taking to bring down those rates so that families who have worked hard and saved hard can get the living standards boost that they so desperately need?

**James Murray:** I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. As he rightly points out, the recklessness of the previous Government has had a direct impact on his constituents' living standards. As a new Government, we recognise that many households right across the country have faced higher mortgage costs in recent years, and we are already taking action to fix Britain's economic foundations with a new approach to growth, with the three pillars of stability, investment and reform. Sustainable public finances are necessary for economic stability and long-term growth. The Government will therefore set out the difficult decisions needed to secure the public finances in the Budget on 30 October.

**Rachel Taylor:** In North Warwickshire and Bedworth, like in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Dan Tomlinson), monthly mortgage costs rose by an average of 22% in the year following the previous Government's disastrous mini-Budget. That made life really difficult for hard-working families in my constituency. What steps is the Chancellor taking to ensure that such a devastating situation can never happen again to families in my constituency and across the country?

**James Murray:** I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. She is absolutely right to highlight just how much damage the Conservatives' recklessness in 2022 caused to families in North Warwickshire and beyond. The decisions of Conservative Ministers unleashed economic turbulence that pushed up people's mortgages and made people across Britain worse off. Our new Government

will hardwire Budget responsibility into Government with our new fiscal lock in the Budget Responsibility Bill, which will make sure that the disaster we saw nearly two years ago can never happen again.

**Dame Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con):** The living standards of nearly 50,000 pensioners in Malvern Hills district and Wychavon district are going to deteriorate very sharply this winter in the face of a 10% increase in their energy bills and no winter fuel allowance. Many of those pensioners have incomes just above the pension credit threshold, and many are too frail and too old to work. Yet within the first few days of coming into office, the Chancellor managed to spend over £22 billion very quickly by setting up Great British Energy and a national wealth fund, and by giving in to the pay demands of her party's union paymasters. Is it not the case that this Chancellor has made the chilling political choice to balance the books of this country on the very frailest shoulders?

**James Murray:** I am disappointed that the hon. Member is talking down essential investments that we have made in our country's future. She also seems to be confused: there is a £22 billion black hole because of the unfunded spending commitments made by the Conservative party when it was in government. But she makes an important point about protecting pensioners, which is why it is so important to ensure that all those pensioners who are eligible for pension credit take it up, and I look forward to her support in making sure that they do so.

**Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD):** Statistics from the Trussell Trust published today show that half of people on universal credit ran out of money and could not afford to buy food before the end of the month. What prospect do those people have of an increase in their living standards? The reintroduction of the household support fund is welcome, but what steps is the Treasury taking to make sure that people do not go hungry this winter?

**James Murray:** As the hon. Member rightly points out, the Government are providing £500 million to extend the household support fund in England for another six months, and that will include Barnett consequential. That is an important measure to help people in the months ahead, but the crucial way to increase people's living standards and tackle the cost of living crisis in the longer term is to get the economy growing. We have spoken at length about the measures that we have already taken as a new Government—from planning reform and the national wealth fund to Great British Energy. All that is about getting the economy growing, because that is the sustainable way to make people better off and to invest in our public services.

**Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** Means-testing the winter fuel payment increases the burden on many vulnerable people and reduces their living standards. Unlike the Scottish Government, who have many statutory constraints on their budgets, the Chancellor's fiscal rules are entirely self-imposed. Does the Minister think that sticking to the Chancellor's fiscal rules is more important than the health and wellbeing of pensioners?

**James Murray:** Let me be clear: if we do not have fiscal responsibility—if we do not stick to fiscal rules—we will lack the economic stability that is so crucial to getting the economy growing and ensuring that people across Britain are better off. We must return stability and fiscal responsibility to our country following the Conservative Government's record. We saw what happened when they lost control of the public finances and made unfunded spending commitments. We need to ensure that that never happens again, which is why we are hardwiring fiscal responsibility into the future of government through our new Budget Responsibility Bill.

### Economic Growth

9. **Damien Egan** (Bristol North East) (Lab): What progress she has made on increasing economic growth. [900213]

22. **Catherine Fookes** (Monmouthshire) (Lab): What progress she has made on increasing economic growth. [900226]

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves):** Sustained economic growth is the only route to improving the prosperity of our country and the living standards of working people. That is why we have already taken a number of actions to begin delivering on our growth mission—the No. 1 priority of this new Labour Government—which includes a series of planning reforms to get Britain building; the establishment of a national wealth fund to bring in private sector investment; the announcement of a pensions review to unlock growth, boost investment and deliver better returns to pensioners; the launch of Skills England; and the announcement of the forthcoming White Paper on getting Britain working again. This Government are determined to boost growth and improve living standards, and, by doing so, to have the money that we need to fund our vital public services.

**Damien Egan:** The delivery of so much of what the Chancellor describes runs through local government. What progress has been made on giving local councils longer-term funding settlements?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to make that point. The Government are committed to delivering longer-term certainty for local authorities, as part of our wider commitment to a more empowered, accountable and sustainable local government system that will support strong public services in all our communities. The Government will set out further details on our plans for local government funding in the upcoming Budget and spending review on 30 October.

**Catherine Fookes:** This year alone, two more high street bank branches have closed in Monmouthshire, bringing the total to eight in the past two years. My constituents now find themselves struggling to access basic banking services—particularly in Caldicot. I was recently handed a petition that had been signed by more than 3,500 constituents. I am sure that the Chancellor understands the importance of high street banking not only to our constituents but to local businesses and local economic growth. What progress has she made in her work with colleagues in the Welsh Government to support high street banks and hubs in Monmouthshire and across Wales?

**Rachel Reeves:** I welcome my hon. Friend to her place; it is already obvious that she will be a strong voice for the people of Monmouthshire. In our party manifesto, we committed to rolling out 350 banking hubs in communities like those she speaks about, which have lost multiple banks in the past few years. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury will happily meet my hon. Friend to work on achieving one such banking hub in her constituency. That is an offer to Members right across the House; so many of our constituencies have lost bank branches in the past few years. For older people, small businesses and families, the lack of access to cash can be devastating, and we are determined to reverse it with the roll-out of the new banking hubs.

**Mims Davies** (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): Growth and additional runway capacity at Gatwick is again on the agenda. My constituents who work at that airport and those who fly from there benefit from its stability and reach, but it needs to be recognised that any expansion of flights requires a careful balance between additional homes and jobs. Will the Chancellor confirm that suitable growth will not come at the expense of communities such as mine without proper consultation and acknowledgement of its impacts?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank the hon. Lady for that question. This Government were pleased to sign off the expansion of London City airport, because we recognise how important aviation is to our economy, getting growth and investment into the UK. Of course, it is right that we always take local views into account and make sure that any investment in, or expansion of, airports comes with the infrastructure that is needed for local communities, but the answer to decisions—whether on road, rail, energy or aviation—cannot always be no. If it is, we will continue with the situation we faced over the past 14 years: low growth, deteriorating living standards and worsening public infrastructure. We cannot continue like that.

**Rupert Lowe** (Great Yarmouth) (Reform): As I see it, the taxpayer is now accountable to the state. The state is not accountable to the taxpayer, and I think that a lot of our lack of growth is rooted in the fact that many of our offices run by the state are not working, and are actually strangling our economy. I would like to know what the Chancellor is going to do to ensure that Government is as accountable to the taxpayer as the taxpayer is to Government.

**Rachel Reeves:** That is the purpose of elections, and at the last election, this Government achieved a sizeable majority for our missions, including growing the economy, improving living standards and making working people better off. We have just got started, and that is what we are absolutely determined to do, in order to deliver on the mandate we got on 4 July.

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

**Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): The Institute of Directors' latest economic confidence index shows that optimism about the economy fell back to minus 12 last month, following a three-year high of plus 7 in July. Can the Chancellor explain how Labour's tax rises on working people, businesses and pensioners will contribute to economic growth when the economy is already going backwards under this Labour Government?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question, I think. On 14 October, we are hosting an international investment summit, welcoming to London some of the biggest investors in the world. In the two months that I have been in this role, I have met over 300 business leaders, talking to them about the huge opportunities to invest in our great country, including in life sciences, financial services, the creative industries and low-carbon technologies. The opportunities are endless, and this Government are determined to work with business to ensure that we bring good jobs, investment and prosperity right across the United Kingdom.

### Topical Questions

T1. [900245] **Mr Gagan Mohindra** (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves):** This Government have inherited a £22 billion black hole in the public finances, and rectifying the situation requires tough choices. We will also clamp down on egregious spending and halve Government spending on consultancy, which will save £500 million next year. Increasing consultancy spend has been rife across Government for the past four years. It is up 55% at the Department for Transport, 137% at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and a staggering 416% at the Home Office. It is no wonder taxes are so high and public services are so poor when the last Government frittered away taxpayers' money with no concern. I will treat taxpayers' money with respect, and we will fix the foundations of our economy so that we can rebuild Britain and make working people better off.

**Mr Mohindra:** I welcome the Chancellor to her place. Notwithstanding what she has just said, can she tell the House why she has made the political decision to scrap the commitment to spend at least 2.5% of GDP on defence, undermining our support for Ukraine, and has instead prioritised giving her union paymasters inflation-busting pay rises that have only led to more unions calling for more strikes and more pay?

**Rachel Reeves:** Let me respond directly on the issue of Ukraine. In my first couple of weeks in this job, I had the pleasure of meeting Minister Marchenko from Ukraine, and made a commitment to him to go ahead with the extraordinary revenue acceleration programme. It is important that we work together across the House to support the Ukrainian people against the Russian invasion. In the previous Parliament, Labour always supported the Government when they took action to support the Ukrainian people, and I hope that that cross-party support can continue.

**Mr Speaker:** Can I remind everybody that this is topical questions? I have a big list to get through. Rachael Maskell will give us a good example.

T4. [900248] **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): In York, the average rent rise of 11.9% exceeded the state pension rise by £380 this year. With the loss of the cost of living payments and winter fuel payments, and the increase in the energy price cap and cost of living, pensioners are frightened about how they are going to

keep warm this winter, as am I. In changing the eligibility for the winter fuel payment, how will my right hon. Friend protect pensioners above the pension credit threshold to prevent cold, ill health or worse this winter?

**Rachel Reeves:** The basic state pension is worth £900 more than it was a year ago, and will go up again in April next year because of the triple lock, which we have committed to for the duration of this Parliament. We have already written to York council and are working with local authorities across the country to boost take-up of pension credit, because this Government, unlike the last Government, are determined to ensure that 800,000 people entitled to pension credit actually receive it.

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

**Jeremy Hunt** (Godalming and Ash) (Con): When the Chancellor was sitting on the Opposition Benches she repeatedly attacked cronyism, so will she tell the House whether she told the Treasury permanent secretary that Ian Corfield had made a donation to her before she got him appointed as a director in the Treasury—yes or no?

**Rachel Reeves:** All Governments appoint people to the civil service. The donation from Ian Corfield was declared over a year ago in the proper way, and we answered all the questions in the right way that the civil service asked when we made that appointment. Ian Corfield is supporting this Government in hosting the international investment summit, which will bring hundreds of global investors to the UK next month.

**Jeremy Hunt:** I think that means the answer is no. The ministerial code states:

“Ministers must ensure that no conflict arises, or could reasonably be perceived to arise, between their public duties and their private interests, financial or otherwise”.

That did not happen. Will the right hon. Lady tell the House why cronyism is wrong under the Conservatives but acceptable under Labour?

**Rachel Reeves:** The right hon. Gentleman has a bit of a brass neck criticising this Government, after the appointments and the partying at Downing Street that we saw under the last Conservative Government, and the billions of pounds' worth of contracts handed out to friends and donors of the Conservative party. That is why this Government are appointing a covid corruption commissioner to get that money back for taxpayers; because unlike the last Government, we are determined that taxpayers' money is treated with respect, and not handed out to donors of the party.

T5. [900249] **Paula Barker** (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): Age UK reports that there are around 1 million pensioners who just miss out on the winter fuel payment. These are people living on modest incomes, within £50 of the poverty line, who will miss out due to a tiny occupational pension, and they include many in Liverpool Wavertree. We have heard about the campaign to take up pension credit, but can my right hon. Friend tell us specifically whether that pension credit will be backdated?

**Rachel Reeves:** Yes, absolutely; pension credit can be backdated by up to three months, and we will ensure that that happens. We are also working closely with Liverpool city council to ensure that the constituents in



Liverpool Wavertree, and indeed in all our constituencies, are getting the support that they are entitled to. The poorest pensioners, who are entitled to pension credit, should get it. It is a travesty that 800,000 missed out under the last Conservative Government. We will ensure that pensioners entitled to support get it.

T2. [900246] **Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): It is estimated that the Bank of England will require a further £110 billion of taxpayer subsidy to cover long bond sale losses through to 2030. So why is the Chancellor clobbering pensioners to save £1.5 billion a year when she could be challenging the Bank of England to save tens of billions of pounds a year?

**Rachel Reeves:** Before I became a Member of Parliament I was an economist at the Bank of England and I respect the independence of the Bank of England. The previous Government undermined that independence. That contributed to the economic chaos that we saw under the last Conservative Government. This Government will never go down that route.

T7. [900251] **Chris McDonald** (Stockton North) (Lab): Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirm that her decisions are targeted at winning new investment in green industry in places such as Billingham in my constituency?

**The Parliamentary Secretary, His Majesty's Treasury (Emma Reynolds):** I welcome my hon. Friend to this House, because he brings a great deal of expertise on green steel from his previous career. This Government's plan to launch the national wealth fund is precisely to create investment across the country in some very important strategic industries, and that includes decarbonisation of steel and the steel industry.

T3. [900247] **Monica Harding** (Esher and Walton) (LD): The prospect of the financial collapse of a major utility company such as Thames Water should cause us all grave concern given not only what it would mean for consumers in my constituency and many constituencies like it, but the wider implications it would carry for our economy and the Government finances. Does the Chancellor therefore agree that putting Thames Water into special administration and reforming it would protect not just consumers, including my constituents, but the wider economy?

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Darren Jones):** Water companies are commercial entities. It would therefore not be appropriate for me to comment on that. It is for the company and its investors to resolve their possible issues.

T8. [900252] **Josh Newbury** (Cannock Chase) (Lab): For decades, members of the mineworkers' pension scheme in Cannock Chase and across the country have seen billions go to successive Governments. With an average of 19 scheme members passing away every day, resolution cannot come too soon. What progress has been made on transferring the Government's share of the MPS investment reserve to scheme members?

**Darren Jones:** I championed this issue in the last Parliament as Chair of the Business and Trade Committee.

I am pleased to confirm that I am working with colleagues across Government to make progress, and I will update the House further in due course.

T6. [900250] **Lisa Smart** (Hazel Grove) (LD): Stories of crumbling public infrastructure are all too common. Stepping Hill hospital in Hazel Grove has had to close buildings because their condition was no longer deemed safe, and we have seen footage of medics having to wade through flooded corridors when pipes have burst. The allocated capital money simply cannot cover the repairs backlog. How will the Chancellor ensure that hospitals such as Stepping Hill can access the capital investment they need both to repair crumbling buildings and to deliver additional sites where needed?

**Darren Jones:** The Government are reviewing the new hospitals programme as part of our spending review. We will undertake a full and comprehensive review while continuing to deliver the most advanced and most urgent hospitals in a realistic timeframe.

T9. [900253] **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): The letter from the Cabinet Secretary to the former Chancellor that emerged this morning clearly stated that the failure by the last Government to hold a spending review following the unexpected national and global pressures significantly contributed to the fiscal challenge that the Labour Government inherited. What can the Chancellor learn from this?

**Rachel Reeves:** The Conservative party crashed the economy and then wrecked the public finances, leaving us with a £22 billion black hole. The shadow Chancellor is not willing to be straight about the damage he did, and is now trying to pass the buck to independent civil servants. I will always be honest about the public finances and take the tough decisions that we need to fix the foundations of our economy.

**Gareth Bacon** (Orpington) (Con): In July, borrowing stood at £3.1 billion, well ahead of the OBR's forecast of £0.1 billion. Does the Chancellor agree that she could have reduced the national debt had she chosen not to reward her trade union paymasters by spending £10 billion on inflation-busting pay rises?

**Rachel Reeves:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, Government borrowing is running at £4.7 billion higher than the OBR forecast because the previous Government made unfunded commitments without any idea of how they were going to be paid for. The previous Government set the mandate for the independent pay review bodies, and we have honoured the recommendations of those bodies to ensure that our armed forces, our police officers, our nurses and our teachers got a pay rise. I think that is the right thing to do. If he does not, I wonder how he justifies that to public sector workers in his constituency.

T10. [900254] **Kate Osborne** (Jarrow and Gateshead East) (Lab): Does the Minister share my concerns about reports of trade union victimisation at HMRC's Benton Park View office in Newcastle, where three Public and Commercial Services Union reps have already been dismissed and more face live disciplinary proceedings? I am pleased to welcome those three reps to Parliament today. Will the Minister agree to meet them and the PCS about this worrying situation?



**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (James Murray):**

As Ministers, we greatly value and respect trade unions and the work of trade union representatives in supporting their members. While it is not appropriate for me to comment on individual cases, I will look into this matter further and respond to my hon. Friend in due course.

**Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con):** The Chancellor's decision to cut the winter fuel payment is forecast to save £1.5 billion. Can she advise the House what other options she considered for making savings in the Department for Work and Pensions budget before deciding to make this cut?

**Rachel Reeves:** The black hole we inherited was £22 billion. We announced in the statement on 29 July £5.5 billion of savings to reduce the size of that black hole, but the hon. Gentleman can see there is still work to be done and we will be setting out further measures in the Budget on 30 October to get a grip of the public finances.

**Joe Powell (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab):** A forthcoming Transparency International report has identified 28 contracts worth £4.1 billion that were awarded to parties with direct political connections to the Conservative party, so can the Chancellor update us on the progress in appointing the covid corruption commissioner and whether they will take evidence from corruption campaigners such as Transparency International?

**Darren Jones:** We are appointing a fixed-term covid fraud commissioner through an open competition that is now running as of this morning. The commissioner will make sure everything is done to return money owed to the taxpayer. It will report to the Chancellor, working with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and will report to Parliament in due course.

**Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con):** The economic potential of the Brigg and Immingham constituency and the wider Humber region is heavily dependent on the renewable energy sector. However, there is a cloud on the horizon, with the future of Scunthorpe steelworks in doubt. Can the Chancellor give an assurance that if there are redundancies at Scunthorpe, there will be a generous package of support for workers and investment through the local authority to redevelop the area?

**Rachel Reeves:** The hon. Gentleman speaks powerfully about the huge opportunities at Immingham and on the whole east coast through renewable energy and carbon capture and storage. Part of the reason for the national wealth fund is to invest in industries such as CCS, but also in our crucial steel sector, which is important to so many of the other Government ambitions on growing our economy. We are determined to support the steel sector through that investment from the national wealth fund.

**Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op):** The Chancellor's plans for growth are welcome in Cornwall, but in the meantime we are relying upon shared prosperity fund and towns deal money. The deadlines for the

completion of those schemes are March 2025 and March '26. To ensure that investment is not lost, will the Chancellor consider extending the deadlines for completion of those schemes by up to 12 months?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question and welcome her to her place. She speaks powerfully on behalf of the people of Cornwall. The spending review will be the appropriate time to look at the shared prosperity funds and what resource we can give to the people of Cornwall, and I am sure my hon. Friend will work with the relevant Secretaries of State to ensure those representations are heard.

**Dave Doogan (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP):** The Chancellor would have known, in advance of the cut to the winter fuel payment and the stripping of £160 million from pensioners in Scotland, that Scottish pensioners suffer the lowest temperatures, rural Scottish pensioners live in some of the oldest houses on these islands, and most Scottish pensioners in rural areas are off the gas grid. Knowing that, what discussions did she have with her 37 new Scottish Labour MPs about pushing Scottish pensioners into fuel poverty?

**Rachel Reeves:** I would just note that the Scottish Government have decided to mirror what the wider UK Government are doing rather than using the tax powers that they have. That is a decision the Scottish Government have made given the fiscal situation they face; we face a similar issue with a £22 billion black hole in the public finances.

**Shaun Davies (Telford) (Lab):** I welcome this Government's plan to get Britain building again with a commitment to build 1.5 million homes across our country. There are also 1 million homes for which councils have given planning consent, and those with skin in the game need help and support to get those houses unlocked. What steps are the Government taking in that regard?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank my hon. Friend for the question and welcome him to his place. As a former local government leader he knows the huge opportunities there are to build the homes our country desperately needs. We have made a commitment to build 1.5 million homes during the duration of this Parliament. That will require making choices to call in planning decisions, as we have already done in our first week in office with regard to four specific housing developments.

**Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con):** Thousands of pensioners in my constituency have worked hard all their lives and are now worried at the prospect of losing their winter fuel payment, upon which they rely. Will the right hon. Lady reconsider and reverse her decision?

**Rachel Reeves:** The increases in the basic state pension mean those constituents are £900 better off than they were a year ago, and of course energy bills are lower this year than they were last year. But it is important that we ensure that the 800,000 people who missed out on pension credit under the previous Conservative Government now get access to that support, because they are the

poorest pensioners and at the moment they are living in poverty because the previous Government failed to sign them up to pension credit.

**Emily Darlington** (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): As Departments are preparing their spending review submissions, will the Chancellor and her team consider allowing the international development budget to be on the same footing as the research and development budget,

and looked at over 10 years, so that we can get back to the 0.7% figure? Will she be willing to meet me and a delegation to discuss the benefits of that approach to such an important budget?

**Darren Jones:** The Government's spending review is currently under way. All decisions on official development assistance spending will be taken in the round as part of that process. I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and her colleagues to discuss this issue.

## Sudan

12.41 pm

**Dame Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con) (*Urgent Question*):

To ask the Foreign Secretary if he will make a statement on the humanitarian and political situation in Sudan.

**The Minister for Development (Anneliese Dodds)**: I would like first to welcome the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Dame Harriett Baldwin) to her place. She is a former Africa Minister, so I know she is deeply concerned about these issues. I am grateful for the fact that this urgent question has been granted; the situation could not be more urgent.

Last month, I visited South Sudan to assess the situation in Sudan and to meet those who have been forced to flee horrendous violence. The scenes of suffering and devastation that I heard about from families who have been torn apart and children who are on the brink of starvation have been etched in my memory.

We now have confirmation that the senseless war between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces has brought famine to Sudan. In the Zamzam internally displaced people camp in northern Darfur, which hosts more than half a million people, 100 people are dying from starvation every day. We have to be clear that these conditions exist across Sudan. We should be discussing a more damning assessment today, but a sustained tactic of denying access to the hardest-hit areas of the country is making many people and their suffering invisible. The famine facing Sudan is almost entirely man-made and a direct consequence of the deliberate efforts by both warring parties to block aid getting to those most in need. The warring parties must remember their obligations under international humanitarian law. Access must not be arbitrarily denied and starvation must not be used as a weapon of war.

The UK welcomes the decision to reopen the Adre border crossing for humanitarian assistance for three months. This move, if conducted in good faith, could save thousands of lives. The SAF must act to remove any unnecessary restrictions on trucks moving through Adre, and the RSF must urgently facilitate movement into areas under their control. Without that, lifesaving aid will be blocked from accessing those most in need.

Last month, I announced an additional £15 million of vital assistance to Sudan, South Sudan and Chad to support vulnerable people forced to flee violence and seek safety. With that announcement, the UK has almost doubled its ODA to Sudan to £97 million this financial year, most of which is vital humanitarian aid. The UK also welcomed efforts by the US, Saudi Arabia and Switzerland to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table last month, but we remain deeply concerned that the SAF did not take the opportunity to act in the best interests of the people they claim to represent, and refused to attend the talks in person.

The warring parties must do everything in their power to ensure that this wholly unjustified war ends immediately. We continue to call upon the RSF to implement the commitments made in the Jeddah declaration to protect civilians. We stand ready to support partners in following up on these talks, including by busing the UK's role as penholder on Sudan at the United Nations Security Council.

**Dame Harriett Baldwin**: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question.

Yesterday, Parliament spent time on two terrible conflicts—that in Ukraine, and that in the middle east—but we must not allow this Parliament to forget about the increasingly dreadful situation in Sudan. I welcome the right hon. Minister for Development to her position. I know that she has just come back from visiting South Sudan, and I welcome her clear focus on the situation, which is urgent, with 10 million people having been internally displaced, 4 million of them children. Two million people have fled as refugees, and half the country's population of 47 million now need food aid. Three quarters of a million people are starving in a famine that has only been made worse by the recent flooding. I urge the Government to pay urgent attention to the situation. We cannot lose momentum, or our focus on resolving the conflict and improving access for humanitarian aid.

The UK is the penholder at the United Nations, and with Norway and the United States we form the troika, which can act as an interlocutor with the warring parties. What progress has there been on initiating a follow-up to last month's unsuccessful effort to bring the Sudanese armed forces to the table? The US special envoy Tom Perriello has been working hard, trying to make progress, but what role are the UK Government playing?

It is welcome that the Adre crossing has opened, and that there is some improvement in humanitarian access, but the UK has a key role to play in bringing donors together for Sudan. What plans do the UK Government have to convene influential regional players, such as the African Union, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, given that our extensive, excellent diplomatic network can make such an important difference? Overall, what strategy do the UK Government have to counteract the growing influence in the region of Russia, which is fomenting conflicts both in Sudan and in nearby countries such as Libya to gain access to Red sea and Mediterranean ports, and to encourage migration patterns such as those that we have seen?

**Anneliese Dodds**: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's commitment to the issue, and for her incredibly important questions. She gave the figures for those who have been displaced; indeed, Sudan is the world's largest displacement crisis in absolute terms. Of course, some of those individuals have been displaced before. When I was in South Sudan, I talked to those who had previously left South Sudan because it was so unsafe, gone into Sudan, and then been forced back to South Sudan.

This really is a horrendous crisis that deserves international focus. That is what the new UK Government are determined to provide. Of course, we recognise what took place under the previous Government, and we want to ensure that this crisis is given the attention that it deserves, not only through our position as penholder at the UN, which the hon. Lady noted, but by continuously urging the warring parties to come to the table, and by ensuring that the voices of civil society are not ignored. It has been particularly important for the UK to ensure that we convene civil society actors. I met some of them when I was in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia—many of them cannot operate in Sudan as it is too dangerous—and they are still seeking to ensure that the voice of civil society, and of women, is listened to.

[Anneliese Dodds]

The hon. Lady talked about applying international pressure to partners. That is important, when it comes to the positive work that we can do together. When I was in Addis, I met African Union Commissioner Bankole to talk about what we could do together to ensure that other regional actors are brought in to push forward peace, the ceasefire that is so desperately needed, and the humanitarian access that is needed. Of course, there is also the negative—the possibility of other countries becoming involved in the conflict and worsening it. The UK Government are clear that any measure of engagement with the warring parties that is not focused on humanitarian access or peace will only prolong this devastating war, which is leading to so much death and destruction.

**Dan Carden** (Liverpool Walton) (Lab): This is one of the world's worst conflicts and humanitarian disasters, but sadly it receives so little of our attention, so I welcome the urgent question and the Minister's response. I praise the efforts of the British embassy in exile in Addis. It is clear that we need a long-term strategy to end the fighting and begin a political settlement. What plans does the Minister have to send UK personnel back to Sudan when the time is right, perhaps based in Port Sudan until a return to Khartoum is possible?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this issue. The staff from the UK embassy that was previously in Sudan showed the best of UK government; there is no question about that. They were placed in a truly horrendous, terrifying situation at the beginning of the conflict—they were effectively under siege at the beginning of a dreadful war—and I praise them. I was pleased to meet a number of them in Addis Ababa; they are operating out of Ethiopia, because it is too dangerous for them in Sudan. I know that they would be keen to ensure that we have that presence there, but we need to ensure their safety—and my goodness, that sense of safety was tested. Again, I praise their bravery.

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

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I congratulate the shadow Minister on securing this urgent question, and I thank you for granting it, Mr Speaker. As we have heard, this could not be more urgent. More than 25 million people are suffering from acute food insecurity—more than half the population. In one South Darfur health facility, five malnourished children died every day in July, yet their plight, on the whole, has largely been met with silence from the international community. At the Paris donor meeting in April, the previous Government did not commit to any additional humanitarian assistance; they just reannounced a previous commitment. Will the Minister tell the House what extra support the new Government will provide? Given that the conference raised only half of what is needed, the case for even more UK aid is clear.

We need to play our part in securing a path to peace in Sudan as a whole. Given the UK's role as the penholder at the UN, what specific actions are being taken to prevent the supply of arms by neighbouring countries? We hear the distressing news that a slave market has opened outside Khartoum. What actions are being taken to prevent human trafficking during the conflict?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I am grateful to the hon. Member for raising those important points. On the UK's support, we have doubled the official development assistance contribution, recognising the severity of this crisis. I announced another £50 million of vital assistance on 22 August, bringing that up to £97 million, which will be focused on where it is possible to operate in Sudan. Much of the country is very difficult to access, including for humanitarian bodies and for those fleeing to South Sudan and Chad.

The hon. Member talked about neighbouring countries. There are a number of countries that we would urge not to engage in destabilising activity; I mentioned that point to the shadow Development Minister. Any activity that is not focused on humanitarian support or promoting peace is prolonging the war, worsening the humanitarian situation and creating a legacy for the future that will be difficult to deal with. We are seeing large numbers of unaccompanied children, for example—a really disturbing situation. We want that message to be heard loud and clear.

**Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): I wish that this conflict and the resulting famine had been stopped before they started. I am grateful for the Minister's commitment. When the International Development Committee took evidence in April, we found that this was a war on women. Could the Minister please tell us what specifically she is doing to protect women from the horrendous rapes and sexual abuse that are going on, and what she is doing with the Department to gather atrocity prevention data?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning this area, in which she has great expertise. We are deeply concerned about the escalation of conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan since the outbreak of the conflict in April 2023. As she and others in the House will be well aware, there are reports of this issue; for example, 262 rape cases were reported from April to August. That is likely to be a massive underestimate of the situation on the ground.

Disturbingly, women and girls are subject to sexual violence in internally displaced person camps; at checkpoints when travelling; in their own homes; and when trying to get firewood or desperately trying to get support for their family. There are also reports of kidnapping, ransom and sexual exploitation. My hon. Friend asked what the UK is doing. We continue to condemn those atrocities against women and girls. We have called out human rights violations, especially conflict-related sexual violence carried out by the parties to the conflict, within the UN Human Rights Council and Security Council, and we are working to ensure that evidence is collected.

**Sir Gavin Williamson** (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): The fighting in Sudan is having an impact not just on that country but on neighbouring countries such as South Sudan, which cannot export its natural resources. What action are the Government taking to open up channels through which countries such as South Sudan can export goods in order to feed people in their country?

**Anneliese Dodds:** The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that there was already a humanitarian crisis in South Sudan. I visited the Bentiu refugee camp, which houses 100,000 people. It is effectively an island of



marooned people in a lake of floodwater at the moment. There was already a crisis there. He is absolutely right that economic prospects have gone even further backwards following the crisis. The main oil pipeline has been impacted by the conflict in Sudan. We have had discussions with international partners about what can be done to improve the situation. I had discussions with the World Bank when I was in Juba in South Sudan about what can be done on economic reform. There is a role for the Government of South Sudan in ensuring economic reform; I am very clear that reform needs to take place, and that we need strong action and elections. The impact of the Sudan conflict is being felt in South Sudan, as the right hon. Gentleman said.

**Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): The Newport Sudanese community came together yesterday in Pill to open their new community centre. They feel that the conflict and this famine of epic proportions still go largely unseen. Some are hearing horrific stories from family and friends. Could the Minister reiterate to them that, as the penholder on Sudan at the UN Security Council, we will do all we can to ensure that international attention and actions are not too little, too late, and that, crucially, aid gets to the right places?

**Anneliese Dodds**: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the important point about diaspora communities in the UK. I have spoken to many people with Sudanese heritage in the UK who are deeply concerned about the situation at home. I am yet to meet someone with Sudanese heritage who has not been impacted somehow—who does not have a close family member who has been killed or subjected to violence, or has had to flee or is in food insecurity. I pay tribute to the Sudanese community in Newport and across our country. Most certainly, their plight is not being forgotten.

**Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): I commend the Minister on having made her visit so promptly. The conflicts in Ukraine and the middle east get coverage on the news night after night. It seems to me that this conflict ought similarly to constantly feature in our media. Why is that not happening? Is it purely because of the denial of journalistic access?

**Anneliese Dodds**: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his question, which I have thought about a lot. How can we elevate this crisis? One fears that people will look back and ask why more was not done about it, given the huge humanitarian toll—there is the biggest displacement crisis in the world, and the famine—which the UK Government recognise. Some very committed journalists are covering it, and I praise their actions. I hope that there can be additional coverage and greater international awareness. That is important for the UN and other multilateral organisations as well. This Government will do all we can to raise the profile of this crisis within those bodies.

**Harpreet Uppal** (Huddersfield) (Lab): There have now been over 500 days of war in Sudan, and we know that the geopolitical context is very complex to say the least. There have been reports from Human Rights Watch of summary executions and torture. Will the Government commit to galvanising the international crisis response that is needed to hold international partners to account, so that the Sudanese people receive the commitment and attention they deserve?

**Anneliese Dodds**: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that incredibly important point. We have indeed, as she eloquently spelled out, seen a really disturbing increase in human rights abuses in Sudan. There has been an escalation of violence, with many civilians killed, sexual assaults on women—as we talked about—and the restriction of humanitarian and journalistic access. The UK will ensure that there is continued scrutiny of Sudan at the UN Human Rights Council. The UK is the leader of the core group, alongside Germany, Norway and the United States. We have been seeking to use that position as actively as possible to raise this issue. Colleagues should also be aware that the UK is funding the Centre for Information Resilience, a research body that is gathering open-source evidence about the ongoing fighting. That is incredibly important for the long-term accountability of those who are abusing human rights so appallingly in Sudan.

**Stephen Gethins** (Arbroath and Broughty Ferry) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for providing time for this issue today. I also thank the Minister. This is the gravest humanitarian situation on Earth and I am grateful for her remarks about evidence gathering on universal crimes. However, I am a little concerned that I am yet to hear what concrete actions are being taken to enforce an arms embargo and stop arms from reaching the conflict zones.

**Anneliese Dodds**: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for being very clear about the magnitude of this appalling conflict and the need to do all we can to prevent it. The UK Government have sought to use every lever we can to put pressure in this area, whether political, diplomatic or humanitarian, and to use every venue we can. To be very clear, I reiterate that the warring parties and those supporting them to become engaged in the conflict must cease their actions, which are having such a negative impact on the population. For those who are engaged to the extent that this is becoming a proxy situation, every single day they do that they are contributing to the humanitarian crisis. The UK could not be clearer in our language.

**Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): Despite Sudan experiencing one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the world, the previous Government failed to expand safe routes for those in Sudan, even for those who have family here. In the light of the ever-worsening situation on the ground, what steps will our new Government take to help those fleeing the conflict to reunite with loved ones and find safety in the UK?

**Anneliese Dodds**: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning the situation facing those who have been forced to flee Sudan. The pattern for those fleeing conflict is quite differentiated. Many who were already in humanitarian need or with low resources have been forced into Chad, obviously from Darfur. As I mentioned earlier, we are also seeing some being forced back into South Sudan. Many have moved into Egypt, which has seen a really significant expansion in its Sudanese population. I think all of us, as parliamentarians, will remember what happened at the beginning of the conflict when there was the evacuation. I pay tribute to the civil servants who ensured that the evacuation took place, because it was a very difficult time. Of course, we take very seriously our commitments on ensuring that refugees are protected in the region.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I am very grateful that time has been given for this urgent question. Groups such as the Zaghawa are facing genocide in Sudan. As a result, many young Zaghawan men have fled to Europe and some live in makeshift camps along the French coast. They wish to come to the UK for a particular reason: because Sudan is a former colony of the British empire and they were taught English at school. The likes of Tommy Robinson demonise them for being young and male, but it is precisely because they are young men that they are most at risk of being slaughtered by the Janjaweed. Will the Government look again, because there is a particular historical duty of care towards people from Sudan, and allow safe passage to the Zaghawa who are fleeing genocide?

**Anneliese Dodds:** We have been very clear that there must not be demonisation of individuals from any heritage or background. We are seeing a situation where a separation is being undertaken by some of the warring parties, so that it is becoming impossible for fathers to leave with their children, and for uncles and grandfathers to leave. They are being separated, unfortunately, and effectively pressganged into supporting some of the warring parties. That is extremely disturbing. We saw that previously, but we are seeing it again intensifying. I met a young boy whose uncle had been subject to that and who escaped by the skin of his teeth. We will ensure that we focus on human rights, including for young men, for everybody in those situations, but the critical thing will be to ensure that Sudan itself has the ceasefire that is desperately needed, and that there is de-escalation and greater regional stability. That is what will be important in both the medium and long term.

**Laura Kyrke-Smith** (Aylesbury) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for dedicating time to this crisis. Given the challenges of getting international aid into Sudan, the humanitarian response is very dependent on local community-led emergency response routes. What measures are the Government taking to ensure that funding reaches frontline responders?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. She has considerable expertise on these issues from before she became a Member of Parliament. We are concerned about the situation of access for humanitarian aid in Sudan. I talked a little about that earlier, but it is important that we do not see unreasonable impediments put in place. I recognise her point about community support being provided. I met some representatives from the so-called emergency response rooms. I also met, as I said, some civil society voices from Sudan who are also engaged in that humanitarian effort. It is important that their contribution is recognised. They are not part of the warring parties; they are completely politically neutral. For that reason, of course, they are being targeted themselves.

**James MacCleary** (Lewes) (LD): What efforts are being made to gather testimony and evidence of the war crimes, breaches of international humanitarian law and ethnic cleansing that we all know are taking place in Sudan at the moment?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I am grateful to the hon. Member for raising that point. I mentioned that the UK is supporting the Centre for Information Resilience, a

research body that is gathering evidence of what is taking place on the ground. For example, funding is being provided for the Sudan witness project, which is investigating attacks against civilians and infrastructure. On the specific finding of genocide, I am clear that that is an internationally focused definition, but we are concerned that we are seeing patterns of violence that bear the hallmarks of that kind of development, so we are keeping that very closely under review.

**Gordon McKee** (Glasgow South) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement. Sudan has borders with seven countries, home to around 280 million people. All those countries now face the destabilising flow of guns and mercenaries. What assessment has the UK Government made of the impact of the civil war on the humanitarian crisis, and not just in Sudan but in neighbouring countries?

**Anneliese Dodds:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. As I mentioned, we have already seen in South Sudan and other neighbouring countries extreme humanitarian need. Clearly, the conflict in Sudan is making the situation even worse in many of those nations. I am grateful to those nations that have opened their borders so that those fleeing conflict are able to move out of the conflict situation, but clearly that is coming at significant cost in situations where there is already considerable humanitarian need. South Sudan, for example, already has the worst maternal mortality in the entire world. It has statistics that place it right at the bottom of the human development index of all countries. This is only making the situation worse, I regret to say.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister very much for her reassuring words about how to help those in Sudan, but given that some 10 million people are displaced there and 25 million are suffering from food insecurity, it is clear that a humanitarian crisis of gigantic proportions is unfolding. In particular—and here I declare an interest, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief—9,000 Christians have been killed, 6 million Christians have been displaced, and 165 churches have been destroyed and closed. There have been human rights violations in the form of rape, kidnapping and looting. Sudan is the eighth worst place in the world to be a Christian. It is clear that much more must be done. May I ask the Minister, very respectfully, what steps she is taking to work with non-governmental organisations on the ground to get support to the people who need it the most: the vulnerable, the ill, women and children?

**Anneliese Dodds:** The hon. Gentleman is right, sadly, about the scale of the humanitarian disaster we see unfolding and about the human rights abuses. He mentioned religious minorities, and also the impact on women and girls, which was mentioned earlier. We are seeing an extremely disturbing situation in Sudan. We will continue to do all we can to raise the profile of this issue. The humanitarian situation in Sudan was a priority for me as soon as I became the new Development Minister—I was determined that I should be briefed on it. It is an enormous crisis, and we in the UK must do all we can to ensure that we play our part politically, diplomatically, economically and in humanitarian terms.

**Adam Jogee** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Yesterday I heard from two Sudanese doctors who were born in Sudan but live in my constituency, and who are rightly and understandably very worried indeed. We have heard from the Minister about engagement with the World Bank, the African Union and the United Nations, but many of our European neighbours have colonial ties with this part of Africa, as do we. What specific and direct conversations has the Minister had with European colleagues to urge them to do their bit to help resolve the crisis?

**Anneliese Dodds:** The Sudanese doctors' groups have been very important in the UK in raising the profile of these issues, and in trying to ensure that information about the situation on the ground is getting through and being reported in the media. We will continue to work multilaterally, but also bilaterally. I have discussed these matters with, for example, counterparts from Norway, Germany and a number of other European nations, and also with the current European Commissioner for Development, who will of course be moving on with a new commission. We clearly need to work together to try to resolve these matters.

**Alice Macdonald** (Norwich North) (Lab/Co-op): Children are often on the frontline of conflict, and that certainly applies in Sudan, where a whole generation of children are living a nightmare and facing a catastrophe. Can the Minister expand on the specific measures being taken to protect children, both in terms of immediate humanitarian aid and to raise the important issue of children's rights?

**Anneliese Dodds:** My hon. Friend brings considerable expertise to the House, gained before she became a Member of Parliament. The appalling circumstances in which children are finding themselves because of this conflict really must be raised up the international agenda. When I was in South Sudan, I met some children who had escaped from Sudan. Those children could not smile any more. There was nothing that they could see for their future. It was extremely disturbing. They had lost their parents, and they had seen, for example, siblings dying of measles or diarrhoea while they were trying to escape the conflict. This is a truly horrendous situation. Children's rights must indeed be raised, and we should of course also consider the situation of children in the context of the activity of the warring parties. Again, the UK Government will be calling on those parties to ensure that they are following international humanitarian law and, above all, that we have the ceasefire that is so desperately needed.

## Ofsted

1.14 pm

**Damian Hinds** (East Hampshire) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on proposed changes to Ofsted reporting.

**The Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell):** As the Government explained in the written ministerial statement that was laid yesterday, and as was outlined in our manifesto, single headline grades will no longer be issued by Ofsted when it inspects state-funded schools. Our landmark reform will drive high and rising standards for children, and will increase transparency for parents.

Today Ofsted published the outcome of its Big Listen consultation exercise, the largest engagement with parents, children and professionals in its history, which, as the right hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) will know, began under the last Government. The Big Listen contains some difficult messages. It is clear that significant change is needed, and Ofsted has responded by committing itself to improvements.

Holding schools accountable for children's education is vital, but single headline grades are low information for parents and create high stakes for schools, so this Government are acting, making inspections both more powerful and more transparent. For this academic year, parents will continue to see four inspection grades for the existing sub-categories, and from September 2025 the introduction of school report cards will provide a more complete picture of a school's performance. We will develop those over the coming months, working closely with parents and schools.

We want high and rising standards for every child, and we will act decisively when those standards are not being met. We will continue to intervene when performance is a serious concern. Ofsted's legal duty to identify schools causing concern will remain. They will still be required to notify the Secretary of State of these inspection outcomes, and she will retain her legal duty to issue an academy order to local authority-maintained schools when that is required. However, we will change the way in which schools are supported to help them succeed. From early 2025, we will introduce regional improvement teams, which will partner with struggling schools to drive improvement quickly and directly. This marks the beginning, not the end, of our journey towards an accountability system that is fit for purpose and will help to break down the barriers to opportunity for every child throughout the country.

**Damian Hinds:** The system can certainly improve. After the terrible tragedy of Ruth Perry, changes were made, and, as the Minister said, Ofsted initiated its wider Big Listen consultation. We supported that, and I welcome much of what was in Ofsted's announcement today, but I fear that the Government have not thought through the consequences of their own announcement yesterday. The overall effectiveness assessment is a vital indicator for parents, and it also plays a specific role in the statutory framework.

Can the Minister confirm that Ofsted will still have a legal duty to identify schools needing "special measures" or "requiring significant improvement", that the Department will still intervene, and that this will be



[*Damian Hinds*]

based on the same criteria as before, with the use of the same word, “inadequate”, but now in any one of four categories? When will there be clarity for other sectors—early years, colleges, prisons and social care? Crucially, what are the implications for intervention if children’s social care in an area is failing, with all the terrible consequences that that can bring? There is already a wealth of report card information on schools, from pupil progress to attendance. What will actually be new in the report cards that the Minister mentioned?

A rather less discussed aspect of yesterday’s announcement is the introduction of the ominous-sounding regional improvement teams to monitor struggling schools, rather a good fit being found with an academy trust. Apparently, they will be funded by—yes, you guessed it—VAT on independent schools. In respect of schools with successive “requires improvement” judgments, can the Minister tell us what reason there is to believe that regional improvement teams will be more effective in delivering improvements than a strong academy trust?

Between 2010 and 2024, the proportion of schools rated less than good came down from about one in three to one in 10. What worries me is that these changes mean less transparency for parents and a step backwards, from a proven school improvement approach with academy trusts to a directive top-down approach. I urge the Secretary of State and her Minister to assess the true impact that this will have on young people’s prospects before it is too late.

**Catherine McKinnell:** The shadow Secretary of State was a Minister in the Department for Education, and he knows these issues well. He also knows that the work we are announcing today is about clearing up the mess that the previous Government left. The Big Listen was announced under his Government, and his former colleague, the previous Chair of the Education Committee, was persuaded of the case for reform of the single-headline grades. Labour is a party of high and rising standards for all our children in all our schools.

Reforming inspection to enable improvement in our schools is urgent. Inspection and accountability are crucial tools for achieving better outcomes for all our children. We will take no lessons from a party under whose watch one in four children left primary school without meeting the standards expected in maths and reading. One in five children are persistently absent from school, and it is not good enough. We are determined to fix it, and the announcement that we have made is the first step on that road.

**Alistair Strathern** (Hitchin) (Lab): May I thank the Minister for taking swift action? As a former teacher and children’s lead at a local authority, I know how high-stakes and low-information Ofsted judgments had started to become for local families. Indeed, having spoken to parents in my constituency ahead of my Westminster Hall debate on education for children with special educational needs and disabilities tomorrow, I know that the lack of a focus on inclusive education is a real issue for a lot of parents. Can the Minister confirm that when looking at a new scorecard, we will make the most of this opportunity to ensure that Ofsted is holding schools to account on the breadth of their inclusion in the local area?

**Catherine McKinnell:** My hon. Friend puts the issues very well. We will consult on the report card system and take the time to ensure that we get it right, but we want to ensure that we have a clearer picture for parents by putting a clearer spotlight on a greater range of areas of performance, rather than a one-word overall judgment. For example, we want to give parents a better picture of the support that a school is providing for children with special educational needs. As part of the process, we will explore how to demonstrate that within the report card system.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Lib Dem spokesperson.

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): The death of Ruth Perry was a tragedy and underscored the high-stakes nature of Ofsted inspections. I have witnessed at first hand how headteachers and teachers in my constituency have suffered under the strain and stress of Ofsted inspections, but others have also told me how helpful they have found them and how brilliant Ofsted inspectors have been. We Liberal Democrats certainly welcome the move away from one-word judgments, which we have long been calling for. At the same time, we believe that a robust and fair inspection and accountability regime is essential to ensure that schools are operating at a high standard and are safe, nurturing and inclusive environments in which our children and young people can thrive.

Although the change is a welcome first step, could we have some reassurances that it will be followed by proper root-and-branch reform? For too long, Ofsted has been seen as an adversary, but it should be seen as a helpful friend. Can we see the announcement as a first step towards a world where Ofsted is a helpful, respected partner for schools? Perhaps the regional improvement teams will provide that—I sense that local authorities used to do so before they had that function taken away from them. Finally, Ofsted should be looking at a broad, varied and rich curriculum. How will the Minister’s curriculum review connect with the Ofsted changes?

**Catherine McKinnell:** I thank the hon. Lady for welcoming today’s changes, which are welcomed by many people in the sector and across the country, who rely on a strong inspection system that is fair, clear and transparent. I echo her comments about the death of Ruth Perry, which was a tragedy. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to her sister Julia, who has fought so hard over the past year to ensure that lessons are learned.

We know that Ofsted has reported on its Big Listen today, and copies will be available in the House of Commons Library. It is a very large report. Ofsted has undertaken a huge exercise, which shows that it is listening. It will take time to see the changes implemented, but Ofsted is determined to change and, as the hon. Lady says, we are determined to work in partnership with it to deliver the changes required. That applies across the board in our education sector, where we want to work in partnership with schools and those who are delivering the excellent education that we want to see for every child.

The hon. Lady mentioned the curriculum review. I may get in trouble for the length of response that her question requires, but the curriculum review is a key part of reforming our education system and ensuring that it gives a breadth and depth of experience to young people, their teachers and their schools.



**Sureena Brackenridge** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for her statement to the House on the long-awaited Ofsted reforms. Given the welcome focus on inclusion, SEND and improved training for inspectors, can she update the House on how this will support children with SEND in Wolverhampton North East and beyond?

**Catherine McKinnell:** I concur with my hon. Friend that this is about ensuring we have an inspection system that drives high and rising standards for every child, which includes supporting our aim to see an inclusive school system that delivers the outcomes that we want to see for children with special educational needs. It is about providing greater transparency in our school system and an inspection regime that focuses on a whole variety of areas where schools should be striving for improvement. We know that schools work incredibly hard and are doing an incredible job for our children, but every school can always do better, and an inspection system that supports and drives improvement will be welcome across the board.

**Sir Gavin Williamson** (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): Across Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge, we have some amazing “outstanding” and “good” schools. Across the country, however, we see schools that are failing and in need of intervention. Could the Minister set out what she envisages as the trigger mechanism for intervention?

**Catherine McKinnell:** The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and we will work with Ofsted on developing the new report card system over the next year. We will engage and consult as part of that process, because we want to get it right. He is right to suggest that where there are serious failings in schools, we will continue to intervene in the best interests of children, and we will continue to intervene where the Government currently have a legal duty to do so. We will continue to intervene but, through our regional improvement teams, we will also look to put improvement support in place for schools that are struggling, because no child should be left in a school that is letting them down.

**Mr Jonathan Brash** (Hartlepool) (Lab): Schools across the country, including in my constituency of Hartlepool, will welcome today’s judgment. As they start the new term, will my hon. Friend join me in thanking them for their extraordinary hard work, including on behalf of my children, who started their school term today? The decision demonstrates that in this Government, schools have a partner who will work with them to improve every child’s future.

**Catherine McKinnell:** I agree, and I wish my hon. Friend’s children all the best as they start school today. Many children across the country are having their first day back at school. I remember my first day at school very well; I remember it being terrifying and not dissimilar from one’s first outing at the Dispatch Box. I concur that this Government’s priority is to drive high and rising standards—not in some of our schools and for some of our children, but for every child in every one of our schools—and we will work tirelessly to deliver that. The reforms that we are announcing are a crucial part of ensuring that it is delivered.

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): In my career as a teacher, I had the dubious pleasure of being inspected by four different regimes. I am afraid to say that Ofsted was the most brutal, the least personal and the least useful of all the regimes. At its best, an inspection regime can help to drive up improvements and celebrate what is great about a school. Inspections hold up a mirror and make teachers ask themselves what more they can do for the children they care about so much. What lessons is the Department learning from other inspection regimes around the world?

**Catherine McKinnell:** The hon. Lady raises an important point, and her experience is obviously valuable to the House for the lessons that we can learn. She is absolutely right to say that a good inspection regime drives improvement and identifies in all schools not only those areas where they are doing well—which should be celebrated—but those where there is room to improve. We will consult on the report card system extensively over the next year. We want to make sure we get this right, and we want to do it in partnership. We will look to see how this is done elsewhere to make sure that we learn from best practice, and we will continue to ensure that this is an inspection system that should be welcomed by schools, as it helps them to identify how they deliver for their children, as she rightly says. I know that that is the priority for every school.

**Darren Paffey** (Southampton Itchen) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement and for the excellent, practical reforms that are being set out. Will she join me in thanking in advance all the hard-working teachers and support staff across Southampton Itchen, and offer them an assurance that this Government intend to work in real partnership to ensure that every child gets the best start in life?

**Catherine McKinnell:** I thank my hon. Friend and very much welcome the opportunity to thank all our teachers as they go back to school this week. They will be putting in a really hard and rewarding year ahead, and will give the best to the children in their care.

I absolutely echo what my hon. Friend says. We were clear from day one in government that we want to work in partnership with the sector. We know that the Government do not deliver education to children: our teachers do; our schools do; our support staff do; and the parents who make sure their children get to school do. We support them all in that endeavour, but where we can do more to support them in delivering that, we will. The announcements that we are making are part of that endeavour.

**Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): When my sister Lee took what were then called her GCE exams in the early 1960s, she was given a specific mark for each exam result. By the time I took mine in the late 1960s, that system had been replaced by one of grades, which merged together all sorts of different results and was likely to lead to subjectivity and relativism henceforth. Could not the simplistic one-word system that is now being replaced be replaced by a proper marking system, where individual aspects of a school are specifically marked and an overall figure given, which would therefore not be subjective, but would give parents an easy guide as to the performance of the school?

**Catherine McKinnell:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a characteristically thoughtful point. As part of our consultation, we will look at how best to deliver our aim, which is to provide greater transparency, greater clarity and greater information for parents, for schools and for the staff who are working to drive improvement. As he says, no child would be given a single grade for their overall school performance, which begs the important question of why we have been doing that for schools.

**Oliver Ryan (Burnley) (Lab/Co-op):** When the previous Conservative Government left office, education standards were declining, schools were crumbling, and they claimed to have maxed out on their support for children. Does the Minister agree that schools, parents and pupils deserve better, and that with this Government, they will get it? *[Interruption.]*

**Catherine McKinnell:** My hon. Friend puts it incredibly well, although those on the Opposition Front Bench seem to protest against his appreciation of the reality that schools up and down the country have been facing, which has been letting children down. That is our key focus today. Yes, it is about schools, it is about an inspection framework, and it is about the organisation, Ofsted, that delivers that, but actually this is about children. It is about ensuring the best outcomes for every child. If we get this system right and we put education back at the heart of national life again, we will deliver on our pledge to break down the barriers to opportunity for every child, wherever they are in this country.

**Mr Joshua Reynolds (Maidenhead) (LD):** I welcome the announcement by the Government, as do many schools and parents in my constituency, who want more information rather than just one-word ratings. Can I urge the Minister to give parents more power through greater detail, while ensuring that ratings are easy for parents to understand?

**Catherine McKinnell:** The hon. Gentleman has very much set out our aim and intention, and that is why we will consult extensively on this. We have given ourselves till September 2025 to have the report cards in place, and we want to ensure that we have input from education experts, parents and children, and that we maximise this opportunity to, as he put it, maximise the information that parents will find useful and the information that schools will find useful, to drive the improvement that they want for their children.

**Mr Luke Charters (York Outer) (Lab):** York Outer is home to many inspirational teachers and I am proud that my wife is one of them, but heads tell me that there is a recruitment and retention crisis. Does the Minister agree that the end of Ofsted headline judgments will improve teacher retention, and can she update the House on the plans to recruit 6,500 specialist teachers?

**Catherine McKinnell:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention and I wish his wife, and all teachers starting their new school term, well. It is an incredibly exciting time. It is a little bit daunting for some, but it is an important opportunity to reset their school life at the beginning of a new year.

Similarly, this is an opportunity for us to reset our relationship with the sector. In doing so, we must ensure that we can recruit the necessary teachers. We must make teaching the attractive, respected and admired profession that it should be, to ensure that we meet the pledge to recruit 6,500 new teachers. We have already started the work. We have reset the relationship and the tone, we have obviously made progress on the pay review, and we will continue to strive to reach our target to ensure that every school has the teachers it needs, and that every child has the teachers they need, especially in the subjects that require specialist teaching.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I thank the Minister for her response to all the questions and wish her well in the role that she now plays to make education better for our children. That is what we all wish to see. The Minister will understand the need for parents to easily and simply determine which school best fits the needs of their child and family, and that any review of a school must be accessible not only to those with an educational background but to those who are perhaps not familiar with educational terminology. This needs to be clear in the reporting. Does the Minister also acknowledge that, rather than having teaching staff focus on an area that appears to be getting a lower grade than the rest, and directing resources to improving that one area, the resources and attention must instead go to children and their educational needs, which are more varied and complex than ever before?

**Catherine McKinnell:** The hon. Gentleman makes a characteristically thoughtful point, and I do not disagree with anything that he said. In fact, the report card system should give a much more holistic picture of school life. A parent knows their child, and they know the sort of school environment that will suit them. A report card system will enable the highlighting of areas where a school may be doing particularly well, and the areas where it may need to strive to improve. That will be useful for parents. It will also be useful for schools to know where they can improve, and it will be useful in driving high and rising standards for every child. We are absolutely determined to deliver that, and we see this as a key part of ensuring that that happens.

**Peter Swallow (Bracknell) (Lab):** If I were to pick a single word to describe Ofsted's grading system, it would be "inadequate", so I welcome the Government's commitment to reviewing Ofsted's review system, and particularly to reviewing its focus on special educational needs. Will the Minister engage with families with special educational needs when developing the new school report card system?

**Catherine McKinnell:** Ensuring that we meet the needs of children with special educational needs and their families is a key priority for the Government. We recognise that the system is broken and that there are too many families and too many children not getting the education that they deserve. We see this as part of the process of resetting that relationship and resetting the system so that we can have a school system that is inclusive, where that is appropriate, and so that we can have mainstream schools that serve the whole community. We will endeavour, as part of wider reforms that we are looking at, to ensure that we have a special educational needs system that meets the needs of every child in this country.

**Nesil Caliskan** (Barking) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement, and for her clarity on the next steps to drive improvement in schools across the country. Many teachers and parents will welcome the news that we will move away from one-word inspections, but intervention is not the same as driving improvement. Can the Minister reassure me that, alongside intervention, there will be a plan and support for schools so that we see the improvements necessary to give every child the best start in life?

**Catherine McKinnell:** We will continue to intervene in the worst-performing schools. Where a school would previously have been rated “inadequate”, the Government will still take action. We will issue academy orders, if required, in line with legal requirements. Inspection reports will continue to make it clear to parents if a school is in this situation, and Ofsted will continue to make it clear where a school is causing concern and if intervention is required by law.

We will also ensure that, where schools need support, they get that support. We will roll out regional improvement teams to ensure that, where schools are struggling, they get the support they need, through a system that partners them with high-performing schools in the area to ensure that schools work together for the benefit of their whole community. We see that as a key part of driving the reforms that we want to see for every child.

**Mike Amesbury** (Runcorn and Helsby) (Lab): I welcome the Minister’s changes to Ofsted inspections. This holistic approach is genuinely common sense. In the future, will similar measures apply to children’s services?

**Catherine McKinnell:** We recognise that this is a first step on the journey towards removing single headline grades, which we see as reductive—we have widespread agreement on that—across all educational remits. At this stage, we are implementing it in schools as a matter of priority, but we will work with Ofsted and the sector over the next year to develop reporting arrangements across a whole range of areas for which Ofsted has responsibility.

**Shaun Davies** (Telford) (Lab): I congratulate the Minister on this rapid work. The Conservatives had 14 years, but Labour Ministers have done it in a matter of weeks. Can I have a commitment that Ofsted’s focus on attainment, SEND and attendance will be laser-focused?

For the benefit of the House, there are only two more Conservatives Members in the Chamber for this statement on education standards than are standing for the Conservative party leadership.

**Catherine McKinnell:** My hon. Friend is right. We have delivered at pace and hit the ground running when it comes to improving our education system. Just as every day at school matters, every day in government matters for driving high and rising standards for every child.

My hon. Friend rightly identifies attendance as a key issue, and we share that concern. The previous Government talked a lot about that, but did very little to turn the tables. We want to see attendance prioritised, as we know that far too many children are missing far too much school, which is harming not only their educational opportunities but their life chances and the whole school community. We want to send the message loud and clear, in this first week back at school, that every day at school matters and every child should be attending school.

**Laurence Turner** (Birmingham Northfield) (Lab): The decision to end single-word judgments will be welcomed by education professionals across Birmingham. I have seen in my own household the mental and physical toll that the old system could impose. Can the Minister confirm that the new school report card will allow Ofsted to assess SEND inclusion alongside SEND attainment?

**Catherine McKinnell:** Yes. We know that the current system is not working for anyone, which is why the changes we have outlined are so important. We know that we need to spread best practice and drive standards across all of our schools, including for children with special educational needs, who are a key priority for this Government, and we will consult on the best ways to do that.

**Chris Bloore** (Redditch) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement. Anyone who has visited a school in their constituency before or after an Ofsted inspection cannot help but know the impact on staff. I welcome this opportunity to reset our relationship with educators and families, because it is so important right now that those young people who are looking to become teachers see it as a worthwhile profession in which they will be welcomed and appreciated by the Government. I hope this is an opportunity for the Minister to work with the education sector and families to build a report system that is fit for purpose and encourages people to work in the education system.

**Catherine McKinnell:** Hear, hear. We know that the system has been letting down children and families, and that we have a shortage of people who want to be teachers. We need to make sure we have a teaching workforce that can deliver the education that every child deserves. My hon. Friend puts it incredibly eloquently, and I very much agree that this is about resetting our system and resetting the Government’s relationship with families, so that they send their children to school and believe that school is the best place for their child, and with teachers, so that they know they are trusted, valued and supported to deliver what I know they went into teaching to deliver, and so that we encourage more people to become teachers.



## Contracts for Difference

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I call Ed Miliband to make a statement on contracts for difference.

1.46 pm

**The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband):** I congratulate you on your new role, Madam Deputy Speaker.

With permission, I would like to make a statement about the sixth contracts for difference allocation round.

It is less than two months since the Government came into office with a mandate to fix the foundations and make Britain a clean energy superpower. The last Government left this country exposed to international fossil fuel markets. As a result, every household and business paid the price in the worst cost of living and energy bills crisis in memory; because of Britain's particular exposure, families and businesses in our country were hit harder than others.

The only way to provide this country with the energy security that the British people deserve is through home-grown clean energy that we control. That is the mandate on which this Government were elected, and that is what we will deliver.

Last year's contracts for difference auction, under the previous Government, was a fiasco. No offshore wind projects were awarded, which was a disaster for the industry and for our efforts to move away from dependence on fossil fuels. In July, when we came into office, I made the decision to expand the budget for this year's auction by 50% to maximise the amount of home-grown clean power we could secure while delivering value for the British people, and today the results are in.

I can announce to the House that we have secured a record-breaking 131 new clean energy projects: more projects for our country as a whole than any previous auction; more projects in England, more projects in Scotland and more projects in Wales than any previous auction; over two and a half times the capacity secured in last year's auction; nearly 10 GW of clean, home-grown power, enough to power the equivalent of 11 million homes; the most successful renewables auction in British history; and a major step forward in our mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower and to help Britain get off the rollercoaster of volatile global gas markets.

Let me set out the results in detail. First, solar is one of the cheapest and most readily deployable energy sources at our disposal. We have secured a record 93 solar photovoltaic projects, the largest number of solar projects ever in an auction, unlocking 3.3 GW of new solar, which is a 20% increase on our installed capacity.

Secondly, we have secured almost 1 GW of onshore wind. However, I must report to the House that, thanks to the Conservatives' near total ban on onshore wind, there was just one small onshore wind project in England of 8 MW. Their nine-year ban destroyed the pipeline of projects. That is why this Government lifted the onshore wind ban in England as one of their first acts. Our onshore wind taskforce will now go about the process of working with industry to rebuild the pipeline of projects.

Thirdly, this auction was a success for the emerging technologies that will serve our country in the future.

Floating offshore wind offers a huge opportunity in every part of Britain. The last auction secured no floating offshore wind. On coming to office, I was presented with a budget that risked repeating the mistakes of the past, so I took the decision to more than double the budget that covers this cutting-edge technology. I can report to the House that today's auction has secured a 400 MW floating offshore wind project, more than 10 times bigger than the previous biggest floating offshore wind farm in Britain.

**Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform):** At double the price.

**Ed Miliband:** At a lower price. This floating offshore wind farm alone is double the size of all of Europe's installed floating offshore wind capacity. In addition, on tidal, where Britain has huge leadership opportunities, we have secured six new tidal stream projects at the lowest ever price.

Fourthly, on fixed offshore wind, in contrast to the zero GW secured in last year's round, we have secured 4.9 GW of offshore wind, enough to power the equivalent of 8 million homes. That includes securing both the largest and second largest offshore wind projects in Europe—Hornsea 3 and Hornsea 4 off the Yorkshire coast. An industry flat on its back because of the mistakes of the last Government is back on its feet thanks to this Government.

I can also report to the House that across the whole auction all these results were secured at prices well below the maximum price limit—prices that demonstrate that wind and solar are the cheapest sources of power to build and operate in our country. For the House's benefit, that means a clearing price for offshore wind that is five to seven times lower than electricity prices driven by gas at the peak of the energy crisis.

The success of this round does not just offer greater energy security for the British people; it also offers the possibility of good jobs throughout Britain. But that will not happen without action by Government, because we know that too often in the past renewable energy produced in Britain has not created enough good jobs in Britain. With Great British Energy and our national wealth fund, we will invest to make sure our clean power mission produces jobs in every corner of the United Kingdom.

This Government have been in office for less than two months. In that time, we have lifted the onshore wind ban, consented more nationally significant solar capacity in one week than the last Government did in 14 years, and now delivered the most successful renewables auction in the history of the country. And on Thursday we will debate the Second Reading of the Great British Energy Bill. This is a Government in a hurry to deliver our mission: energy security, lower bills, good jobs and tackling the climate crisis. I commend this statement to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I call the shadow Minister.

1.53 pm

**Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con):** I am grateful to the Secretary of State for the timely advance sight of his statement. I would like to put on record that Members on the Opposition Benches welcome the success of the



contracts for difference allocation round 6. The Secretary of State is right to be proud of that achievement by the Government. It is to be celebrated that we, as a country, are creating an extra 131 clean energy projects that include 5 GW of offshore wind farms and 3 MW of floating wind.

The Secretary of State will be grateful to the previous Government for setting up the details of auction round 6 last November. The previous Secretary of State recognised the problems of AR5 and the price set for offshore wind—a price that was set before a round of inflation that made the CFD strike price cap too low for the producers. By the way, this was not just a UK problem; it affected other projects for offshore wind around the world. Increasing the strike price by around 60% to the current AR6 price of £73 has been crucial to securing the current success. Of course, in addition, the previous Government had many other successes. In 2010, just 7% of our energy needs were supplied by renewables. Today it is nearly 50%. This has come from many initiatives, not least bringing in the contracts for difference auctions in 2014 and making the auction process an annual event—an initiative that was learnt from AR5 problems.

It would not be fair to ignore the contribution by the new Secretary of State. As he said, he has increased the pot for this year's auction by 50%. While that is welcome—frankly, who would not welcome more renewable energy—that does not tackle our energy issues. At the same time as increasing renewable energy production, the Government are decreasing UK gas production. The UK needs reliability of supply of energy, but we all know we cannot predict with any certainty when the wind will blow and the sun will shine. That is why we need baseload, dispatchable energy that can supply the energy needs of our homes and economy.

We recognise the importance of investing in renewables to deliver clean energy, and the 9.6 GW announced today is a brilliant step in the right direction, but given these successes, and his self-declared success today, why does the Secretary of State plan to saddle the country with billions in debt to fund Great British Energy? In previous months, he may have answered that question by saying that the purpose of GB Energy was to cut energy bills by £300. However, we note that his promise to cut energy bills seems to have gone missing, much like the winter fuel payments of 10 million pensioners.

Despite the Secretary of State's pledge, and that of many hon. Members on the Government Benches, he will be aware that energy bills are in fact going up. Can he confirm when bills will fall, and by how much? Pensioners are not the only ones being impacted by this Government's ideological energy targets. As I have already mentioned, the Secretary of State banned new oil and gas, which will cost 200,000 oil and gas workers their jobs. Research conducted by the industry predicts that that move will see tax revenues from that industry fall by £13 billion by 2030.

The Opposition welcome the Secretary of State's ambition to make sure that the jobs created by the transition are located in Britain, but, at this stage, the majority of jobs in the solar and wind sectors are located in China. What steps is he, as the current Secretary of State, taking to ensure all the jobs created through AR6 are located in Britain? He has already made a bit of a habit of riding roughshod over the

concerns of local communities, approving developments without regard to the concerns of local communities. These decisions will see some of Britain's green belt and best agricultural land developed. Will the Secretary of State confirm what share of today's investment will take place on the green belt? What protections is he putting in to protect the green belt?

The Secretary of State has spoken at length about the need to overcome challenges facing the grid. In Government, we delivered a 500% increase in the amount of renewable energy connected to the grid, but we recognised that so much more needed to be done. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to support this further increase? Has he investigated undergrounding? What plans does he have to protect the countryside from more pylons?

I note that the Secretary of State today recommitted to decarbonising the grid by 2030. We have previously warned him of the risks of being over-ambitious, which include leaving families facing the cost. It is not only the Opposition who have warned him of that—Chris Stark, his newly appointed head of mission control, once described the 2030 target as “over-ambitious”. Will the Secretary of State please share exactly what his head of mission control believed to be over-ambitious about a 2030 decarbonisation target? His head of mission control also warned that it was entirely fair that people are concerned about the cost of decarbonising by 2030. Will the Secretary of State confirm that neither taxpayers nor bill payers will be left with the cost of the 2030 target? Will he tell the House when we will see a proper, comprehensive estimate for the full systems costs of his decarbonisation plans for 2030?

In conclusion, the Opposition welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has built on our successes in boosting renewable energy. However, we hold serious concerns about what this round will mean for Britain's green spaces and whether, given the increased cost of AR6, his commitment remains to cut bills by £300.

**Ed Miliband:** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his elevation since the election. I look forward to our exchanges in this House. I say him to gently that the crucial first phase of Opposition, in my experience, is having a bit of humility to admit where they have got things wrong. I do not deny that some of the things that the previous Government did were right, but quite a lot of what they did was wrong—for example, the nine-year ban on the cheapest, cleanest form of power, the blocking of solar projects across the country and the crashing of the offshore wind market, which led to the worst energy bills crisis in generations. That is their legacy, and at some point some of the leadership candidates will have to face up to that.

Let me deal with the hon. Member's specific points. If I may say so respectfully, I feel like he answered some of his own questions. He draws attention to the fact that energy bills are rising from 1 October. He is right about that, and that is deeply regrettable. Why is that happening? Because we are exposed to international gas markets. This is about power that we do not control. Every solar panel that we do not put up, every onshore wind turbine that we do not erect, and every piece of grid that we do not build leaves us more exposed. The Conservative party is in a dilemma on this, because it is facing both ways, but it has to face up to that fact. Of course we will have a proper and orderly transition in the North sea,

[*Ed Miliband*]

keeping existing fields open for their lifetime and having a just transition for the workforce, but the idea that the Conservative party and some of its erstwhile friends are clinging to—that fossil fuels will get us out of this—is completely belied by all the facts and the crisis that we went through.

The shadow Minister says—and I agree with him—that we need to have jobs in this country. He says it as if he finds it hard to remember who has been in power for the past 14 years. It is terrible, he says, that everything is being produced elsewhere. He is right. Germany has almost twice as many renewable energy jobs per capita as the UK. Sweden has almost three times as many, but, most interestingly, Denmark, with its publicly owned energy company, Ørsted, has almost four times as many.

The hon. Gentleman asks about Great British Energy. We will debate that matter on Thursday, but one reason why we went to the electorate on this point and were endorsed on it is that, unless we have a publicly owned national champion, all the evidence is that the jobs will go elsewhere. That is part of having a basic industrial policy.

The hon. Member talks about solar energy, but, again, he has to make up his mind about where he is on this. He says that he agrees that we need clean energy in this country, and that we have to get off the international gas markets, but the problem is that the Conservatives duck every difficult decision. Then he asks about undergrounding. The Conservatives were in power for 14 years, so they had plenty of time to do the undergrounding of all the cabling. Why did they not do that? It is because they know that it is multiple times more expensive. Now they come along, less than two months after the general election, and say that it is time for some undergrounding of the grid. For goodness' sake! I have experience of being Leader of the Opposition. Perhaps it is time for the Conservatives to have some private tutorials on how to be in opposition.

**Mr Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): It is great to see my right hon. Friend in such ebullient spirits. I have to say that his enthusiasm can only be matched by that of the industry, which today has roundly welcomed the decision that he took back in July to increase the size of this auction. That demonstrates that, if we have a Government who are consistent, positive and ambitious, the industry will respond and will back their plans. Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that the great start that he has made will be continued with a consistent plan under this Government, so that businesses can invest for the long term, knowing that the Government will always back them?

**Ed Miliband:** My hon. Friend makes a typically eloquent point. This is about a partnership with private industry. The truth is that much of the investment that we need for the clean power mission will come from the private sector, and I suspect that there is cross-party agreement on that. We on the Government Benches have a difference with the Opposition, though, because we believe that a lot of that comes from breaking down the barriers to planning and grid infrastructure, which is a massive challenge for supply chains and skills. There is also a role for what we call catalytic public investment, leveraging in extra private investment.

The other point that my hon. Friend makes is absolutely right. There is huge enthusiasm in the private sector and industry more generally for this sense of mission for the country. We want this mission to involve every business that has an interest in this area, and I believe that we can achieve that.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): We Liberal Democrats very much welcome the results of this round. It is a significant improvement on last year, when the previous Conservative Government completely failed, with zero bids from the onshore wind developers.

The results show that the CfD programme is back on track. They demonstrate the power of industry and Government working together to identify a fixed problem, so that we can widen the level of private sector investment we bring in, which is required for a clean power system transition.

Britain's unique geography, with its abundance of natural resources, is an asset. We must harness the wind and the world's largest tides. It is hugely encouraging that a record-breaking amount of solar capacity has been procured. Whatever the Conservatives are saying now about their record in government, solar targets were repeatedly missed, and this round is a welcome change. Unlike the Conservative Government, who, as has been pointed out, left us at the whim of the global oil and gas market, this Government are making choices that will increase our energy independence and lower energy bills for our consumers.

Future allocation rounds, especially in the next few years, must continue to deliver increasing quantities of renewables. That can be achieved by setting ambitious budgets and bringing forward incremental reforms of the CfD regime. Can the Secretary of State assure me that this round is not just a one-off and that we will increase the pace of the CfD allocation rounds?

**Ed Miliband:** I thank the hon. Lady for her support and the warm tone that she uses. She is right that we face a big challenge as a country to get moving on the offshore wind Bill, the onshore wind Bill, solar on rooftops and ground-mounted solar. The truth is that CfD auctions have served us well and continue to do so. We inherited this auction halfway through the round, and we increased the budget substantially to make sure that it was a success. But the right thing for us to do—I think this is the main point that she is making—is to talk to industry about how we can make sure that future rounds are a success. I am very interested in how we can have a line of sight for industry, so that it can have the industrial certainty to plan ahead. The annual auction round is serving us well, but we need to work with industry to make sure that we land the clean power that we need and get the jobs here too.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab): The Secretary of State is right to point out that the previous Government presided over the failed fifth auction round for the offshore wind sector. It was devastating. I congratulate him on achieving success for this important industry, but part of the measure of that success will be the wider industrial benefits, including good jobs. What

action will he take to make sure that coastal communities such as mine see those jobs, as well as training and manufacturing?

**Ed Miliband:** My hon. Friend speaks with great experience—from both inside and outside this House—and I welcome her expertise on these issues. She is absolutely right that we have to face up to the fact that we are in a global race for these jobs. Investors are trying to decide whether to locate their blade factories and other investments in the UK or elsewhere. That is why we went into the election with a range of measures, including Great British Energy, the national wealth fund and the British jobs bonus. All are designed to achieve the re-industrialisation that my hon. Friend is talking about.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): What consideration has the Secretary of State given to proposals for an interconnector from north Africa to the UK, bringing reliable solar and wind power at times when the wind is not blowing here and the sun is not shining?

**Ed Miliband:** I shall address this question at a more general level, for reasons the right hon. Gentleman might understand. I think we should be looking at all proposals that can maximise energy security. He is talking about the Xlinks proposal. I am obviously aware of that proposal, and know that we need to look at it in the broadest way. My view has always been that we need every source of power available, which is why I embrace nuclear, onshore wind, offshore wind, solar, tidal, carbon capture and storage—[*Interruption.*] And absolutely, as the right hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position, oil and gas also have a crucial role in the transition.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is correct that clean energy is by far the cheapest way to power the UK, as confirmed by industry bodies today in welcoming his announcement, but there will be intense international competition for investment. How does he foresee ensuring that we have the competitive advantage in attracting that investment for years to come?

**Ed Miliband:** Again, my hon. Friend speaks with great expertise. Part of it is about having a Government who are committed to a proper industrial strategy and have the levers to make that strategy happen. There was an interesting divide between the Opposition, when they were in government, and us. Although, of course, America is a different-sized country from us, we see the Inflation Reduction Act as offering real lessons to us about how we can lever in private investment. We will not be able to do it on the scale of that Act, but these interventions can make a difference. There is also this crucial point: we care where the manufacturing happens, and we are determined to make sure that it happens in the UK.

**Richard Tice** (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): Will the Secretary of State, who is obsessed with renewable energy, actually be honest with the British people? The truth is that the offshore wind turbine bids today are some 20% above current prices. The floating offshore wind bids are some three times the current prices. His Department says that this requires subsidies of some

£1.5 billion a year. That is before the extra transmission costs, before constraint payments, before compensation payments for blighting my constituents' countryside, and before the cost of back-up when the wind does not blow and the sun does not shine. Why will he not be honest and tell the truth: that renewable energy is more expensive, not cheaper?

**Ed Miliband:** I am interested by the hon. Gentleman's intervention, because his manifesto is basically higher bills and to make people poorer. We do not need to look into the crystal ball; we just need to look at the record. The truth is that the cost of living crisis—the energy bills crisis—casts a long shadow in this country. It was caused not by a dependence on renewables but by our exposure to fossil fuels. He just needs to understand this basic point: whether fossil fuels are produced in this country or internationally, they are sold on the international market, and that is why the British people paid the price and the Government forked out £94 billion. The only way to get off the rollercoaster of international gas markets and take back control is to become a clean energy superpower.

**Joani Reid** (East Kilbride and Strathaven) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. This allocation round is testament to the continued success of the contracts for difference scheme. As we are now on course to produce more renewable energy than ever and we need to get that power to consumers, does he agree that we need the same political and financial commitment to the development of transmission infrastructure as we do to renewables?

**Ed Miliband:** I welcome my hon. Friend's question. We need to be honest about this: we face what we can only describe as a crisis with our grid situation, because we have people wanting to connect to cheap, clean renewables and being offered dates in the 2030s—often late in the 2030s. We have industrial investments that we need to happen, for which dates in the 2030s are offered. Grid reform and, as part of that, planning reform is absolutely crucial for this Government and for any Government who are serious about this. I am afraid to say that the legacy of the last Government is disastrous when it comes to the grid. We will build the grid, and I look forward to support from all parts of the House from those who want to tackle fuel poverty and want lower energy bills.

**Dave Doogan** (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): Fair play to the new Secretary of State: 5.3 GW of offshore wind is a great achievement, especially compared with the flat zero achieved by the Tories in auction round 5. It unlocks the vital Inch Cape array off my Angus constituency coast, and supports jobs in Montrose, as well as in Moray West, and there is also the game-changing Green Volt floating array off the north-east coast of Scotland. He highlights 1 GW of onshore wind, 8 MW of which is coming from England. Will he tell the House where the rest of that onshore energy is coming from? His target is 60 GW by 2030. How will he achieve that 9 GW a year from now until 2030?

**Ed Miliband:** I welcome the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, and even the second part. The only way this will work is if, whatever our differences—and



[Ed Miliband]

we have large differences—we work on this task with every Government across the United Kingdom, whatever kind of Government that is. Gillian Martin, the Cabinet Secretary in Scotland, and I have had many conversations—probably more in a couple of months than were had in many years under the previous Government. That deliberate example of “country first, party second” has been set by the Prime Minister. We want to work with Governments across the UK to get the renewables revolution that we need if we are to make Britain a clean energy superpower.

**Florence Eshalomi** (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to welcome my right hon. Friend to his place, and to see him continuing to champion this really important change, which our constituents up and down the country have been crying out for. One of the key issues we find when we go into people’s homes is fuel poverty; it is real. Constituents talk about not being able to heat their home—that is the reality for many of my Vauxhall and Camberwell Green constituents—so they will welcome this announcement, which will mean cheaper bills and cleaner energy. Does he agree that we need to get on with this as quickly as possible? Given that bills are to increase from 1 October, residents want action from this Government at a fast pace, so that they can see their energy bills come down.

**Ed Miliband:** My hon. Friend is 100% right, and she puts it incredibly well. It is hard for Governments of all stripes to admit this truth, but when the 1 October price cap was announced, these matters were not within the previous Government’s control, and would not have been within ours, because of our exposure. These prices are set internationally. When Putin or the petro-states make decisions, they rebound on my hon. Friend’s constituents, and the only solution is our clean energy superpower mission. The truth is that it will take time, and it will be hard for her and my constituents, and the constituents of those across the House, but the answer has to be to go as fast as possible, because that is what gets us energy security and lower bills.

**Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): I warmly congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment; he is the perfect example of a political renewable. As politicians, we all have a great deal to contribute to onshore wind. More seriously, does the Secretary of State share my concern that *The Guardian* last year and *The Daily Telegraph* this year both drew attention to the Chinese exploitation of Uyghur slave labour in the manufacture of so many solar panels? Other countries have been banning their import. How does he propose to deal with the matter, because I am sure that he shares my concern that we should not profit on the back of that sort of disgraceful exploitation?

**Ed Miliband:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind words. He raises an incredibly serious and important issue. When I came into Government, I asked for discussions across Government on this. Controls were in place, to be fair to the last Government, and as part of the ongoing solar taskforce, these issues were being looked at, but we need to kick the tyres on this, to

make sure that the proper controls are in place. My Department is very happy to have discussions with him and other interested parties on those questions.

**Perran Moon** (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement, and his tireless campaigning in favour of unleashing our renewable energy potential. As he knows, Cornwall is ready, willing and able to play a full part in the renewable energy transition. Can he outline his plans to support smaller, co-operative, community energy projects? When it comes to those, once again, Cornwall stands ready to act.

**Ed Miliband:** My hon. Friend asks a very important question, which gives me a chance to advertise the Second Reading of the Great British Energy Bill on Thursday. All are welcome—standing room only! As part of our plans for Great British Energy, we allocated £3 billion of the £8.3 billion that we set out in the election for what we call the local power plan to do what other countries such as Denmark and Germany do as a matter of course: unleash local renewables, with local communities, councils, community groups and co-ops being part of that. That is important, because it is a way to tackle fuel poverty and generate income for local communities. It is also important as a way of winning consent from local people. I look forward to my hon. Friend and others making a contribution on this question in that debate and others.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If, as the Secretary of State says, he wants to offer a line of sight for industry, he should look more closely at the opportunities that come from the development of tidal stream, particularly through the creation of a supply chain from the ground up; that is always easier than recovering one that has already gone overseas. But that line of sight has to go in both directions, which is why developers in tidal stream energy are asking the Government to set a 1 GW deployment target. Will he listen to those representations now, and act on them?

**Ed Miliband:** When I came into office and examined the issues around pot 2, which covers tidal, I was very keen to make sure that we increased the tidal minimum, which we did by 50%. These are important discussions to continue. There is a dilemma here, as the right hon. Gentleman will know, which is that tidal remains relatively expensive, but the point of the tidal developers is that many technologies remained expensive until they were deployed at scale. These are hard questions, because they are about value for money and how much we invest in tidal, but my Department needs to have those important discussions.

**Olivia Blake** (Sheffield Hallam) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State and his Department on their excellent work. Given all that we have heard from the shadow Minister today, does my right hon. Friend agree that this Government’s record success shows that the main block to the sprint to renewables was the Conservative party?

**Ed Miliband:** My hon. Friend makes an important point about the legacy of the last Government. To widen her point, I would say to Members across the House—we need to be candid that this is hard for us as constituency MPs—that there is a need to connect debates in this House about fuel poverty and energy

bills and the decisions that are being made in our areas. Candidly, unless we build the grid, solar and onshore wind, we will never get off the rollercoaster of international gas markets. All of us face a choice. We need a public debate about this, because if we are to tackle fuel poverty and do the things that I described, building is required, and we need to make that happen.

**James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): I gently say to the Secretary of State that he promised at the general election to bring energy bills down by £300. They are now going up by 10% in October. When will my constituents see the reductions that those in his party promised—or did they not mean it?

**Ed Miliband:** I think that tonight, the hon. Gentleman will think that that was not a very smart point to make. Weeks after we came into office, the price cap went up. I have explained why the price cap went up—because of our reliance on international gas markets. The decision that he has to make is this: does he support our mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower in order to bring bills down, or does he not?

**Tracy Gilbert** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): There is one notable absence from the allocation round results today, which is Berwick Bank wind farm. Located in the North sea, Berwick Bank has the potential to deliver up to 4.1 GW of clean electricity, and to lead to further investment in the supply chain and manufacturing. The port of Leith in my constituency is a prime location for the project, but we are still waiting to hear about the consent. Can the Secretary of State confirm that he will push the Scottish Government to speed up their section 36 consent process, so that Berwick Bank can come forward in the next allocation round and we can get on with delivering a sprint to clean energy?

**Ed Miliband:** I am glad that my hon. Friend has raised that point. We face planning decisions and questions at a policy level, if I can put it that way, right across the United Kingdom, including in Scotland and in England. We will work with the Scottish Government and others to make sure that we have a planning system that is fit for purpose, and that can build the clean energy that we need.

**Lee Anderson** (Ashfield) (Reform): This Secretary of State is living in a completely different world from my constituents, because they are not asking for this on the doorstep at all. By the way, he is quite happy to spend £11.6 billion on climate aid abroad and £8.5 billion on GB Energy, yet rob our pensioners of £300 at the same time. But I will give him the benefit of the doubt. When will my pensioners in Ashfield receive significant discounts on their fuel bills, and of how much?

**Ed Miliband:** I thought that the hon. Gentleman's party supported a publicly owned energy company, but I may be wrong about that. I can absolutely say that this is the way to deliver lower bills for his constituents. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] Members can shout all they like—I know that this is hard for the hon. Gentleman—but the reality they must face is this: does he believe that a continuing reliance on fossil fuels, and this country saying no to renewables, which I think is their position, will give us energy security? The truth is it will not.

[*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman says that he agrees with me; well, I look forward to him supporting our clean energy superpower mission.

**Oliver Ryan** (Burnley) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome this phenomenal, record-breaking achievement from the Secretary of State, which represents a significant milestone towards clean power by 2030. Let us see more projects in Burnley. Does he agree that the best way to protect my constituents' energy bills from price shocks, and the patriotic thing to do, is to ensure our nation's energy security through home-grown clean power? That will lower energy bills and give tyrants like Putin a bloody nose at the same time.

**Ed Miliband:** I agree 100%. The notion that our exposure to fossil fuels as a country gives us security is belied by what has happened over the last few years; as the Prime Minister often says, it means that Putin's boot is on our throat. My hon. Friend talks about this patriotic mission, and he is completely right. Other parties in this House have a decision to make on Thursday: will they support the Great British Energy Bill? We have public ownership of our energy system in Britain—foreign public ownership, by state-owned companies from abroad. We welcome that investment, but we also want British public ownership. I very much hope that other parties will learn the lessons of their election defeat and support our Bill on Thursday.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** To be helpful to Members, I gently point out that it is important that they be here for the start of a statement if they wish to be called to ask a question. I will be very kind today. I call Claire Young.

**Claire Young** (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. The latest allocation round is good news and should be welcomed, especially after the fiasco of the last round. It is vital that Britain invests in our sustainable green energy production, so that we can guarantee our energy security and lead the world as a green powerhouse. However, the only way that we can achieve that is if we also push ahead with energy storage and ensure that we boost our capacity to retain the energy that is generated, so what steps is the Department taking to accelerate the roll-out of new storage solutions, including green hydrogen?

**Ed Miliband:** The hon. Lady, whom I welcome to her place, makes an important point. We often get questions about what to do in an intermittent system. We need different forms of both dispatchable power and energy storage. One project that my Department is working on—continuing some of the work of the previous Government—is long-duration energy storage and battery technology. Personally, I think that the system continues to underestimate the potential role of battery and long-duration storage, and we will say more about that in the months ahead.

**Ms Polly Billington** (East Thanet) (Lab): The Conservatives continue to oppose our publicly owned clean power company despite widespread public support for it, including in my constituency. Does the Secretary of State recognise the absurdity of the Opposition's

[Ms Polly Billington]

arguments? They are quite happy for public ownership of energy in this country, as long it is by foreign Governments, not UK citizens.

**Ed Miliband:** My hon. Friend, who has great expertise on these issues, makes an important point. We welcome the success of Ørsted in today's allocation round for the Hornsea wind farms. It is great for Danish taxpayers that they will get some benefit from it, and it is great for Britain that we will get the investment, but as the Prime Minister often asks, why not Britain as well? Why should we not invest in clean energy? Why should our taxpayers not benefit from this? Why should we not create jobs in this country as well as accelerating clean power? It seems a simple and logical proposition to me.

**Shaun Davies** (Telford) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know from his recent visit to Telford that businesses right across the country, including in my constituency, want to partner with the Government on this agenda. Will this statement and future announcements mean that those private sector businesses, which want to put their skills and money into this agenda, and take risks on behalf of the Government and the country to make us a clean energy superpower, have the Secretary of State's backing?

**Ed Miliband:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I very much enjoyed my visit to Telford, where I spoke with local business. It is easy to think about these things in very macro terms, of how many gigawatts and so on—the kind of thing I like talking about—but he is right that this is as much, if not more, about all the jobs that we can create in the supply chain. People in this country want hope and change, and this will deliver it.

**Mr Luke Charters** (York Outer) (Lab): I welcome the auction increasing solar capacity. There are great projects in my constituency, funded via that scheme, such as

Hessay solar. Will the Secretary of State visit sunny York to see the site once it is complete, and does he share my conviction that solar will be critical in the energy mix if we are to reduce our dependence on foreign oil and gas?

**Ed Miliband:** I very much welcome my hon. Friend's embrace of solar as part of the energy mix. It is really important to say this: we need more rooftop solar. Lots of people in this House ask, "Why don't we do more on rooftops?", and I agree with them. There is also an important role for ground-mounted solar, however. I very much look forward to coming to York at some point to see the projects he talks about.

**Henry Tufnell** (Mid and South Pembrokeshire) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, for which I thank him. It is incredibly exciting and marks a complete change from Conservative party policy. The Celtic sea, off the coast of my constituency, has the unique conditions of deep water and strong winds, offering us the opportunity to be a global leader in the new technologies of floating offshore wind. However, those unique conditions require a unique approach from Government. As we look forward to allocation round 7, will the Secretary of State join me in working to refresh the approach in the auction so that more support goes towards FLOW projects in autumn 2025?

**Ed Miliband:** My hon. Friend is a great champion of floating wind in the Celtic sea. He is right: we are proud of the 400 MW project in this round. We need to look—including in the auction round, through GB Energy and in other ways—at how we can build on our advantages in crucial floating wind technology, take the opportunities that they provide, and have the industrial capacity. I look forward to discussions with him and other colleagues on how we make that happen.



## Point of Order

2.34 pm

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. On 25 July, the main estimates were laid before the House and passed without debate or vote. On 29 July, the Chancellor came to the House and made a statement about the public finances, and laid a further document called “Fixing the Foundations”, which showed a wildly different picture of the public finances from that which had been presented to us just one working day before.

Naturally, that raised concerns in the House. I and a number of Members questioned the Chancellor of Exchequer about it at the time. The fact that she was evasive in the debate and, frankly, look rattled raised further concerns. Today, a letter from the Cabinet Secretary to my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor has been leaked. It explains that officials knew at the time that the estimates laid by the Chancellor were incorrect. I also have a letter from the Office for Budget Responsibility in response to a freedom of information request that I made prior to the recess. It explains that the OBR was shown the contents of that document two days before the estimates were laid before the House. Indeed, the OBR was given the “Fixing the Foundations” document in order to fact-check it on the day that the estimates were laid before the House of Commons.

That raises a number of issues for the House, but the one that I am most concerned about is whether the Chancellor of the Exchequer has knowingly misled the House of Commons on the state of the public finances and her knowledge at the time. Knowingly misleading the House is a breach of the ministerial code, and I want your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker, on what the appropriate course of action might be for the House. If we cannot rely on the financial information laid before us, but trust that it is accurate and wave it through, we are in a very difficult place indeed.

I have notified the Chancellor of the Exchequer of my intention to raise this point of order. Obviously, once an independent adviser on the ministerial code is appointed, I can make representations to them, but in the meantime we are faced with a situation where either the estimates or the “Fixing the Foundations” document was knowingly wrong. In either case, the House may have been significantly misled, and I would be interested to hear your guidance on what we can do about it, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for advance notice of it. He indicated that he has informed the Chancellor of his intention to make the point of order, which of course is the correct thing to do. There are two separate points here. The first is one of privilege. He should write to the Speaker to make the point that he is concerned that the Chancellor may have misled the House. The second is about the accuracy of the estimates. That is not a matter for the Speaker, but it may be something that the right hon. Gentleman chooses to raise with the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee once they are elected next week.

## Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill

*Considered in Committee*

[CAROLINE NOKES *in the Chair*]

**The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Caroline Nokes):** I remind Members that in Committee they should not address the Chair as Madam Deputy Speaker. Please use our names when addressing the Chair. “Madam Chair”, “Chair” and “Madam Chairman” are also acceptable.

### Clause 1

PROHIBITION ON FRANCHISE EXTENSIONS AND NEW FRANCHISES

2.38 pm

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I beg to move amendment 18, page 1, line 12, at end insert—

“25B Report on impact of prohibition on franchise extensions and new franchises

The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament—

- (a) within six months of the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, a report on the anticipated impact of the prohibition on franchise extensions and new franchises under section 25A; and
- (b) after a period of five years has elapsed after the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, a report outlining the actual impact of the prohibition on franchise extensions and new franchises under section 25A.”

**The Second Deputy Chairman:** With this it will be convenient to consider:

Clause stand part.

Amendment 19, in clause 2, page 2, line 14, at end insert—

“(1AA) Before making a direct award of a public service contract to a public sector company under subsection (1A), the relevant franchising authority must provide information to the Office of Rail and Road on the public sector company’s ability to become responsible for the provision of the relevant passenger railway services.

(1AB) The information provided under subsection (1AA) must include an overview and analysis of the capacity of the public sector company to provide the relevant services while maintaining or improving existing service provision.

(1AC) Following the receipt of the information provided under subsection (1AA), the Office of Rail and Road must publish an opinion on whether it is reasonably practicable for the public sector company to provide, or secure the provision of, the relevant passenger railway services.”

Amendment 13, page 2, line 17, at end insert—

“(1BA) Every contract made in accordance with subsection (1A) shall place a duty on the public sector company to encourage and invest in innovation across all aspects of its operations, including but not limited to—

- (a) operational efficiency;
- (b) fares and ticketing;
- (c) stations and onboard services;
- (d) passenger information; and
- (e) digital transformation.”

Amendment 14, page 2, line 17, at end insert—

“(1BA) Every contract made in accordance with subsection (1A) shall place a duty on the public sector company to consider the needs of—

- (a) passengers;
- (b) residents of rural areas;
- (c) residents of areas underserved by the rail network; and
- (d) the wider rail network

when considering making changes to existing service levels.”

Amendment 1, page 2, line 22, leave out subsection (3).

Amendment 6, page 2, line 22, at end insert—

*“30ZA Impact on provision of rolling stock*

(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, lay before Parliament a report on the impact of the awarding of public service contracts to public sector companies under section 30(1A) on the provision of rolling stock by rolling stock leasing companies.

(2) The Secretary of State must consult with other franchising authorities before finalising a report under subsection (1).”

Amendment 7, page 2, line 22, at end insert—

*“30ZA Impact on procurement*

(1) Within six months of the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, the Secretary of State shall publish details of the Government’s proposed approach to procurement once passenger rail services are provided by public sector companies under public service contracts awarded under section 30(1A) and the impact of the awarding of such contracts to public sector companies on procurement processes.

(2) Any publications relating to the Government’s proposed approach to procurement under subsection (1) should include details of the approach towards—

- (a) technological development;
- (b) the management of demand and supply;
- (c) the supply chain;
- (d) future sectoral planning.”

*This amendment would require the Secretary of State to publish details of the Government’s proposed approach to procurement and the impact of the Bill on procurement processes.*

Amendment 8, page 2, line 22, at end insert—

*“30ZA Independent financial monitoring of public sector companies*

(1) The Secretary of State must, within three months of the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, instruct an independent body to conduct monitoring of the financial management of any public sector company with whom a direct award of a public service contract is made under section 30(1A).

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), “monitoring of the financial management” includes the auditing of accounts, the review of spending efficiency, and the making of recommendations to improve cost-effectiveness.”

Amendment 9, page 2, line 22, at end insert—

*“30ZB Report on cost of contracts with public sector companies*

(1) The Secretary of State must, within three months of the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, instruct an independent body to report on the total cost to the Government of contracts awarded in accordance with section 30(1A).

(2) The first report under this section must be laid before Parliament within twelve months of the first award of a public sector contract in accordance with section 30(1A), with subsequent reports to be laid annually.

(3) Any report published under this section must include consideration of any liabilities previously held by franchises which are now public sector liabilities.”

Amendment 10, page 2, line 22, at end insert—

*“30ZC Annual reporting of performance of publicly-owned train operating companies*

(1) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament an annual report on the performance of public sector companies to whom public service contracts are made under section 30(1A).

(2) An annual report published under subsection (1) shall include details of a company’s—

- (a) financial performance;
- (b) revenue growth;
- (c) cost control;
- (d) innovation;
- (e) service quality metrics;
- (f) customer satisfaction metrics; and
- (g) value for money.

(3) The first annual report under this section must be laid before Parliament within twelve months of the first award of a public sector contract in accordance with section 30(1A).”

Amendment 11, page 2, line 22, at end insert—

*“30ZD Performance-based assessment of publicly-owned train operating companies*

(1) Public sector companies with whom public service contracts are made in accordance with section 30(1A) are to be subject to performance-based assessments in relation to their management of the relevant passenger railway services.

(2) Performance-based assessments of public sector companies under subsection (1) are to be conducted by an independent body instructed by the Secretary of State.

(3) In conducting a performance-based assessment the independent body must assess the public sector company against published targets in relation to—

- (a) the punctuality of services;
- (b) customer satisfaction;
- (c) revenue and passenger growth; and
- (d) operational efficiency.

(4) Every contract made in accordance with section 30(1A) must place duties on relevant public sector companies—

- (a) to prepare performance improvement plans where published targets are assessed under this section as not being met;
- (b) to place limitations on the remuneration of senior managers while a performance improvement plan is in force.”

Amendment 12, page 2, line 22, at end insert—

*“30ZE Impact on performance and efficiency of the UK rail network*

(1) The Secretary of State must, within five years of the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, instruct an independent body to conduct a review of the impact of the Act on the performance and efficiency of the UK rail network.

(2) A report on the findings of the review must be laid before Parliament.”

Amendment 15, page 2, line 22, at end insert—

*“30ZF Impact on open access operators*

The Secretary of State must, within twelve months of the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, lay before Parliament a report on the impact of the awarding of public service contracts to public sector companies under subsection 30(1A) on open access operators in the UK.”

Amendment 16, page 2, line 22, at end insert—

*“30ZG Impact on exemption of passenger services*

(1) The Secretary of State must, within twelve months of the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, lay before Parliament a report on the

impact of sections 25A and 30, as amended by the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, on the exemption of passenger services under section 24.

(2) A report under subsection (1) must include whether the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024—

- (a) has made, or is expected to make, it more or less likely for an application for an exemption to be made to an appropriate designating authority;
- (b) has made, or is expected to make, it more or less likely for an application for an exemption to be granted by an appropriate designating authority;
- (c) has made, or is expected to make, any difference to the basis on which decisions as to the granting or refusing of applications for exemptions will be made by the appropriate designating authorities.”

Amendment 17, page 2, line 22, at end insert—

*“30ZH Independent body to advise on pay and terms and conditions of employment for employees of public sector companies*

(1) The Secretary of State must, within three months of the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, establish an independent body with responsibility for—

- (a) providing advice to Government on the—
  - (i) remuneration, and
  - (ii) terms and conditions of employment

of employees of the public sector companies providing passenger railway services under a contract awarded in accordance with section 30(1A);

- (b) advising the Government on value for money during the negotiation of the terms and conditions of employment of employees of the public sector companies providing passenger railway services under a contract awarded in accordance with section 30(1A); and

- (c) preparing an annual report to be laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State on the terms and conditions of employment of employees of the public sector companies providing passenger railway services under a contract awarded in accordance with section 30(1A).

(2) Advice provided in accordance with subsections (1)(a) and (b) shall be based on annual investigations of working practices conducted by the independent body and consider—

- (a) value for money;
- (b) affordability;
- (c) domestic and international comparators;
- (d) the future of the rail network, including the modernisation of working practices.

(3) Advice provided in accordance with subsection (1)(b) shall include advice on whether any conflicts of interest exist between any Government Minister and any union involved in the negotiation of the terms and conditions of employment, and how any such conflicts should be managed.

(4) An annual report under subsection (1)(c) shall include a comparison with the terms and conditions of employment under the franchise which provided the relevant passenger railway services prior to the awarding of a contract in accordance with section 30(1A).

(5) The first annual report under subsection (1)(c) must be laid before Parliament within twelve months of the first award of a public sector contract in accordance with section 30(1A).”

Amendment 22, page 2, line 22, at end insert—

*“30ZA Review of impact on exemption of passenger services*

(1) The Secretary of State must, within one year of the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, conduct a review of the impact of that Act on the exemption of passenger services under section 24 of this Act.

(2) A review conducted under subsection (1) must consult—

- (a) the Scottish Ministers;
- (b) the Welsh Ministers; and
- (c) English combined authorities

on their willingness and ability to make an application to the appropriate designating authority for the grant of an exemption from designation under section 23(1) for the purposes of applying for or being awarded a public service contract under section 30(1A).

(3) The Secretary of State must lay a report on the findings of the review before Parliament.”

Amendment 2, page 3, line 23, after “Scottish Ministers” insert—

“or an elected public body”.

*This amendment, and accompanying Amendments 3, 4 and 5, would expand the definition of “public sector company” to enable public service contracts to run passenger railway services to be awarded to public sector companies owned by local elected public bodies.*

Amendment 3, page 3, line 25, after “Ministers” insert—

“or an elected public body”.

*See explanatory statement for Amendment 2.*

Amendment 4, page 3, line 27, after “Ministers” insert—

“or an elected public body”.

*See explanatory statement for Amendment 2.*

Amendment 5, page 3, line 27, at end insert—

“(ba) ‘elected public body’ means a body which is—

- (i) a mayoral combined authority;
- (ii) a combined authority; or
- (iii) a unitary, county, district or borough council

or which is composed of more than one of the bodies listed above.”

*This amendment is consequential on Amendments 2, 3 and 4.*

Amendment 20, page 3, line 32, at end insert—

*“30D Independent body to provide advice on proposed contracts*

(1) The Secretary of State shall, within three months of the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, establish an independent body with responsibility for advising the Secretary of State on contracts proposed to be made in accordance with section 30(1A).

(2) The independent body must provide advice to the Secretary of State, including recommendations as to how or whether to proceed with the agreeing of the contract, within three months of a request for such advice being made by the Secretary of State.

(3) Should the Secretary of State wish to proceed with the agreeing of a contract—

- (a) having received advice against proceeding with the agreeing of the contract from the independent body; or
- (b) without taking such steps as were recommended by the independent body,

the Secretary of State must make a statement in Parliament of the reasons for doing so.

(4) The Secretary of State shall consult other franchising authorities before finalising proposals for the establishment of the independent body under subsection (1).”

Amendment 21, page 3, line 32, at end insert—

*“30D Annual report on ticketing effects of public service contracts*

(1) The Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament an annual report on the effect of public sector contracts awarded in accordance with section 30(1A) on—

- (a) ticket pricing,
- (b) tap-in, tap-out options,



- (c) single-leg pricing,
- (d) digital season tickets,
- (e) compensation for delays and cancellations,
- (f) ticketing interoperability with—
  - (i) other train operators, and
  - (ii) bus and light rail system operators.

(2) The Secretary of State shall consult other franchising authorities before finalising a report under subsection (1).

(3) The first annual report under this section must be laid before Parliament within twelve months of the first award of a public sector contract in accordance with section 30(1A).

(4) Each subsequent annual report must be laid before Parliament before the end of July in each subsequent calendar year.”

Clauses 2 to 4 stand part.

The schedule.

**Helen Whately:** It is good to see hon. Members so soon after the summer recess. I know that the Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Sheffield Heeley (Louise Haigh), has been busy over the summer, but I hope that she managed—like the Deputy Prime Minister—to find some time to let her hair down.

When we last met, I set out why the Conservatives cannot support the Bill. I do not doubt that Government Members sincerely believe in their plan, in getting rid of privately run train operators, and in putting politicians in charge of running train services, but just because an ideological belief is deeply held, that does not make it right. It is certainly not the same as using evidence as a basis for decision making.

Our railways are vital to our economy: millions of people rely on trains, whether to get them to work or school, to make essential journeys, to see family and friends, or simply to visit other parts of the country. Our rail system is complex—a mix of public and private built up over many years. One thing it is not, though, is a toy train set to be played with, but I fear that is the approach this Government are taking. They are rushing through this ideological reworking of our rail system despite the absence of solid evidence to back up their approach, at a time when other countries are choosing to increase private sector involvement and competition in their rail systems.

There is no good reason for this Committee stage to be raced through in one day, rather than through a normal Bill Committee that would allow proper time for consideration and discussion, the time appropriate for such a substantial and significant change. Proper time would allow this legislation to be made better—indeed, fit for purpose—drawing on the strengths of our rail system as well as the weaknesses, and using the lessons of our experience and that of others, while still fulfilling the Government’s intention as set out in their manifesto. Instead, in their haste, this Bill simply takes a one-size-fits-all approach, pulling the plug on even the best train operating companies despite the mixed record of the Department for Transport when it comes to the performance of the franchises it runs already.

In the Government’s haste, the Bill lacks any controls or incentives to reduce the risk of increased costs to taxpayers and passengers. We can say the same for performance: where in this Bill are the incentives to improve that, or the protections for passengers should performance worsen when the right hon. Member for

Sheffield Heeley is at the controls of our trains? In the Government’s haste, those things are missing too. In their haste, if they do what they said in their manifesto, they are going to bring thousands of rail workers into the public sector, all under a single Government employer. We will have unions reclining comfortably on ministerial sofas as they discuss pay for thousands of people, funded by the taxpayer, with no safeguards to speak of to make sure the taxpayer gets a good deal.

On Second Reading, I said that some more thought should go into the Bill over the summer. I asked a series of questions and made a number of suggestions. At the very least, I was expecting the Government to table some amendments, but I am sorry to report that, as far as I can see, they are going full steam ahead. There is no sign that any serious thought has been given to the long-term impact of Government-run train companies on growth, or on the efficiency of our railways. There is barely a word on the liabilities that this Bill would transfer on to the Government’s balance sheet, and crucially, no evidence has been shared about how passengers and their journeys will be affected.

Fundamentally, the Government are rushing ahead but travelling blind, pressing on irrespective of the impact on passengers or taxpayers, which they simply do not know. The right hon. Lady has made herself passenger-in-chief and then set off on a journey without knowing the destination. That is not a sensible way to govern. Passengers should always come first, above providers, unions and ideology. That is why our first amendment would require the Government to set out what impact they believe the Bill will have.

**Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): I find the hon. Member’s comments on public ownership a bit rich, given that privatisation of our railways has spelled 30 years of failure—30 years of delays and price increases for passengers, and eye-watering profits for private companies. Most people in the UK opposed privatisation at the time, and most people still oppose it today; in fact, a clear majority of her own party’s voters oppose the privatisation of the railways. Can she not see that the Secretary of State, in bringing forward this Bill, is serving the interests of our constituents?

**Helen Whately:** Unfortunately, the hon. Member is simply wrong in some of the statements she makes. I am not ideological about this—I know that there is a place for the public sector and a place for the private sector. In our reforms, we proposed a closer working together of track and train through Great British Railways, much of which this Government are planning to bring forward. However, there have also been benefits to this country from privatisation, including a significant growth in passenger numbers, which has not been seen in many other countries. That is one reason why several European countries are planning to follow our model and increase competition in their rail services, in order to drive up passenger numbers and provide greater efficiencies.

As I said a moment ago, amendment 18 would require the Government to set out what impact they believe the Bill will have. For instance, what impact will getting rid of private sector train companies—the good performers as well as the weaker ones—have on passengers, fares, reliability and the cost of the railway to taxpayers? The amendment proposes that the Government should set

that information out clearly in a report within the next six months. I am sure that hon. Members do not consider that to be unreasonable; surely, it is the least that any of us would want to see, since we all represent both rail users and taxpayers. It would mean that we would all know what difference the Government expect the legislation to make. I would hope that the report would be set out in a way that stands up to scrutiny, that it draws on evidence and that it has a suitable level of rigour for something so significant. It would also give us all something to hold the Government to account against, as well as the managers who take over responsibility for train operators.

2.45 pm

To that end, our first amendment also proposes a follow-up report in five years' time, which would articulate the actual impact of these reforms. That is not a lot to ask, so I hope the Government will seriously consider the amendment. Passengers and taxpayers deserve to know what difference this change is likely to make, and then what difference it has made—to services and costs, to what their money will buy and how wisely it has been spent—and to be able to compare the impact of the choices this Government are making with those made by Governments across Europe. As I said, several of those Governments are reforming railways in the other direction by unwinding their public models and introducing more private provision into their networks.

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): The shadow Minister asks about the benefits that will accrue if this change is made. We on the Labour Benches have been working on it for years, so the suggestion that it has somehow been rushed is a nonsense. May I gently point out to her that over the years that this change has not been made, millions if not billions of pounds have been shipped out of this industry to subsidise and support other nation states' railway systems? If ever there was a nonsense, that is it, staring us in the face. She talks about ideology: the ideology of privatisation has been ruinous for the railways, and it is about time that it was corrected.

**Helen Whately:** There are a few problems with what the hon. Member has just said. One is that he talks about those figures, but the Government have not taken the time or trouble to set out what the impact of the Bill on passengers and taxpayers is expected to be. Were the Government confident about that impact, I am sure they would have set it out, but they have not. That is why our amendment proposes that they should set it out. We also know that while on the one hand, there are some savings to be made from management fees—I will come to that later in my speech—the benefits of competition, and the pressure of profit and loss and the bottom line, drive innovation and bring efficiency. That does not necessarily happen to the same extent in the public sector.

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Ind): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Helen Whately:** No, I will make some progress.

For the reasons I have described, we have also tabled amendments to put some conditions on franchises moving into the public sector. Under the Secretary of State's plan, the running of trains on our network will increasingly

be tasked to a little-known Government company called DFT OLR Holdings Ltd, or DOHL, the current operator of last resort. It seems to me a huge risk to expect DOHL to successfully take over and run every franchise in the country. DOHL has had, shall we say, mixed results with the franchises it has taken over, and expecting it to run a further 10 on top of the four it is currently operating strikes me as a lot to ask. I recognise that the Bill makes reference to that risk by providing for franchise extensions where it would not be practical to bring the service in-house, but under the current plans, that would be decided by the Secretary of State. It is not that I do not trust the right hon. Lady, but she has shown herself to have a great deal of confidence in public operators, in the absence of any substantial grounds for that confidence.

I have been told that there is no plan to increase headcount, budget or resources of any kind for DOHL as it takes on that increase in workload from four to 14 franchises. I welcome the Government making an effort to achieve efficiencies at the centre, but I struggle to believe that more than tripling the number of franchises brought in-house will not involve some increase in resources. We therefore think it would be prudent for the Office of Rail and Road to form an independent judgment on whether DOHL has the capacity and expertise to take on each new franchise as it comes up, and to run it, at a minimum, as well as it is already being run. That could be done well in advance of most contracts ending, so it would not really be a hindrance to the Secretary of State's plan, but it would provide a great deal of reassurance to passengers, and all of us as their representatives, about the capacity of the Government to successfully take over the functions of so many train operating companies.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): On impact assessments and how we can have confidence that DOHL will improve performance, we can look at past performance. I remind the shadow Minister that the operator of last resort currently runs 14 franchises. Since the east coast main line, which serves my region, was taken over by LNER, revenues have grown substantially. Since TransPennine Express was brought back into public sector operations in May 2023, we have seen cancellations decrease from an average of around 20% to 5%. In the last quarter, TransPennine, which is run by the operator of last resort, DOHL, was the most improved operator in terms of cancellation scores compared with the same period last year.

**Helen Whately:** I accept some of the points that the hon. Gentleman made. That is why I said that the record of DOHL had been mixed. Sometimes there has been improvement in performance, but that is not the case for all the franchises it runs. That is my reason for not being confident that it is the right organisation to take on such a large increase in its workload, particularly without any further increase in its resources, including some operators that are performing better than the train companies that he mentioned.

We want every contract that is awarded to place a duty on DOHL to look at how to modernise our network and to ensure that passengers are at the forefront of all decision making—passengers not just in urban areas and around London but, crucially, in rural areas and places that have traditionally been under-served by the rail network. Time and again, the Secretary of State

[Helen Whately]

has said that her No. 1 priority is passengers—that she will protect their interests above all else, and that it is for them that she is seeking this change. This is a chance to put her money where her mouth is and create a legal duty that promotes the needs of passengers in all future agreements with public sector operators. That will build in a layer of accountability on things that we all agree are important.

On amendment 8, public bodies marking their own homework is not something that Opposition Members believe leads to good results. I know from my time in government that independent scrutiny makes life harder for Ministers, but it also improves accountability, and with that outcomes. That is why we seek to introduce proper financial reporting and oversight for public sector operators. Under the franchise system, whatever its shortcomings, train operators are incentivised to increase passenger numbers and control costs. That has been an undeniable success of privatisation. Passenger numbers have doubled and costs have been controlled, increasing at a far slower rate than revenue.

In future, passengers and taxpayers will have to foot the bill for any loss of control on costs, any inefficiencies or any failures to innovate. That is a serious implication, and something we should do our best to protect people from. Creating, or recreating, some incentives is a good place to start. We will need to know how well the public train companies are performing—what they are doing to increase passenger numbers and drive growth in rail services, how reliable their services are, how well they are keeping costs under control, and how satisfied passengers are with the service they provide.

Our proposals will allow us to identify both good and bad performance, hold the managers of those companies to account and reward them accordingly, such as by linking managerial pay to performance. Those companies will no longer have shareholders to answer to, or the financial incentives that go with a senior role in the private sector. The Government have told us that part of their rationale for these changes is to better align the incentives of train operators with the interests of passengers, but the Bill currently provides no mechanism for that. We are not seeking to frustrate a change that this Government were elected to deliver; we simply wish to bring proper transparency and accountability to the process. That includes reporting on the costs involved in bringing operating companies into public ownership.

Government Members will no doubt point to the money that will be saved by removing management fees, but this equation is not one-sided. While the Secretary of State might be saving £150 million each year on fees, industry experts have predicted that the Bill could cost passengers and taxpayers up to £1 billion a year in lost productivity and growth—and that is before accounting for the Government's taking on all the long-term liabilities of the companies. Pension obligations, rolling stock and long-term leases will all be transferred on to the Government balance sheet, and we have had alarmingly little information on what that figure will be.

**Richard Burgon:** The shadow Secretary of State is making a case from her ideological point of view, although she denies it. Running through her speech is a deep suspicion of the public sector. Suddenly she is

suspicious about the quality of service for passengers. Suddenly she is suspicious about the quality of service provided, and the amount of money being spent on it. If only those suspicions and that scrutiny had been applied by the shadow Secretary of State and her colleagues while they were in government to the disastrous privatised railway service. Is she really trying to convince this House that privatisation of the railways was in any way a success? It seems to me that she is trying to stand as a barrier to public opinion and the Bill's progress, because the majority of people in this country support public ownership of the railways and the Labour Government were elected with that as a clear manifesto pledge.

**The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Caroline Nokes):** I am sure the hon. Gentleman is about to finish.

**Richard Burgon:** I am, thank you. I will bring my remarks to a close by asking, is it not the case that the shadow Secretary of State is being deeply ideological and is only interested in the privatised model and the pursuit of profit, regardless of the effect on the public?

**Helen Whately:** The hon. Gentleman and I probably do have different views ideologically; I will acknowledge that. I think that he probably, as was implied in his intervention, thinks that profit is bad. I think that profit can be a helpful thing, and it is thanks to the motivation of people to make profits that we in this economy, and those in many similar economies, have the prosperity that we enjoy today. I think that Government can do a lot, but I am also thoughtful about when Government can help and when Government might hinder. That is why I take the view that, in rail, sometimes it is right for the public sector to do things and sometimes it is right for the private sector to do things.

One thing that I fundamentally think is missing from the Bill is scrutiny. I am not trying to frustrate the mandate that the hon. Gentleman's party has to bring forward this legislation—I think I made that clear—but I want to improve it, and improving it involves introducing a level of transparency and accountability that simply is not in the Bill. That is why I tabled my amendments.

We also seek clarity on how the Bill will affect other privately run passenger services on the network. It is clear that deep down, those on the Government Benches know that the public sector cannot, and should not, run every service on the network. That is why open access operators like Eurostar and Gatwick Express have rightly been allowed to continue under these plans.

Open access represents a huge opportunity for passenger rail in this country. When done right it can provide nimble, cost-effective services that give passengers greater choice and bring in revenue for the network. In fact, the EU has enshrined in law the rights of open access operators in tendering for passenger services. We are not proposing that at this stage, but I am concerned about how this change will impact on those already operating on the network, and what opportunities will remain open to them or others to offer new open access services in future.

The same goes for the future of devolved concessionary models. Why, if Government Members truly believe that private providers are simply siphoning off cash, can Transport for London and Merseyside still run



concessionary models? While I happen to think they should be allowed to do so, it does not seem fair to have one rule for Sadiq Khan and another for everyone else. What about Manchester, Leeds or Birmingham? What if they want to run their own transport systems in a way that suits them?

My understanding is that the Labour Government want to build on the progress we have made in devolving responsibilities to cities and regions, but this Bill looks more likely to reduce the options for other devolved authorities, leaving them able to run concessionary models only if they get an exemption under section 24 of the Railways Act 1993 to do so.

3 pm

That brings me to unions and pay. The Bill will over time create tens of thousands of new public sector rail workers on a jumble of anachronistic terms and conditions. There should be an independent body to look at what we are inheriting and to advise on what is fair to those employees and the taxpayer each year when it comes to pay. Teachers, nurses, doctors and our armed forces all have independent bodies that help take the politics out of pay. How can it be a good idea for rail union bosses to sit around the table with Ministers negotiating pay without the assistance of an independent pay review body, especially Ministers who from time to time benefit from generous union donations?

I imagine that the Secretary of State herself can see how that would look. She must know that it would not pass the sniff test. This looks like the return of the 1970s—a return to deals done over beer and sandwiches in No. 10. Surely nobody in this country beside the unions wants to see that happen. We have actually just had a taste of it with the Government's recent ASLEF deal, in which Ministers skilfully negotiated a bumper pay rise for train drivers for nothing in return—nothing for passengers and taxpayers. This no-strings pay deal meant removing all reforms to working practices—in other words, all the things that might help modernise the network and drive down fares—shortly followed by ASLEF announcing another strike anyway. Who knows what deal was done to get that called off; perhaps the Secretary of State will be making a statement on that.

We on the Opposition Benches are blue in the face from making this argument: living standards are not raised through inflationary pay rises; they are raised by improving productivity.

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Louise Haigh):**

I would be interested to know whether the hon. Lady has spoken to her immediate predecessor to understand exactly the value of the reforms he was pursuing as Secretary of State, and if she was aware that they were worth less than half the cost of every time the railways went on strike under his leadership.

**Helen Whately:** Unfortunately, the right hon. Lady's approach is deeply flawed and risks our facing more strikes in future, rather than fewer. *[Interruption.]* Yes, to directly answer her question, I can assure her that I have spoken to her predecessor in the role, and I know that the reforms proposed to modernise the railways were crucial not only to controlling increasing costs and fares, but to improving the reliability of our train services.

Unfortunately, she gave all that up overnight when she gave away a bumper pay deal of almost 15%, with nothing from the other side to improve services.

The independent body I am proposing would look at pay and terms and conditions in the round. It could shed some light on who is getting a fair deal and help put modernisation at the top of the agenda in negotiations. Given that this Government seem to be set on creating a single huge employer across the network, as set out in their manifesto, which surely means harmonising pay and terms and conditions across many thousands of employees, none of whom I suspect will want to give up whatever terms they most value—a four-day working week, 34 days of annual leave and the extra money they negotiated to start using iPads are some examples—can the right hon. Lady imagine what effect this might have on ticket prices and the efficiency of our network? An independent pay review body could at least gather evidence and advise Government on what makes sense to fill jobs and provide value for money for the taxpayer.

Madam Chair, I am grateful to you for giving me some time to outline our amendments, and I am mindful that other Members wish to talk to their amendments or make maiden speeches, so I will wrap up my comments with a couple of final points. As we made clear on Second Reading, His Majesty's official Opposition do not support this Bill. Our rail system needs reform, and we have set out plans to do that, but this Bill is not the right way to go about it. On the contrary, the Government are being driven by a flawed ideological belief along the lines of “public sector good, private sector bad”. It is not underpinned by evidence of what works, and they are not being straight with people about the possible downsides such as higher fares for passengers, higher costs for taxpayers and less reliable trains.

Why are the Government rushing through this Bill? Is it to please their Back Benchers, who we know are deeply unhappy about scrapping the winter fuel allowance, or is it to please their union paymasters? I know the right hon. Lady has promised everyone that she is going to move fast and fix things, but this looks more like moving fast and breaking things. I say sincerely to her, as I am sure she will want to make this legislation as good as it can be and, like me, wants to do the best possible job for all our constituents and for the country we serve, that she should please consider the amendments we have tabled and think hard about giving them the Government's support.

**The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Caroline Nokes):** As a point of information and for my assistance, it would be very helpful if Members wishing to be called could indicate clearly that they wish to speak.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**The Second Deputy Chairman:** Thank you. I call Graham Stringer.

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Middleton South) (Lab): That was earlier than I expected, Ms Nokes!

Before I come to the amendment I have tabled, I should say that I am probably the only Member in the Chamber who remembers the debate on the National Audit Office report after the original privatisation of rail, and if the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen

[Graham Stringer]

Whately) applied her proposal to the original decision to privatise rail, against the criteria the then Government were using, she would find that it has been a complete failure. I remember that when in this Chamber I asked Teddy Taylor, a Conservative I respected greatly, how he justified selling off the railways for less than they were worth, which is what the National Audit Office report said, his justification—the policy of the then Conservative Government—was that it did not matter because they would take all the subsidy out of the railways. Had the hon. Lady been present then and had those tests been applied to the original policy, the Conservatives' policy of privatisation would be seen to be a complete failure.

The other point I would like to make about what the hon. Lady said, which a number of interventions from the Government side brought out, is that a huge amount of money has been transferred to other rail systems and to pension funds in north America and elsewhere that could have been used to benefit the transport system in this country. Incidentally, one of the reasons why passenger numbers have increased on the railways is that the previous Government did not invest in roads over many years. That has led to congestion which has forced people on to the railways; it is not the privatisation of the railways that has attracted those passengers. Those profits have gone out precisely because the Treasury did not want the debt on the balance sheet, but one cannot have it both ways. If we are to repatriate those profits, which I believe taking the railways back into public ownership will do, we of course have to take the debt. An accountancy sleight of hand, because the Treasury does not like seeing the debt on the balance sheets, is the direct cause of the profits being taken out of this country.

On the Government side of the House, there is real enthusiasm for this Bill, and the sooner the train operating companies are back in public hands and that money is repatriated to this country, the better. However, I share with the shadow Transport Secretary a worry that officials in the Department for Transport may not be up to it. Excuses may be used to slow things down, because the operator of last resort is not ready and they are worried about taking on the extra capacity. It is a genuine worry, but it is a problem that should and has to be overcome if we want a publicly owned railway working for the benefit of passengers and the taxpayers of this country, not a privatised system. I have therefore tabled an amendment to remove clause 2(3), which could be used as a loophole as it would allow the Secretary of State to carry on with a franchise under certain circumstances. I ask my colleagues on the Front Bench to be explicit about what those circumstances might be, because my worry is that they will be getting advice from officials in the Department for Transport who have not covered themselves in glory and have failed with the railways over many, many years.

As the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent likes evidence, I refer her to a Public Accounts Committee report in May that is excoriating in describing the officials in the Department for Transport and how they have dealt with the railway system. I will read some of the conclusions from that report, because it should worry us all if we want this Bill to work—not just to be passed into legislation but actually to work.

The first point made by this all-party Committee with a Conservative majority in May this year was this:

“It has been six years since the Department identified the need for a root and branch review of the railway, but it has achieved very little in this time.”

It then says:

“There has been too little focus on passengers and taxpayers and how to get them a better deal.”

Those are the first very worrying points from Labour's perspective.

The report also says:

“Six years since the Department started work on rail reform, it has failed to resolve fundamental disagreements and clarify key aspects of reform.”

There are other points too, but I do not want to bore the Committee too much. The last point is:

“The Department has failed to engage with the workforce to successfully deliver its reform ambitions.”

That is also very worrying.

I note as well the comments of an official from the Department when discussing the appalling performance of Avanti, which I think is permanently in breach of its contract and which has laughed at the Government and the travelling public as it has received massive subsidies. It is not working for profit; it is not at risk. It has just been ripping off the taxpayer for many years—since it took over from Virgin in fact. A DfT spokesperson said:

“Stripping Avanti's contract would just cause more upheaval for passengers rather than solving the challenges the operator is facing. These include restrictive working practices that can't be reformed without ASLEF's agreement.”

I think those officials could be and have been a barrier to reform. I would not expect my colleagues on the Front Bench to do anything but be loyal to the officials who work in the Department, but I would like them to respond on how they are going to overcome some of the potential problems they will find in a Department they control. There are not only the problems where there will be resistance. Owing to the way the franchises are dealt with, some of the better train-operating companies—such as Greater Anglia, which has a reasonable record—will come up first, whereas Avanti has eight years left on its contract. It seems to me that it would be easy for officials to recommend dealing with the best first rather than the worst, which is not in the interests of passengers or the taxpayer. We really need as a Government to get control of that and deal with the worst first, because that is where we are losing money, that is where passengers are suffering, and that is where money is being taken out of the system. As I say, I do not expect the Front-Bench team to criticise the officials they have to work with, but I hope they will take on board the fact that there are real problems and that we need to deliver right across the rail system to create a wholly publicly owned industry as soon as possible.

3.15 pm

**Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD):** The Liberal Democrats' first principle is to put the rail user at the heart of any new arrangements for rail passenger services. We are ultimately agnostic about public or private ownership so long as what the Government propose clearly delivers the improvements on our railways that are so desperately needed. I thank Ministers for their prior engagement and for today's debate. I am aware that the Bill is only a step towards more comprehensive legislation later in

this Parliament. We Liberal Democrats have tabled three amendments to address three core issues that are relevant to the Bill but might become even more relevant to any future Government plans.

Amendment 21 is aimed at keeping passenger experience under review. Public confidence in our rail system has been falling year on year. Greater scrutiny is needed of how nationalisation will impact day-to-day travel. Our amendment will ensure that getting a fair deal for passengers is the guiding principle of the Bill.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): Does my hon. Friend agree that an essential part of that is addressing the problems that the railways face now? Although the Liberal Democrats are agnostic on nationalisation, as my hon. Friend says, the problems that customers face now are about pricing and timetabling, and this Bill will not address them.

**Wera Hobhouse:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention and repeat that it remains to be seen how quickly that can be addressed. That is really our main point—we will scrutinise the Government on how quickly these changes can be delivered, because that is what all our constituents are really asking for.

Our amendment would ensure that an annual report was published on the effects of public sector contracts, particularly on the ticketing system. Fare hikes, delays and cancellations all contribute to a loss of confidence. Despite that, passenger numbers are up; people want to use our railway as a clean, green way to travel. We agree with the Government that competition is not working as intended, but we cannot expect nationalisation to be a silver bullet that solves all the issues with our rail services. It is therefore vital that the Government get a clear picture and are fully transparent about the public experience throughout the change.

The current ticketing system is simply not fit for purpose. Complicated and inconsistent ticketing is a barrier to rail travel. If we are to meet our climate commitments, green travel must be encouraged. I often hear from my constituents that they find it hard to understand when a ticket is best value for money, which highlights the need to simplify the entire system. When people buy a ticket, the best value fare should be clear and should be displayed first. There have been cases where operator-owned ticket machines have had an in-built bias to sell their own company's tickets even if they are not the best value. Commuters should not have to jump through hoops to find the most effective price.

Amendment 21 would also require a look at the effects of nationalisation on digital season tickets and compensation for delays and cancellations. Delay repay is another big issue on our rail network. In the last reporting year, train operators closed 7.6 million delay compensation claims. That figure was 30% higher than the previous year even though passenger journeys were only 16% higher. However, current operators treat delay repay claims differently: while some passengers can get automatic compensation if their journey is delayed, others have to fill in complicated forms and have to wait. A unified approach to delay repay is clearly needed to improve passenger experiences, and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) that it is absolutely vital that passengers see such changes very quickly, rather than having to wait for a whole-system change.

The same is also the case with season tickets. Annual passes for similar-length rail journeys differ immensely across the country depending on the operator. An annual report scrutinising how nationalisation affects those inconsistencies is essential to reducing them. To ensure that passengers get a fair deal from nationalisation, I urge Members to support our amendment 21.

Amendment 20 aims to bring people further confidence as rail companies are brought into public ownership. The amendment would establish an independent body to review contracts made by the Transport Secretary and public companies. That body would put the customer at the heart of services, as well as delivering, putting commuters first and holding operators to account. The amendment would ensure that if the independent body did not agree with a proposed contract, the Secretary of State must explain to Parliament why they were going ahead. To give the public confidence in our railways, the process of contract allocation must be kept under scrutiny and be fully transparent.

Our third amendment is amendment 22, which would require the Government to review how the transition to public ownership affects services such as Merseyrail and Transport for London. Those services are already under public control, but in those cases the control is local, not national. The amendment would allow more services to be operated by local public bodies in the future—we have discussed that in our pre-meeting. The review would not simply look at direct impacts, but engage with the local public bodies themselves on their capacity and their wish to deliver such services.

If the new Government are serious about devolution, the option for combined authorities to deliver services must be on the table. We have already seen how devolved authorities can deliver rail services effectively. Transport for London and Merseyrail are two such examples. If devolved authorities wish to deliver rail services, there must be a way for them to have discussions with central Government. I understand that such a proposal might be for the future, but it is important we put a marker down here. Amendment 22 provides a mechanism for that process.

Nationalisation must be a means to an end. The public at large do not care who is running the trains as long as there are good services and travel is affordable. Our Liberal Democrat amendments would ensure that the legislation has the passenger at the heart of any changes and that the public get value for money.

**Andy McDonald** *rose*—

**Wera Hobhouse:** I am coming to the end of my remarks.

The Liberal Democrats want to work with the new Government to improve our railways and deliver a fair deal for passengers. I call on all colleagues to support our amendments.

**Catherine Atkinson** (Derby North) (Lab): I will address my remarks to my amendment 7. It is a probing amendment, whose main purpose is to raise and discuss procurement reform.

I start with good news: 100 new jobs at Alstom Derby, refurbishing CrossCountry's Voyager fleet, in an upgrade worth £60 million. Train manufacturing in Derby was at death's door some months ago, and now it has a heartbeat, with 10 trains for the Elizabeth line in



[Catherine Atkinson]

the pipeline. I thank the Transport Secretary and many other hon. Members for their extraordinary support in the dark days some months ago, when hundreds of jobs at Alstom—thousands when we consider the supply chain and agency workers—were being lost. The city came together to demand action. No one wants to see their city or their workplace go through that, so we need to see an end to boom and bust, replaced with consistency and certainty. We need crisis and sticking plasters to be replaced with long-term funding and stable projects.

We saw a failure to act in that way when privatisation happened. When British Rail was split up, there was real concern that the upheaval would crush the world-renowned expertise in the supply chain in Derbyshire. According to *Hansard* on 20 December 1994, in that year alone, 5,000 jobs were lost nationally. That was one of the first unnecessary tragedies of privatisation. In spite of that setback, more than 10,000 workers are employed today in Europe's largest and most diverse rail cluster, centred around Derby. It covers every aspect of the railway supply chain.

Since the Bill's Second Reading, I have been pleased to visit and meet with rail forum members, including Hübner, Serco, DB ESG, Resonate and Millennium Site Services, which are all enthusiastic about working with this Government to deliver improvements to rail. The Transport Secretary said on Second Reading:

"As private operators are brought in, their contracts and supply chains will be considered, to ensure that they are delivering the best possible service for passengers."—[*Official Report*, 29 July 2024; Vol. 752, c. 1074.]

My amendment seeks to establish what details publications related to that consideration should include. Specifically, the amendment suggests that details should include the approach towards

"technological development...the management of demand and supply...the supply chain...future sectoral planning."

Through better procurement we can also speed up delivery, reduce costs and create social value. That point was made in the Maier rail and urban transport review, which was recently published—I commend the Transport Secretary on commissioning it. One of its valuable recommendations is that the Rail Minister should be given responsibility for working in partnership with business to support the establishment of local supply chain capability. It makes the point that as supply chain capability goes up, costs and skills shortages come down.

I started with the good news of 100 jobs at Alstom, but there is no complacency in Derby, because we are looking five and 10 years ahead, and I know there is no complacency from the Transport Secretary. On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) reminded the House that to meet decarbonisation goals, the UK needs to upgrade up to 4,000 rolling stock units. With management of contracts and sectoral planning, there is enough domestic work to create a stable base for train builders and their suppliers, who can then top that up with exports. I therefore look forward to hearing from the Minister how we can get the structure right now for delivery in the future.

**Graham Leadbitter** (Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey) (SNP): I will not speak for a great deal of time, as this issue is largely devolved in Scotland. However, I welcome

the Bill, and the Scottish Government have been keen to support it through a legislative consent motion. That supports the work that has already been done in Scotland. We have put the railway into public ownership as a last resort, but the Bill will provide stability going forward for the Government and the operator and enable them to do much better on medium and long-term planning, with certainty on what the future holds.

My amendment 6 brings into the debate the role of rolling stock leasing companies, or ROSCOs. Many Members on the Government Benches will agree that the ROSCOs are taking a huge profit out of the public sector. Rolling stock contracts in the past couple of years took more than £3 billion each year, and the amount of profit being taken from that is in the billions over the lifetime of the contracts. That money could be reinvested in the railways. I appreciate that it is not for this Bill, but I would like the Government to come forward with proposals on ROSCOs in the next Bill that will come forward later in the Session.

That is all I want to say at the moment. I do not intend to press my amendment to a Division, but I would like some assurance from those on the Government Front Bench that serious consideration will be given to how we deal with ROSCOs and the amount of profit being taken.

**Grahame Morris:** I start by declaring an interest. I am proud of the fact that I am a trade unionist and have strong links to the transport unions, particularly Unite, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, and ASLEF. Indeed, as I pointed out on Second Reading, when I was a young fellow many years ago, my first job was on the railways, when they were part of British Rail. In those days, I was a member of the National Union of Railwaymen. More recently, I served on the Transport Committee for almost six years, and I am delighted that many of the arguments and issues that I and many other stakeholders raised in numerous sessions have finally found their way into a Government Bill and on to the Floor of the House of Commons.

3.30 pm

Having served 14 years in opposition, I understand the Opposition's call in their amendments for reports, performance assessments and impact assessments. I am familiar with the arguments. However, the Bill's integrity must remain intact. Much of the information requested by the Opposition about performance will be produced routinely, so there is no need for a separate clause requesting it.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and her team for prioritising the Bill, bringing it to Committee so soon after the recess, and keeping up the momentum from before the summer. I believe that the Bill will fix a structural failure in UK railways by ending the presumption in favour of the private sector for passenger service delivery.

Contrary to the views expressed by the Opposition and set out eloquently by the shadow Secretary of State, the Bill will save taxpayers money, as profits will be used to improve rail services, rather than inflate considerable, unwarranted dividend payments to private train operators. As my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East (Andy McDonald) indicated, the private train operating companies are

often owned by foreign Governments, so in fact we are subsidising the rail fares of passengers in other European countries. The previous Government allowed train operating companies to pay out hundreds of millions in dividends while taking public subsidies. That is financial mismanagement. It is bad value for money and exploitative of the taxpayer and commuters.

**Andy McDonald:** The privatisation of the railways was a privatisation too far, even for she whose portrait should be removed. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is utterly ridiculous that the only nation state on the planet not able to run the railway in this country is this one?

**Grahame Morris:** Absolutely. If ever there was a charge of political dogma to be made, it must be about the fact that, under the terms of the privatisation, the British taxpayer and the British Government are not allowed to own a stake in our own railway. For too long, private companies have provided a substandard service while making substantial profits. Over the last seven years, the remaining private train operating companies—I apologise for misleading the Committee, but I misspoke earlier when I said that there were 14 of them; there are 14 franchises in total, four of which are operated by the state through the operator of last resort—have paid out an average of £130 million annually to their shareholders. Those companies are often owned by foreign Governments—in Germany, Italy, France and across Europe and the world. Meanwhile, passengers’ day-to-day experiences have been of overcrowded carriages, delays, service failure and, worst of all, some of the highest fares in Europe.

It is worth thinking about the costs, and the profits that some private train operators have been able to generate for shareholders. Figures released just this week show that Govia Thameslink Railway paid out a staggering £82.4 million in dividends, with £62.3 million of that being for the 2023-24 financial year. That represents a 268% increase from the previous year. In return for those princely profits, Govia consistently failed to meet two thirds of its customer service quality targets, as reported in the *Financial Times*. The situation was encouraged to persist under the last Conservative Government. I welcome the fact that Labour is making this a priority from day one, as that is fundamental to fixing the foundations and delivering the economic growth promised by the Prime Minister.

I support the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Catherine Atkinson) and the hon. Member for Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey (Graham Leadbitter) about the rolling stock companies—the so-called ROSCOs. Many commentators see a problem with the newly formed Great British Railways having to continue to lease rolling stock from ROSCOs, as that would allow those companies to profit from taxpayers’ money. My view is that ROSCOs are an unnecessary link in the chain. I frequently raised the issue with experts and industry leaders on the Transport Committee, and I believe that we would benefit from meeting our rolling stock needs by placing orders directly with UK-based manufacturers such as Alstom and Hitachi, rather than enriching the ROSCOs.

Despite being in post for a relatively short time, the Secretary of State has made a strong start with the Bill. However, I urge her to consider the points raised by me and Members on both sides of the Committee about how we continue to procure rolling stock as we move forward.

On Second Reading, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield and Rothwell (Simon Lightwood), said that purchasing existing rolling stock would not be a responsible use of taxpayers money. I understand that, but will the Minister, in responding, clarify whether in the future, under GBR, there will be an option to purchase new rolling stock directly, instead of having to continue to lease through the ROSCOs?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North said, the UK needs to upgrade to 4,000 units of rolling stock over the coming decades, with Network Rail estimating costs in the tens of billions of pounds, so this is an ideal opportunity to explore a new financing model for rolling stock. I am not naive—I understand the financial situation that we have inherited from the last Government—but I ask the Government to explore not-for-profit financiers if rolling stock cannot be nationalised under GBR. May I point out respectfully that Eurofima, a supranational not-for-profit financier, has stated that, for every £1 billion of financing on UK railways, it could save the taxpayer £350 million over 30 years due to its lower financing costs? That is compared to using the existing ROSCOs. Will the Secretary of State update us on the possibility of using not-for-profit financiers for rolling stock in preference to the ROSCOs?

I will take up the point made by the shadow Secretary of State about the pay review bodies. May I point out that they are not universally welcomed? I have been looking at responses to pay review bodies in the health service, and the last Government had a less than wonderful record when it comes to implementing the recommendations of pay review bodies, not least those relating to junior doctors. The Royal College of Nursing has said of pay review bodies that there is “nothing independent about them.” The chairs and members of pay review bodies are hand-picked by the Prime Minister and Government Ministers, and the terms of reference are decided by the Government. There is some scepticism about how independent they truly are, and about whether, when they make recommendations, the Government are obliged to implement them in full.

I ask the Minister if it is possible to provide a timetable for the next steps. When will future Bills be introduced to the House, and when is Great British Railways expected to be fully established? I acknowledge and express my appreciation for the engagement of the Front-Bench team. I stress that I support the Bill because I believe that it represents a critical step in fixing the long-standing issues in our rail system. The current privatised framework is giving a fragmented railway, and has failed to deliver value for money, an efficient service or customer satisfaction. I am pleased that we are moving towards a model that prioritises the needs of passengers over the profits of shareholders. Rethinking our approach to rail management and financing is a crucial first step towards fixing the foundations and putting Great British Railways at the service of the travelling public.

**Siân Berry** (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): The Greens are not agnostic on privatisation. We very much support the principle of the Bill and look forward to its progress. I want to make a short speech on amendments 2 to 5, which I tabled. They are very simple and common sense; their goal is to leave open the opportunity for

[Siân Berry]

elected devolved bodies to set up companies that they own, in order to bid to run railway services under the overall guidance and wing of Great British Railways. The Bill, which restricts the definition of a public sector company to those owned by Ministers, either here or in Wales or Scotland, does not allow for that. That seems to clash with the direction of travel towards more public sector devolution, with which my party and I agree.

It would improve and future-proof the Bill if we amended proposed new section 30C of the Railways Act 1993 so that Ministers could in future choose a company set up or owned by combined authorities, or by groups of unitary, county, district or borough councils who decided to co-operate, ahead of further devolution, on improving their railways. Any decisions on the award of franchises, on the suitability of a body to run and own local railways, and on where investment should go would remain fully with Ministers. I tabled the amendments in a constructive spirit, and I hope that they will start a constructive conversation that will continue here and in the other place as the Bill progresses.

**The First Deputy Chairman:** I call Abtisam Mohamed to make her maiden speech.

**Abtisam Mohamed** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Thank you, Ms Cummins, for giving me the opportunity to speak. It is a real privilege to deliver my maiden speech in this debate on the Bill, which will see the biggest overhaul to transportation in a generation. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) on making excellent points about placing passengers at the heart of decisions, rather than unthinkable profits for shareholders.

I deliver my maiden speech with a sense of profound honour and humility. Representing the vibrant and diverse community of Sheffield Central is a responsibility that I do not take lightly. I would like to start by saying a few words about my predecessor, Paul Blomfield. A Labour MP for the last 14 years, Paul turned a majority of 165 to a majority of a whopping 27,000. He achieved this electoral popularity because he made politics accessible and was a great constituency MP. He listened to people and made their concerns his priority. He fought for the people of Sheffield Central tirelessly and consistently. He is everything we should look for in the character of elected Members: humble, honest and extremely hard working. He has received many awards in recognition of that. On a personal level, Paul has been my mentor. His guidance and support during my campaign have been invaluable, and for that I am deeply grateful. If he is watching, I would like to thank him for all the support that he has given me, and for everything that he has done for the people of Sheffield Central.

Sheffield Central is a microcosm of all that is Sheffield and all that is modern Britain. It is characterised by its rich cultural diversity, beautiful green spaces and a thriving independent economic dynamism. From the beautiful Bole hill views to the new Pound's Park in the city centre, the small independent shops in Sharrow Vale and the up-and-coming Neepsend and Kelham, we have an unwavering sense of community spirit that genuinely makes every area feel like home. That is because it is home to remarkable individuals and organisations that

work tirelessly to make our city a better place. It is a place where tradition meets innovation; we have seen the recent excavation and regeneration of a 12th century castle, and have new thriving business hubs, such as Leah's Yard, which was the place of old toolmakers and is now the city's new exciting independent home for makers and creatives. Sheffield has earned its stripes as the undisputed start-up capital of the UK. We also have a very large student population. Sheffield Central is home to two brilliant, world-class universities that enrich the fabric of our community. I am fortunate to have been a student at both of these excellent institutions at various points in my life.

With vibrant museums and the largest theatre complex outside London, we are a city that recognises people's creativity, knowledge, identity, traditions and passions. Our theatres have been home to the world snooker championship since 1977 and, more recently, the multi-award-winning musical, "Standing at the Sky's Edge". Sheffield has no desire to copy; we desire to celebrate and embody our uniqueness. We storm ahead in our ability to bring people together, to think, to create and to celebrate.

3.45 pm

As the first city of sanctuary, Sheffield is a city rich in diversity, with settled communities and heritages from all over the world. In 1963, a man crossed two continents to start a life in the city of Sheffield. He came by invitation of the British Government to work in the then growing steel industry. He was drawn by the desire to better himself and his family. Later, his son joined him in the 1970s and they worked for the renowned Forgemasters. In 1982, they were able to support the journey of a young woman and her two little girls from the Yemen to the United Kingdom. That man was my grandfather, and you are listening to one of those little girls tell her story now.

I am honoured to be the first person of Yemeni heritage and the first British Arab woman to be elected as a Member of Parliament. I am immensely proud of that honour, and I feel privileged to represent not just my constituency, but every person who has ever hoped for a better future. I have climbed personal mountains and faced many personal barriers and hurdles that have come my way, and not only have I had to overcome them, but I have fought for and helped many others along the way.

I grew up in some of the most deprived parts of Sheffield and attended some of the most underachieving schools. I grew up with people like me: people who had very little hope and huge odds stacked against them; people who did not understand politics and systems, just day-to-day survival. And when life becomes about survival, living within the constraints of our own prism, our voice is our only means of breaking through.

I left school with 4 GCSEs and went on to graduate four times. I refused to become a statistic. I refused to be defined by my postcode or the school I went to. I worked hard to qualify as a teacher and then a lawyer. But I am never satisfied unless I am using my experiences and voice to better the lives of others. I have consoled and wept with many parents who have lost their children to gang violence, either buried or in prison. I have worked tirelessly, bringing together the police and youth providers, developing community-led services, working



to reduce crime and getting young people engaged in community activity and into jobs or education. I have supported women fleeing domestic violence and sought better support for them and ensured their safety.

I recognise that there are many priorities in politics, but building strong communities will always be at the heart of mine. I will champion localism, ensuring that local authorities and, equally, community organisations and charities get the support they need to deliver the best in early years, youth work and mental health support, creating local jobs and services for those who need them the most. I will press on the urgency of our commitment on climate action, where we work for the best interests of our planet rather than the interests of oil and gas companies. I will advocate for more affordable housing to provide younger people hope for the future.

And hope is key. Hope will shape our individual stories, who we are and the journeys we take. I personally broke through deprivation barriers by embracing the education system and the opportunities provided then by the Labour Government. A strong education system is the cornerstone of a thriving society. It is the key to unlocking potential and creating opportunities. So supporting the education system, from early years right through to higher education, will always be a key priority not just for me but for the constituency I represent.

I will also use my platform to strongly advocate for cohesion in society. I am driven by the belief that fairness and inclusion are core values that must be embodied in all that we do. I will do everything in my power to promote multiculturalism in our brilliant country and will reject the tired populism of blame, exclusion and hate. Our unity is our strength. Indeed, the positive reactions against the recent riots celebrated an identity of diversity and inclusiveness.

As I look ahead, I am filled not with foreboding, but with optimism. We have a new Labour Government with a strong mandate from across the country. I will work with my colleagues to strengthen and champion our communities. I will work alongside anyone who wants to eradicate racism and bind our cosmopolitan communities together. We are strengthened by our diversity, not weakened by it, and we must hold firm to the fundamental rights and freedoms we all cherish. It is imperative that everyone feels valued and included, and we must strive to ensure that our public services are accessible to all. I will work tirelessly to make and promote laws and policies that foster inclusivity and challenge the systemic barriers that prevent all individuals from reaching their full potential.

I stand here as a woman of colour, alongside many others from different backgrounds, and as a proud product of multiculturalism who now has the honour and privilege of being the voice of the people of Sheffield Central and beyond. I am here to listen, to learn, to serve and to act in the best interests of all our communities.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): It was a real privilege to listen to the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Abtisam Mohamed). Her passion for the constituency that she has been elected to represent shone through in her speech, and I congratulate her on being the first British Arab woman to be elected to Parliament. I really enjoyed listening to what I would best describe as a picture portrait, in her words, of her

constituency. I will reflect on that next time I drive up or down the M1—while also concentrating on my driving, of course.

Let me now turn to the Bill. I rise to support the Opposition amendments, particularly amendments 10, 12, 15 and 17. As others have said, this is a short Bill, but I believe that its aims are radical and ideological. It will completely change our rail system, removing the presumption in favour of private sector operation of passenger services and allowing the Government to bring those operators into public ownership when a franchise ends. In short, I see this move as nationalisation and, indeed, ideologicalisation.

Although the Bill introduces such fundamental change, it is also being rushed through this place with limited scrutiny, for just four hours for Committee consideration. Smaller Bills have sat in Bill Committees for many more sessions. In fact, I think that a private Member's Bill of mine spent more time in Committee than this. I am disappointed because there seems to be scant regard for what these changes will cost. I am also disappointed because I think the Bill should be considered alongside the railways Bill, which is yet to be published, and from my perspective that makes the scrutiny of the Bill, particularly at this stage, even more important.

I agree that the current model is not working. I am a former Rail Minister, and when we were in government we acknowledged the need to change and made the case for rail reform. However, that reform was about simplification, not nationalisation. It was about bringing the track closer to the trains and putting the passenger first.

Let me begin with amendments 10 and 12. I do not think we should underestimate the need for strict scrutiny, accountability and transparency. At the end of the day, that is what we on the Opposition side of the Chamber are here to provide. Without the additional measures proposed in the amendments, it seems very unclear how the shift from franchise to public ownership will work, and how its impact will be assessed. How will the costs be monitored, and where will investment in future rolling stock come from?

Another problem with the Bill in its current form is the arbitrary transfer of franchises to public ownership, based not on performance but simply on chronological franchise date. I raised that on Second Reading. West Midlands Trains, for example, is one of the better performers, but its contract expires this month. Contrast that with Avanti West Coast. As many Members have probably experienced when travelling to this place, it is currently one of the worst operators, yet its contract expires in 2026.

My reason for supporting the amendments is to ensure that, through stricter reporting and oversight of the new operators, we will see targets that are linked to performance and innovation. It is important that they are also linked to managerial pay, and it is all about keeping the passenger at the heart of what we are doing. It is also important to look closely at how the operator of last resort will manage the many more train services that will fall under its remit. I am not quite sure whether the OLR will have more resource to do that—hence the need to have accounts and monitor what is happening.

It is also important to understand how and where decisions about infrastructure and investment are being made. I will cite the example of the midlands rail hub,

[Wendy Morton]

which the last Conservative Government committed to. It is absolutely critical to growth and improvements in services, and not just in Birmingham but across the west midlands and other regions. I would like to understand how some of the investments will be progressed under the new model, and how they will be held to account.

Amendment 15 seeks to address the issue of open access operators. Again, I raised this issue at Second Reading and, to be fair, the Rail Minister wrote to me and confirmed that there will remain a role for open access services, alongside publicly owned services. I welcome that, not least because it gives me a reason to continue to bang on about the need for the Government to support the bid for open access for services from Wales to London Euston via Aldridge. However, we need a train station in order for the train to stop in Aldridge, and we want it to be built by 2027 and not pushed into the sidings by the new Labour mayor. So forgive me, Madam Chairman, but I will keep talking about that until we see it delivered, not least because residents are expecting it to happen.

Amendment 15 seeks to carve out the space for open access operators and ensure that there is fairness in the awarding of contracts, which will be critical moving forward. I genuinely believe that there is a place for both the current system of providing train services and open access operators. Generally speaking, a lot of them have proved their value to the passenger and the taxpayer.

I will touch briefly on amendment 17, which is about reforming terms and conditions. I welcome the breakthrough in the pay talks, which is very positive, but it is really disappointing that it has done nothing to address the urgent need for reform of some of the terms and conditions. I see that as being crucial for the future stability of rail passenger services and for having the passenger-focused, seven-days-a-week service that the fare-paying passenger expects. Without the tools to scrutinise the ideologically driven changes, there is a real risk that the Bill fails not just the taxpayer, but fare-paying passengers, as many Members have highlighted this afternoon.

Finally, for constituents to be able to enjoy any benefits of rail travel, they need access to a local station. I will close my remarks by referring to Aldridge, because it is just one of a handful of constituencies that have a track but no train station. I urge the Minister to join me in pushing his colleagues in the Treasury and the West Midlands combined authority to help me deliver a train station for Aldridge on time.

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Judith Cummins):** I call Julia Buckley to make her maiden speech.

**Julia Buckley** (Shrewsbury) (Lab): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for allowing me to make my maiden speech. What a privilege it is to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Abtisam Mohamed) and her moving story of her family overcoming racism and her personal passion for change.

I am delighted to contribute to this afternoon's debate on our plans to introduce Great British Railways and bring trains back into public ownership. Nowhere will these benefits be felt more keenly than in my constituency of Shrewsbury, where services are thin on the ground, lacking carriages and frequent and reliable services.

Most residents and visitors to Shrewsbury would very quickly conclude that our town is a beauty spot with so much potential but cut off from the wider economic region by a lack of robust public transport. This is mirrored by our inadequate bus services, with over 5,000 routes cut since 2010. Shrewsbury is dreaming of a Sunday service or a bus after 6 pm to support our young people and our night-time economy. Public bus franchises will make a huge impact on so many lives. We also have high hopes for Midlands Connect's plans to electrify the train route between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton to boost our capacity.

4 pm

Shrewsbury is, of course, the new name for my constituency—or should that be Shrowsbury? Apparently, pronunciation reveals which side of the river you grew up on. As it turns out, the people of Shrewsbury—and Shrowsbury—are very tolerant of both pronunciations. My constituency was known for many years as Shrewsbury and Atcham, until several villages leading up to Wenlock Edge were donated to South Shropshire under the boundary review. My predecessor, Daniel Kawczynski, is well known to this House, as he served our constituency for 19 years and was particularly focused on raising the profile and challenges of our river, through establishing and sharing the River Severn Caucus. I hope to continue this important work with my neighbouring colleagues as we tackle the shared threat of flooding and compromised water quality.

There is another, perhaps even more famous former MP for Shrewsbury. Going back a little further into history, Benjamin Disraeli was our Member of Parliament from 1841, when he earned a reputation as being both witty and able before going on twice to become Prime Minister and to decriminalise the work of trade unions. Shrewsbury has many famous sons, but none is more well known than Charles Darwin, the father of evolution. He was born and raised in Shrewsbury, attended Shrewsbury school as a boarder in the building that has since become our town library and has a statue commemorating his contribution to learning. We are delighted that his family home will finally become an international visitor attraction to celebrate his work.

Unlike Darwin, I have only lived in Shropshire for a mere 20 years, so I am grateful to have been graciously adopted by the good people of Shrewsbury to represent the county town of Shropshire. It is renowned as one of the finest medieval market towns, with regular farmers markets brimming with local producers, agricultural livestock markets and our award-winning indoor market, which goes from strength to strength with late-night events and live music, winning Britain's favourite market no less than three times.

The River Severn famously forms a loop around the town centre, framed by our old town walls, as a backdrop to our older historic properties, stone-flagged narrow streets, Regency crescents and imposing black and white timber-framed buildings. In total, we have over 600 listed buildings, including the castle—now a museum—the art gallery, the old market hall and the famous Shrewsbury abbey. Our main shopping street, the Wyle Cop, which climbs the steep hill from the English bridge up to the town square, is reported to host more independent shops than any other street in the country, thanks to the support of the Shrewsbury business improvement district and our chambers of commerce.

There are beautiful riverside walks, cycle paths, pedestrian bridges and—the jewel in our crown—the Quarry park along the river, with Percy Thrower’s famous sunken gardens in the dingle. This is where the Royal Horticultural Society hosts its annual flower show. With such well-kept beauty and heritage charm, it is easy to see why Shrewsbury attracts so many visitors each year, boosted by our array of cultural festivals including the folk festival, the food festival and of course the Darwin festival, as well as the county show at the West Mid showground and Loopfest. We also welcome gentle, sustainable tourism—those who come to walk in the Shropshire hills, kayak down the river or take a leisurely cruise on our famous tour boat, the Sabrina. I am sure that Members listening are already planning to book their next visit, and I would be happy to oblige with a guided tour for any who make it.

We have some 30 or so smaller villages in the rural hinterland: Upton Magna in the east towards the Wrekin; Montford Bridge; Nesscliffe with its long-standing military training camp; Minsterley, Pontesbury and Bayston Hill to the south; and Shrawardine and Westbury almost on the Welsh border, in what was historically named the Marches. These rolling green hills provide our farming base and woodland natural habitat, and serve our agricultural sector, ably supported by the nearby world-leading Harper Adams University, where our farmers of the future are trained in sustainability and productivity. That is crucial, given their impact on the food and drink supply chain that flows through the county to support our local economy.

We have several large employers, including the world-leading Morris Lubricants factory dating back to 1869, Salop Leisure, Beaver Bridges and, of course, Shrewsbury Town football club, where manager David Moyes once played.

Despite the very long list of famous Shrewsbury men, I am here today as the first female MP for Shrewsbury, and not before time. I am the daughter of a coalminer whose pit was closed in 1986, and who never worked again. I was 12 years old when this affected our family and our community, and it is when my interest in politics was first ignited.

As an adult, I was fortunate to win a scholarship for my PhD in EU policy, and I worked in the European Parliament in Brussels for five years, specialising in regional investment funding to tackle inequality. While I was there, I made friends with the chirpy young woman in the next office, another northern lass who was passionate about politics—Jo Leadbeater, who later became Jo Cox. We ran the New York marathon together in 2001 with Suzy Sumner, as the Northern Lasses. We were so proud of Jo when she became an MP and how, with her usual style of Tiggerish enthusiasm and charm, she would persuade everyone towards her policy aims.

That is all the more reason why her death was so very difficult to comprehend: a senseless loss of someone so sincere and positive. Jo never shied away from standing up for what she believed in and what really mattered, however difficult or unpopular. She never said she was too tired or too busy. She just got on and fought for what was important, and always with a winning smile.

Jo inspired me to go back into politics. After realising that life is too short and precious to wait for other people to solve problems, I decided to be more like Jo. That week, I rejoined my local Labour party, and

became a town councillor and then a county councillor, and ultimately leader of Shropshire Labour group. I stood as the parliamentary candidate for the seat in 2019, and I returned this year to win and become our MP, thanks in no small measure to the support of my husband John and the patience of my children Annabel and Edward.

I conclude by saying to Jo and her sister Kim that finally the Northern Lasses are reunited in this place.

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Judith Cummins):** I call Sorcha Eastwood to make her maiden speech.

**Sorcha Eastwood (Lagan Valley) (Alliance):** I congratulate everyone who has made their maiden speech today, and I have to speak from the heart and say that it was incredibly moving to hear the hon. Member for Shrewsbury (Julia Buckley) talk about her friend Jo Cox, who was a former colleague of so many in this House. Jo’s philosophy, that we have more in common than that which divides us, certainly inspired me. We have a lot to learn from that in my part of the world in Northern Ireland.

It is an honour to be here today as the new MP for Lagan Valley. Like many others, I am the first woman MP for my home constituency. I would not be standing here today without the people of Lagan Valley, who have given me the privilege of representing them on Lisburn and Castlereagh council, in the Northern Ireland Assembly and now at Westminster.

I want to take a wee moment to thank Team Lagan Valley Alliance, my colleague David Honeyford MLA and my successor Michelle Guy MLA. I also want briefly to pay tribute to my dear friend and colleague Stephen Farry, who served in this House for five years representing the constituency of North Down. I am delighted that Alliance is continuing the legacy of Stephen’s contributions in this House.

There is a saying back home, “It’s far from here that you were reared,” and it certainly is far from here that I was reared. There was absolutely no expectation that I, as the daughter of Brigid McKeown, who was born on the side of Blaris Road in Lisburn, would wind up as the MP for Lagan Valley. My journey in politics began around our family table. Where I grew up, people did not really take an active interest in politics unless it took an active interest in them. I learned around our family table about public service in housing, education, policing, nursing or whatever it may be—that it was about what we can give back to our community.

My mum used to ask me every Sunday, “Do you want to do a wee general knowledge quiz?” and I would be like, “Yeah, who doesn’t like a quiz?” She used to take me into our back room and say, “Who is the Prime Minister?” and “What’s the capital of Spain?” What I did not really understand was that my mum, who left school with no qualifications and worked damned hard as a domiciliary care worker, wanted her daughter to have a better life, and education was the key to that. No, it was certainly far from here that I was reared, but that makes my presence today even more important.

But this is not about me or my life or my family; this is about the tens of thousands of people across Lagan Valley who grew up the exact same way. In fact, just today, while sitting on these Benches, somebody sent me a wee private message to ask, “Can you help me with this?”



[Sorcha Eastwood]

Oh and here, by the way, it's good to see that one of us got in there." They did not mean "one of us" in the Northern Irish sense of the past; they meant somebody who grew up in the same street as them, who had the same social problems and knew what it was like to work a minimum wage job: strong, dignified people; people who want better, voted for change and for the first woman MP for Lagan Valley, but more importantly who voted for the first united community MP for Lagan Valley.

Our job here is to speak truth to power. Frankly, the people of Lagan Valley would not let me away with anything less. The system is broken. The social contract is shattered. It is not working. We have played this tape through to the end. We know how it ends. It so often ends with the most vulnerable in society crushed by a system that is sometimes overwhelmingly stacked against them. The system is harming people. Austerity is a political choice, and not one that my constituents—or frankly anybody in the UK—should be forced to bear.

Nearly 40% of people who are working are in receipt of universal credit. Young people are priced out of the housing market, we are not building enough social or affordable homes and renters are being exploited. We have full-time workers across health, education and hospitality dipping in and out of food banks. When did food banks become normalised? I do not want a single one of us ever to regard food banks as a part of our social architecture. We should be ashamed and disgusted and spending every minute in this place to eradicate their need. People who are working full time and in a households where both are often earning well above the median wage are having to shell that money out again through childcare costs, and many times it is the woman who has to give up her job.

Some politicians need focus groups to tell them what people feel about certain issues, while others create divisive culture wars to distract us from what really matters. But it should be as clear as day that people do not want more of the same. They do not need to be told that it is going to be painful, because they have been in pain for a long, long time. The message needs to be one of hope, ambition, vision and inspiration. From listening to the speeches, not just today but over the past few days and weeks in the House, I know that that is not something we are short of.

People know that underfunded and unfunded promises were made, and nowhere has that been felt more than in Northern Ireland and in my constituency, Lagan Valley. Alliance proudly went out before the election and campaigned primarily on two things—first, reform of the institutions and ending the veto, which so often has led to having no Government for the guts of 10 years where I am from. That is not acceptable. We also campaigned strongly for a fair funding package for Northern Ireland. That is not just a political opinion of mine; the Fiscal Commission for Northern Ireland said that Northern Ireland is not funded based on need. I will certainly be making no bones about fighting for that in this House.

It is one thing to say that we need reform of the institutions and for the UK Government to say that we have won the intellectual argument. Well, guess what? We have also won the argument at the ballot box time and time again. That is not something I will shy away from championing in my time in this House.

I sat around in Ballymacash estate on Friday and talked to people there about a number of things they are doing in that area that are absolutely fantastic. That community has gone on from years of social exclusion and isolation to develop so much. We talked about funding streams, and one we mentioned was the UK shared prosperity fund. They said to me, "That's your job to go and fight for that." Do you know what? It is. I met women from Tonagh estate. They rang me and said, "We are desperately worried about our winter fuel payments." They are not the people with broad shoulders.

People say that politics is personal. It is absolutely personal to me—I make no bones about that. One in two of us will get cancer in our lifetime. I know personally five of my constituents who last year were diagnosed in our accident and emergency department. Just two of those people are alive today, and that is within one year. One of those people diagnosed in A&E was my husband, who has a rare form of blood cancer. Through that time, coping with that diagnosis, we have met hundreds of families right across the UK and Ireland who have been impacted by this. Every second we are in this place, somebody in this country will get a diagnosis of cancer.

4.15 pm

I am not sure how this slid down the public agenda, but cancer survival rates in the UK are as much as 25 years behind other European countries. Although health may be devolved, the concept of the NHS definitely is not, and I will certainly be fighting tooth and nail to make sure that it remains the way that it was meant to be, so that we do not underfund it and gaslight the patients who need it or the staff who are working in it.

Britain has the fewest CT, MRI and PET scanners per person of 16 comparable countries, as well as a shortage of radiographers to run them. This has a direct impact on cancer diagnostics and the life prospects of our constituents.

I am not one to just highlight problems and walk away. There are solutions. An enhanced windfall tax on energy giants would create revenue that could be used to help safeguard the wellbeing and health of vulnerable individuals and, in doing so, prevent future hardship and illness, which are costly to the NHS. A phased carbon tax could help capture environmental costs and costs of inaction, allowing for investment in green technologies and creating new jobs.

Today's debate is about the public railway ownership Bill. If I can be brutally honest, I am not sure that we have ever recovered from the Beeching report. This is obviously a devolved issue, but we in Lagan Valley are desperate to get the trains back to where they should be. We are certainly delighted to look forward to the Knockmore line being reopened again.

Austerity has failed, and the last thing we need is more of it. Now is our opportunity to transform the lives of our constituents, changing the things that really matter to them and delivering big investment in public services that matches our big ambition for them.

Half a mile from my home in Lagan Valley, it is a changed place. There are GAA pitches, Orange halls, LGBT clubs and Egyptian societies. That is the new Northern Ireland—the north—everyone's shared homeplace. I know that, in Lagan Valley, there is a weight on my shoulder to deliver leadership for people right across the community regardless of their view, but I have no fear

that either Alliance or myself, in my time in this House, will fall short when it comes to representing and fighting for people.

I look forward to working with everyone in this House on the issues that matter to us, and I look forward to working with the Government to create the change and make a society where our constituents, particularly in Lagan Valley and right across Northern Ireland, can flourish. I look forward to working with you all. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Judith Cummins):** I call Paul Waugh to make his maiden speech.

**Paul Waugh (Rochdale) (Lab/Co-op):** Thank you, Madam Chair. It is an honour to make my maiden speech during the passage of such a landmark piece of legislation and one that is very much long overdue. It delivers on our promise at the election of real change, and every one of us here is proud to represent it.

It is also an honour to follow my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield Central (Abtisam Mohamed) and for Shrewsbury (Julia Buckley) and the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sorcha Eastwood), who made such moving and powerful speeches. They are a real tribute to this historic 2024 intake. They show up the excellence and diversity of our intake.

In a maiden speech, it is customary to pay tribute to one's predecessors. I sincerely thank George Galloway for his career of public service. I wish to pay tribute to the late Sir Tony Lloyd, a man who commanded respect across this Chamber and whose decency, internationalism and compassion are an example to each one of us. As Tony once advised his staffer, now my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Chris Webb):

"If it is not about making people's lives better, don't be a politician."

Rochdale certainly has a long history of making people's lives better and of strong links to this Palace of Westminster. Indeed, it was a Rochdale lass, 15-year-old Emily Kelsall, who, in 1843, laid the foundation stone of the Elizabeth Tower that houses Big Ben. The Kelsalls were close friends of another of my predecessors, the great parliamentarian Richard Cobden and his ally, John Bright, who famously described England as the mother of Parliaments.

Cobden and Bright, one a Rochdalian by adoption and one a Rochdalian by birth, were two Rochdale radicals who campaigned as vigorously against slavery as they did for cheaper food through the abolition of the corn laws and for a wider franchise. Another Rochdalian who was friends with Cobden and Bright was the Lancashire dialect poet Edwin Waugh, after whom my youngest son, Eddie, who is in the Gallery, is named. Waugh captured the beauty of the

"hill and hillock, knoll and dell",

and the moors and brooks of my Pennine constituency. From Blackstone Edge to Hollingworth lake, from Healey Dell to the landscaped gardens of our magnificent town hall, there is greenery and beauty throughout our town and its villages of Littleborough, Wardle, Milnrow and Newhey.

The Pennine way cuts through my seat, yet our Pennine way is more than just the well-loved footpath; it is a way of doing things, too. Our Pennine way is one of community,

co-operation, self-help and resilience. Ever since the Rochdale Pioneers set up shop in 1844 to sell affordable basics like butter, sugar and flour, we have been proud to be the birthplace of a global co-operative moment, and I am proud to be the first Labour and Co-operative MP in our town's history.

That sense of co-operation and community has been enhanced by the currents of migration that have flowed through our town as steadily as the River Roch itself. Scots, like my own Waugh clan, the Irish, Italians, Ukrainians, Poles, Pakistanis, Kashmiris, Bangladeshis, Nigerians—we even welcome the occasional Yorkshireman—have all staffed our factories and our NHS and created new family businesses. All are proud Rochdalias. Just as our town has shown real resilience in the face of economic downturns and Government cuts, our community cohesion has proved resilient, too—despite the provocations of extremists on all sides.

As well as radicalism and resilience, our town's story is a story of renewal. Many of our mills have closed, but there is still a strong sense of industry, of hard work, of grafters, of entrepreneurs, of people who put something back into the town that raised them. There are people like Richard Tang, whose Zen Internet started as a small, home-based business, but is now a major network provider and our biggest private sector employer. There are people like Sir Peter Ogden, who founded Computacenter and this year invested millions into my beloved Rochdale AFC—up the Dale—in recognition of its role as a hub of our community.

From the brass bands of Milnrow to the rock and folk music of Feel Good festival, our arts are thriving too. Rochdale sixth-form college is one of the highest achieving in the country. Our armed forces veterans support groups are superb. Springhill hospice is a beacon of excellence, and the Oasis ward at Rochdale infirmary is a national model in dementia care.

My own journey from Rochdale to this place was made possible only by an enabling state: a fantastic teacher, John Williams, who spotted the potential in me and my twin brother, Mark; a council house that gave me the stability and affordability that many families sadly lack today; and free school meals that meant we could focus on learning, not earning. As a former chairman of the Lobby, it would be remiss of me not to also mention the role that my parliamentary journalism has played in propelling me on to these Benches—and I would like to dispel the vicious rumour that the main reason I stood for Parliament was to guarantee five more years of jerk chicken.

The phrase "Westminster village" is often used as an insult, but this place really is a village, in the best sense of the word: a community of more than 3,000 people from all walks of life, making sure that this is an open and accessible people's House, not the preserve of an elite. For 26 years, I have had the pleasure of working in this building, with its fabulous canteen staff like Betty, Rita, Daphne, Terry and Godfrey, the Doorkeepers like Adrian, the security staff like Saeed, the many Clerks and officials, and of course, the police. I will never forget the day when we lost our own "village policeman", PC Keith Palmer, in the terror attack of 2017. It has been my pleasure to work with my Lobby colleagues and with MPs of all parties, and I would like to reassure all the Tory leadership contenders: don't worry, your secrets are safe with me.

[Paul Waugh]

Politicians and journalists have more in common than either would like to admit. At their best, both are honourable trades—and they are trades; they are not professions—but the big difference between us is the difference between criticism and action, between commentary and doing. In the end, I could no longer just write about the appalling state of our public services; I wanted to do something about it. I wanted to do something about the NHS workers like my wife, who came home every night exhausted by a sheer lack of staff. I wanted to do something about all those working-class kids like me whose destinies are still too often determined by their postcode, not by their potential.

I also wanted to do something about this misinformation age that we live in, and to combat the rise of extremism that disfigures too much of our discourse. It was Stanley Baldwin who denounced the newspaper barons for wanting power without responsibility; today, too many social media companies have exactly that. This summer's spread of online hate and falsehood is a challenge to which this Government will have to rise, just as they rose to the challenge of cracking down on the thugs who attacked our communities and our brave police officers. Tackling online publishers—that is what they are: publishers, not platforms—may sound radical, but in reality radicalism is often just common sense ahead of its time, a reminder that all our rights are hard won. What could be more commonsensical than demanding that the vote be given to the working classes and to women, more than 100 years ago? What could be more commonsensical than this railways Bill, giving the public control over the services that spend billions of pounds of their own money? What could be more commonsensical than tackling climate change or giving towns like Rochdale more control over their own future—towns that do not want a handout, but deserve a fairer share of the national resource?

The Pennines are famously the backbone of England, but the people of Rochdale are the backbone of England too. Common-sense radicalism, resilience and renewal—those are the watchwords of my home town, of this country and of this Government, and I will do my utmost to live up to them.

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Judith Cummins):** I call Charlie Dewhirst to make his maiden speech.

**Charlie Dewhirst (Bridlington and The Wolds) (Con):** Thank you, Madam Chair, for allowing me to catch your eye during this very important debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochdale (Paul Waugh) on a really excellent maiden speech, and I hope that I can match the very high bar that has been set by hon. Members in all parts of the House so far today.

I start by paying tribute to my predecessor, Sir Greg Knight. I am very fortunate to be following him; he was a very well-liked and respected Member of this House. His parliamentary career spanned five decades, and he served as a Minister in the Governments of Thatcher, Major and Cameron. He was first the Member for Derby North, from 1983 to 1997, and excelled in the roles of deputy Chief Whip and Minister for Industry. He then returned to this place in 2001 for the then

constituency of East Yorkshire, which has now become Bridlington and The Wolds, and was re-elected on five separate occasions until his retirement this year.

Sir Greg served for a second stint in the Whips Office during the coalition years and worked tirelessly behind the scenes on many of Parliament's less fashionable Committees. I will always aspire to match his dedication and integrity in public life, but there is one area in which I will never be able to compete with him—that is, of course, the election campaign jingle. For any hon. Members who are unaware of his unique impact in this area, I wholeheartedly recommend a quick internet search after today's debate. More seriously, Sir Greg was rightly rewarded with a knighthood for his service to this place, and I place on record my thanks for his support and friendship in recent months. I wish both him and Lady Janet a very happy and well-deserved retirement.

I now have the unbelievable privilege of representing my home constituency of Bridlington and The Wolds, and it is truly the greatest honour of my life. I am sure you will agree, Madam Chair, that there is no finer county than Yorkshire, and nowhere showcases it better than the East Riding—from the stunning cliffs and world-famous seabird colony at Bempton and Flamborough Head to the golden, sandy beaches stretching from Bridlington to Hornsea and the rolling hills and picture-book villages of the Wolds.

Each of the four towns in the constituency has its own unique appeal. Bridlington is the largest shellfish landing port in the UK and the lobster capital of Europe. It attracts millions of visitors every year and is home to many thousands of people who have retired to the area, and I will always fiercely defend our local pensioners. Driffield, my home town, is the capital of the Wolds—or capital of the world, as I thought it said on the road sign as a child—and home to one of the largest one-day agricultural shows in the country. Hornsea boasts not only a beautiful coastline but the largest freshwater lake in Yorkshire, and Market Weighton was once home to William Bradley, who is believed to be the tallest person ever to have lived in this country at 7 foot 9 inches tall, and to whom the town pays tribute every year on Giant Bradley Day. I do not wish to test your patience, Madam Chair, by singing the praises of all the many villages and hamlets across my constituency, but it would be remiss of me not to mention Nafferton, where I grew up, and Wansford, where I now live. Both are home to excellent local pubs; if you do find yourself in the area, I would be delighted to buy you a drink.

I hope to repay the faith placed in me by the electorate with hard work and diligence. I want to improve access to local health services, increase transport links, ensure access to high-speed broadband for all and address the historical funding formula in education that disadvantages children in rural local authority areas. I am one of the few Members who can claim to represent more pigs than people. Agriculture, fishing and tourism are the foundations of our local economy. If I can make our beautiful corner of Yorkshire a better place to live and work before I depart this place, I will, I hope, have done some good.

4.30 pm

I return to the topic of today's debate. Privatisation of the railways was necessary because British Rail was not working, either for rail users or the British taxpayer.



However, the process of privatising rail operators has not been perfect, in part because franchises operate monopolies; in that respect, they are no different from the nationalised services that they replaced. However, where genuine competition exists, rail privatisation has been a success. On the east coast main line, the Government-subsidised franchise, London North Eastern Railway, competes with open access operators Hull Trains, Grand Central and Lumo. That has led to cheaper prices for users, high satisfaction and greater punctuality, and inter-city services have been extended to new towns and cities across Yorkshire and the north-east. One of those operators, Hull Trains, now runs two direct services a day between Beverley and London, and I would love to see them extended to Bridlington and Driffield, just up the line in my constituency.

However, the legislation puts those efficient, non-subsidised open access operators under threat. Instead of learning the lessons of those success stories and expanding them across the network, the Government are sliding back to a nostalgic vision of the 1970s, even though public services were in fact inefficient and expensive for rail users and the public purse. The legislation's failure to provide specific guarantees to open access operators will mean that there is no incentive for them to invest in new rolling stock or expand their services. We need more open access, not less.

Ministers claim that there is a continued role for open access operators where they add value and capacity to the network, but they will soon be at the mercy of an entirely nationalised infrastructure and provider. Do Ministers not realise that a reborn British Rail will work for passengers only if its inter-city services face stiff open access competition across the network? The east coast main line is a mature and successful test case, and it should be expanded. Otherwise, what incentive will there be for a new British Rail to deliver cheaper and better services? None, I suspect. The legislation is as rushed as it is ideological. The only losers will be rail users and the taxpayer.

**The First Deputy Chairman:** I call Paul Davies to make his maiden speech.

**Paul Davies (Colne Valley) (Lab):** I express my gratitude to you, Ms Cummins, for the chance to address the House for the first time. I congratulate all hon. Members who have delivered their maiden speech in recent days. Their eloquence serves as testament to the remarkable talent in this House, and I am honoured to be counted among them. I eagerly anticipate their contributions to future debates in the years ahead. I also pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, Jason McCartney, who has demonstrated over the past four and a half years a real passion for improving the lives of many people in the constituency.

Today, we discuss the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill. For my constituents, the change cannot come soon enough. The Bill will be a cornerstone, kick-starting economic growth, unlocking opportunities across the country—especially in Colne Valley—and accelerating us towards net zero.

We are all shaped in many ways by our upbringing. My commitment to community was deeply influenced by growing up in south Wales. My parents quietly volunteered to drive stroke survivors to the aptly named

stroke club, which provided essential respite. For them, it was not charity; it was just something you did. Working in the mines taught me the value of collective support. Miners watched out for each other; their safety depended on it. That sense of community cohesion contributed to proud and resilient communities that shaped our nation's success. We must reignite those bonds through community wealth-building initiatives, and by retaining wealth in local communities. That transformation, inspired by the co-operative movement, is pivotal. Born in Wales and shaped by the Labour movement, I found purpose through education and global experiences during my professional career. Now, just a few years later, I stand before the Committee as the newly elected Member for Colne Valley. It is an immense honour, and I am genuinely humbled that the people of Colne Valley and Lindley have placed their trust in me.

The Colne Valley constituency embodies the community values instilled in me during my Welsh upbringing, values that are evident in its vibrant villages and urban centres—Meltham, Lindley, Linthwaite, Slaithwaite, Marsden, Golcar, Honley and Holmfirth—where community ecosystems thrive and people look out for each other through various community groups. There are festivals and shows, such as the Holmfirth arts festival, the Honley show, Lindley street festival, Marsden jazz festival and Golcar lily day, and everybody is welcome to contribute, participate, or simply enjoy themselves. There are sports clubs, such as Honley cricket club, Wooldale Wanderers football club and Holmfirth bowling club, that are woven into the fabric of our constituency. Of course, there are the local businesses that serve and employ our community members, including the Picturedrome in Holmfirth, Coopers Yard, Beauty and the Barista, Read, Trojan plastics, and many others. We should not forget the community support groups, such as Crossroads in Meltham and the Holmfirth food bank.

Much of the above only came about due to individual sacrifices and an unwavering belief in our communities. Developing a strong community spirit is an ongoing effort. It is not something that you simply bottle. It is a living, often delicate entity that requires nurturing and protection. External support is crucial to put in place the foundational elements. For example, we need to empower people through safe, secure, affordable homes and decent jobs. Those foundations allow individuals to contribute more broadly to their communities. In Colne Valley and Lindley, a palpable community spirit thrives—a spirit you can almost touch. That vitality is evident through numerous community groups, from EcoHolmes, which focuses on building affordable homes, to Holmfirth Tech, which provides community spaces, as well as the Full Life food bank and various faith-based organisations. That is why, 15 years ago, Leah and our two daughters chose to make this area our home. It is why, every single day, we appreciate how lucky we are to live in such an amazing place with such amazing people. Of course, I have to mention the excellent beer, which does help.

However, as I suggested earlier, focusing beyond our immediate needs can be challenging when we are tired, lonely, hungry, distracted, or simply busy. Too many of our people are in that position; they find it impossible to get off the treadmill of looking to make ends meet. As the Member for Colne Valley, I aspire to be a voice for those who struggle to be heard amid the pressures of

[Paul Davies]

the cost of living challenges they face. I aim to be a calm, consistent advocate for all, emphasising the strength that comes from unity, and a voice that celebrates the selflessness of those whose altruism forms the bedrock of a healthy society. However, I also recognise the importance of being a strong, resilient voice, one that calls for better and more effective ways of building and retaining wealth in our communities to benefit everyone. My values stem from the collective, and my unwavering commitment lies with my community. Those are the values and principles I will carry with me every day as I go to work in this place for the people of Colne Valley.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I call Calum Miller to make his maiden speech.

**Calum Miller** (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): It is an honour to be called to give my maiden speech, Ms Cummins. I start by thanking the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Paul Davies) for his speech. He spoke about a spirit in his community that you could touch; he has a pride in his community that we can feel, and can almost touch as well. He spoke about the selflessness of service to the community, a point echoed in excellent speeches given today by the hon. Members for Sheffield Central (Abtisam Mohamed), for Shrewsbury (Julia Buckley), for Lagan Valley (Sorcha Eastwood), for Rochdale (Paul Waugh), and for Bridlington and The Wolds (Charlie Dewhurst). It is my honour to speak in their company.

Convention requires that I say a few words about my predecessor, and I have been advised that, despite political differences, these should be complimentary and civil. I have tried, but the best that I can say is that the views of the last MP for Woodstock belong to a different time—which is quite understandable, since Lord Randolph Churchill held it until the parliamentary borough of Woodstock was abolished in 1885. For over a century, Woodstock disappeared from the constituency names in this House. Meanwhile, the town of Bicester has never previously been named in a constituency. Bicester and Woodstock is a fusion of four previous constituencies. I therefore have no immediate predecessor to refer to, but I want to thank Robert Courts, John Howell, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and Victoria Prentis for their service to the communities in my constituency. Like any new Member, I am eager to learn from how others have done things, so I am grateful to have such a diversity of approaches to draw on.

I was fortunate to be called on to ask a question in the first Prime Minister's Question Time of this Parliament. I spoke then about the River Evenlode, but I could equally have referred to the Rivers Cherwell, Dorn, Glyme or Ray. Each cuts a path through my constituency and each has to carry its unfair share of pollutants from Thames Water's sewage spills. Tackling the pollution of our rivers and waterways was a common concern among my constituents during the election campaign, and I welcome the Prime Minister's undertaking to work across parties to address this scandal.

Alongside our waterways, the railways are significant features of my constituency. We have no fewer than seven stations. To address the subject of this afternoon's debate, at each you will find passengers keen to see

improvements. The travellers through Bicester North bemoan the age of the rolling stock, which breaks down far too often, and the shortened trains with their inadequate seating. Constituents near Bicester Village are deeply concerned about the future closure of the London Road level crossing, which would cut off those living in south-east Bicester from the rest of the town. I hope the Rail Minister, to whom I have written, will respond positively to my request to ensure that East West Rail brings forward sufficient funding for alternative crossings for all users.

Another feature of my constituency is the rapid proposed growth of towns and villages, under plans adopted by the last Government and supported by Conservative local councils in 2017. Bicester has already seen tremendous growth. A similar scale of development is planned for Eynsham and the wider Kidlington area, including Begbroke and Yarnton. As this Government prepare for an increase in housing provision, the lessons from areas like those in my constituency must be learned.

My constituents understand the need for more homes for local residents, and especially for those who cannot access social housing, but they want to know that sufficient infrastructure will accompany new homes. I am talking about not just improvements to the hard engineering for travel, grid connections, sewage and other utilities, but also the social infrastructure of schools, GP surgeries, dispensing chemists and NHS dentists, as well as community, youth and sports centres. We must make sure that these services are funded and delivered before new homes are released.

I have lived in the constituency for over 12 years, and my wife and I have raised our four children there. They attend local schools and are active in local sports clubs. Long before I ran for this election, they ensured that I knew the future constituency well by dragging me to most of the sports grounds and sports halls that it contains. I owe my place to the many voters who put me here, but I would not be here without the steadfast support of my family, and I am so pleased that they are here today. For some, that support has come with encouragement; for others, it comes with occasional embarrassment about my endeavours. But from all, it has come with love, affection, and a willingness to keep me grounded through the occasional well-deserved put-down. I am truly grateful to them and hope that they know how much I appreciate their support.

My constituency contains a vibrant mix of communities beyond its two towns. Famously, Kidlington contends to be the largest village in England, with its population of over 13,000. When the parish council suggested in 1987 that it was a town, irate residents forced it to back down and reinstate village status. That does not, however, explain why groups of Chinese Harry Potter fans were spotted taking photos outside suburban homes in the village in 2016. Despite extensive searches, I never found the Dursleys of Privet Drive on the electoral roll.

One of the greatest pleasures of representing this area is travelling across its stunning countryside and discovering the passion for history, environment and community that burns in each town and village. I cannot do justice to that diversity today, but I say thank you to the thousands of constituents who contribute to their communities as town and parish councillors, school governors, village fête organisers, wildlife champions, Royal British Legion fundraisers, youth sports coaches,

or food bank collectors, and in many other roles besides. Every week, as I visit organisations in the constituency, I am inspired by the selfless actions of those who put community first and build stronger relationships, one freely given hour at a time.

It is that sense of community and of what we can do for each other that brought me here today. From volunteering as a school governor, I came to see how both the setting and implementation of national policy had deep local impacts. I became a county councillor in 2021 and saw up close how local government has been hollowed out by national funding decisions that respected neither the role that local authorities play in delivering critical services, nor the unique insights they hold at local level about the needs of their residents. Those experiences put me on the path towards standing for election, and it is a huge honour now to be a Member of this House. I hope that during my time here I can serve my community with the same selflessness and energy shown by so many of my constituents.

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Judith Cummins):** I call Graeme Downie to make his maiden speech.

4.45 pm

**Graeme Downie** (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Chair. I am delighted to make my maiden speech today as the first MP for the new constituency of Dunfermline and Dollar. It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Bicester and Woodstock (Calum Miller), and I would like to congratulate all MPs who have made such fantastic and powerful maiden speeches this afternoon. With such a high turnover of MPs, the calibre of the speeches I have heard since the election should give everyone a sense of optimism about the future and what this Parliament can achieve.

I believe I must start my speech with a particular tribute, and so I shall. They are known for being colourful and preening, strutting around like they own the place, and expecting to be waited on hand and foot by a fantastic team of underpaid and overworked staff. They demand honours, and they disappear without permission whenever the mood takes them. In the past century, their names have included Andrew, Malcolm and Angus, and I am even told that some individuals have been found in bushes in a horrible state. No, these are not my honourable predecessors. They are not even Members of the other place. Instead, they are the names of just some of the peacocks that reside in the beautiful surroundings of the Pittencrieff Park in Dunfermline, and that only last week were awarded the freedom of the city.

I am sure that my immediate predecessors for the seats that now make up the constituency of Dunfermline and Dollar will not object to being upstaged by the peacocks, but I would like to place on record my thanks to both Douglas Chapman, the Member for Dunfermline and West Fife from 2015 until retiring prior to the election, and John Nicolson, the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire. Douglas and John worked hard on behalf of their constituents in the best and truest tradition of public service, and I wish them well.

I would also like to thank my immediate predecessor from the Labour party, Thomas Docherty. Thomas is still known by many in this House, and we should

remain grateful to him for first proposing the idea of recalling MPs, although I suspect that gratitude is perhaps felt by me and some of my colleagues rather than by some of the Members opposite.

My “Aww, Dad” sense of humour is something I was accused of having long before I had children, and where better than a debate on railways to put some of that reputation to the test. So I will steam ahead with my remarks and do my utmost to stay on track, hoping to reach my destination on time and not come up against the buffers of your patience, Madam Chair.

I have never served in the armed forces, but I was raised in a family that did. Much of the sense of public service that I hope to bring to my contribution to this House is rooted in the values of the members of my family who have done so. My grandma, Margaret Delworth, was a plotter for the RAF during the battle of Britain, with the air raid sirens next to her playing a part in the deafness she suffered later in life. My grandpa served in the Royal Signals in campaigns in north Africa, Italy, including at Monte Cassino, and later with the UN in Korea. My parents, Jim and Cathy, were both members of the Royal Observer Corps—indeed, that was where they met—and I am very proud that they are in the Public Gallery today.

When I was six, my parents took what I now realise must have been an incredibly brave decision: to move our family to Berlin, where we lived on RAF Gatow for three and a half years. Many of my early memories are from there, and it has shaped the rest of my life: I played football with FC Westend, a German club based nearby; the death of Rudolf Hess was historic but meant I got a day off school; and the defection of a Soviet general saw my sister locked in the cellar of an air traffic control tower for hours—Helen has always been a very supportive older sister, but I would be lying if I said that there have not been times when I wished she had been left there just a little longer.

But it was an early November morning in 1989 that truly shaped my politics. I was woken at 2 am by my dad, who sat me down in front of a German TV channel and proclaimed, “This is history.” I watched as tens of thousands of people scaled the Berlin wall, heralding the beginning of the end of the cold war and moves towards a united Germany. The events of 1989 taught me that oppression is not, cannot and never will be either acceptable or effective, and neither should it be tolerated.

I want to take this opportunity to add to the sentiment across this House that the UK will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes to fight the aggression of Vladimir Putin. He might hold the honorific of “president”, but a dictator is a dictator, as many before have warned from these Benches.

It is that history—that privilege of observing good triumphing—that makes me immensely proud to be serving the constituency of Dunfermline and Dollar. The area has a proud military history and, with the Royal Navy base HMS Caledonia, that continues to this day. The firth of Forth was a regular home to the grand fleet, and throughout the 20th and 21st centuries the ships and sailors that protected us then and continue today have called that part of west Fife their home.

This allows me to mention Rachel Squire, who some might remember was the Member of Parliament for Dunfermline and West Fife before her sad death in 2006.



[Graeme Downie]

She led the successful battle to save the dockyard at Rosyth, which remains a vital and major asset to the local economy and our community. I visited the dockyard just last week to see the progress on the construction of the first two Type 31 frigates and was impressed by the talented and dedicated workforce who build and maintain the warships that keep our country safe. As the world continues to look to Britain for leadership and security, we must never forget the communities and workers who are the backbone of a deterrent and strength that so many depend on.

I am afraid I will now return to the bad puns as we ride the rails again from Rosyth to Dunfermline, Scotland's ancient capital. Close to Pittencrieff Park and the preening peacocks we find Dunfermline abbey, the resting place of Scotland's king and queens, including Robert the Bruce, and the birthplace of Charles I. Close by is the birthplace of Andrew Carnegie, the great Scottish businessman and philanthropist, who valued and promoted industry, innovation and education with a global view of Scotland and the UK. His legacy of libraries and education is strongly felt in Dunfermline and around the world, and nowhere more so than in the United States, in institutions such as Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. However, a local historian told me that after Andrew's death his widow employed a certain Mary Anne MacLeod as a domestic servant in her home in New York—answers on a red baseball cap for why I might not want to dwell on that connection too much.

As I continue my journey, poor rural transport sadly means that a replacement bus service is required as I take us to Dollar, a beautiful village at the foot of the Ochil hills. I held an excellent surgery there this weekend and I am very tempted to return this weekend for the village's annual beer festival—I note that beer has been a theme in many of the maiden speeches we have heard since the election. Dollar is most famous for Dollar academy, and despite cordial disagreements over certain aspects of the Labour party manifesto, I am very grateful for the excellent work it does with the local community and schools in the area to share its learning and experience.

Travelling back towards Dunfermline, we will find the railway tracks once again. These tracks transported coal from the mines in nearby villages such as Oakley, Comrie, Valleyfield, Saline and Steelend, and were more recently used by the former Longannet coal power station near Kincardine. As the Member for a constituency with a proud history of mining, I was delighted to stand on a manifesto that will end the injustice of the mineworkers' pension scheme.

At this point, I will mention just one more of my predecessors, Gordon Brown, who was elected as the Member for Dunfermline East in 1983. In preparing my speech today, I read his incredible first contribution to this House. I urge others to do the same, as it was a powerful speech focused on the need to tackle unemployment. With this new Labour Government investing in green jobs, manufacturing and infrastructure, we will have the opportunity to make the constituency of Dunfermline and Dollar and sites such as Longannet drivers of the Fife, Scottish and UK economies once again, tackling unemployment by establishing new industries and expertise that will help the global fight against climate change.

I began this speech by talking about the contribution of family and my optimism for the future, and I will begin winding up in the same vein. First, I want to take a moment to thank my wife, Jen. It is very simple: without her love and support, I would not be standing here today. We have heard about the importance of family in maiden speeches from Members from all parts of the House. All Members of this House will be aiming to make even the smallest contribution to creating a better community, a better country and a better world for our own families and future generations. I want my two daughters, Hannah and Eilidh, and all children, regardless of where and how they started their life, to be able to grow up in a world where the opportunity exists for their own aspirations and ambitions to be met, nurtured, supported and fulfilled. That is something we have heard powerfully in speeches this afternoon. As the Dunfermline-born author Iain Banks wrote, "the future remains malleable and retains the possibility of change".

Those are wise words that I will try to remember as I work across the House to create that better future.

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Judith Cummins):** I call Rebecca Smith to make her maiden speech.

**Rebecca Smith** (South West Devon) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline and Dollar (Graeme Downie). I was especially interested in his recollections of the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, which is also one of my early political memories, although I am obviously on the other side of the House as a result. I was interested in his reference to Monte Cassino, which might make sense later on in my speech.

I am incredibly grateful to the people of South West Devon, who put their trust in me on 4 July, electing me to serve them here in Parliament. Starting out in this place just a few short weeks ago, it was almost a quarter of a century to the day since I first set foot in Parliament. Forgive the cliché, but if someone had told the 18-year-old me, who was spending a week's work experience with the MP for South West Devon, Sir Gary Streeter, that one day I would follow in his actual footsteps, I would not have believed them. Everybody I have met since entering this place who knew my predecessor tells me that I have big shoes to fill. For some, that might seem daunting. After all, he is a size 10 and I am a mere size 4. However, knowing Sir Gary as I do—in fact, having known him since we first met at a Kylie Minogue concert in 1991, where we both enjoyed her rendition of "The Loco-Motion"—I am honoured to follow in his footsteps and the legacy he has left.

After 32 years as a Member of Parliament, Sir Gary's legacy is one of kindness, integrity and a deep commitment to the people of South West Devon. I know that there are Members on both sides of the House, past and present, who appreciated his wisdom over the years. It is something that he will tell you comes from his deep Christian faith. I am grateful that I still have access to that wisdom, given that he is now one of my constituents and that I also share his faith.

Unsurprisingly, although Sir Gary achieved a huge amount for our constituents, there are issues affecting South West Devon today; long-term battles that he fought and that remain in need of a victory. One such

issue relates to our Great Western Railway line through Devon. Today's debate therefore provides the perfect opportunity to commit myself to the fight for a better railway service to the far reaches of Devon and the south-west.

Following the devastating floods at Dawlish in 2014, the previous Government did much to safeguard the line through Devon. The sight of a railway track suspended in mid-air with nothing between it and the sea is not easily forgotten. I will therefore be campaigning cross-party alongside colleagues to see the new Government commit to completing the remedial works at Dawlish. They must also ensure that forthcoming HS2 works at Old Oak Common in London do not hamper the progress made on our journey times between London and the south-west. The main line through Devon does not just take holidaymakers to our beautiful counties; it is vital for those who live and work there too.

The west side of Plymouth is served effectively by several small stations, but to the east, in my constituency, there are very few options for train travel between Plymouth and Totnes, some 30 minutes away. Indeed, the current level of service makes a mockery of the existing "Park and ride by train" that is advertised as people drive down the A38. I will therefore continue to fight for CrossCountry trains—not just Great Western Railway services—to call at Ivybridge station. As the population of that town and of nearby Sherford grows, having adequate access to mainline train services closer than Plymouth, Totnes—or, in some cases, Tiverton Parkway—is essential.

To see the full economic benefits of the Plymouth and south Devon freeport, with its key sites at Langage and Sherford, we must see the delivery of a metro railway linking Plymouth with Tavistock and Ivybridge, including a stop in Plympton. That would also enhance connectivity for the Dartmoor villages, which are now a welcome part of South West Devon following the recent parliamentary boundary changes. The previous Government's plan to reopen the line between Plymouth and Tavistock is critical to delivering that metro service. I therefore call on the new Government to push forward with that proposal and enable us to get the metro scheme off the ground.

5 pm

I can only hope that the new Government are as committed to supporting those much-needed improvements in South West Devon as they are to the new legislation that we are hastily debating today: a Bill that seems to indicate ideological time travel back to the nationalised railway system of the past and a mistaken belief that state-run institutions are the answer to all our woes. Our railway system needs to drive forward into the middle of the 21st century, not creep backwards to the 1970s. In the case of South West Devon, that means the difference between reaching our full potential and missing the mark.

I would waste the opportunity to extol the virtues of South West Devon further if I left things there. Yes, transport is a big issue locally, whether that is about the need for a bus route between Plymstock and Plympton, cycle paths in the South Hams that do not require mountaineering experience to navigate, or improved junctions on and off the A38 at Lee Mill, but I hope I will be allowed just a few moments to introduce hon. Members more fully to South West Devon.

South West Devon has to be one of the most unique constituencies in the country. I challenge hon. Members to name another constituency anywhere with our combination of urban and rural moorland and coastal communities. It combines the city suburbs of Plymouth—the ancient stannary town of Plympton, and Plymstock, with its rich maritime history—with the rural South Hams and Dartmoor national park. We have the thriving town of Ivybridge, the inland and coastal villages and farms of the South Hams, the historic country estates of Flete and Maristow, the villages on the edge of the Tamar valley, and rugged Dartmoor farms and villages. South West Devon is home to the new town of Sherford, the soon-to-expand community of Woolwell and Royal Marines 42 Commando at Bickleigh barracks. There is so much history, so much beauty and so many wonderful and unique communities—indeed, too many to list here and be finished by the Adjournment, hon. Members will be pleased to hear.

Life has dealt me experiences that have turned into passions that I am determined to build on here in Parliament. I have spent the last six years working for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission—hence the comment on Monte Cassino. From travelling around the south-west, sharing the stories of the men and women of the Commonwealth, whom the commission commemorates across the world, I have developed a lifelong passion for this wonderful organisation and the importance of keeping alive the stories of those who fell. I know that all hon. Members have recently heard from the commission about those commemorated in their constituencies, and I encourage them to get in touch with their regional public engagement co-ordinator if they would like to know more.

When I was growing up, my parents, who are in the Gallery today, offered up their home as foster parents. That experience has left me with a deep interest in the care system and how we enable care-experienced young people to have the future they deserve. While there are those in this place with far more experience in the field than me, my interest spans over two decades, and I am determined to be a voice for those young people.

Finally, having started my elected career in local government, I bring with me experience of a range of issues including working to tackle violence against women and girls. Enabling women and girls to feel safe and be safe in their communities, and in my community in South West Devon, is a long-term challenge. Yet, having chaired the Plymouth violence against women and girls commission and seen the cross-party determination to deliver on it in this place, I believe that we will see the societal change that we fight for.

In 1919, Plymouth, which makes up a significant proportion of my constituency and is my home city, saw its Member of Parliament, Nancy Astor, become the first female to take a seat in the House of Commons. Since then, a female MP has represented at least a part of Plymouth for all but 11 years. The longest gap in female MPs was from 2017 to 2024. I am delighted to have brought an end to the drought, picking up the baton of Plymouth's six former female MPs and also becoming the first woman in South West Devon. Nancy Astor herself said in her maiden speech just over 100 years ago:

"Hon. Members...should not be frightened of what Plymouth sends out into the world. After all, I suppose when Drake and Raleigh wanted to set out on their venturesome careers, some cautious

person said, ‘Do not do it; it has never been tried before...’ But, on the whole, the world is all the better for those venturesome and courageous west country people, and I would like to say that I am quite certain that the women of the whole world will not forget that it was the fighting men of Devon who dared to send the first woman to represent women in the Mother of Parliaments.”—[*Official Report*, 24 February 1920; Vol. 125, c. 1624.]

Fortunately, I am venturing out from Plymouth in the well-worn footsteps of the women and men who have gone before me, buoyed by the courage of the people of South West Devon—men and women who voted to send me to this, the mother of all Parliaments, to fight for them and our special part of Devon.

**The First Deputy Chairman:** I call Jen Craft to make her maiden speech.

**Jen Craft** (Thurrock) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Chair. It is the honour of my life to address this House as the Member of Parliament for Thurrock, my home, and to speak in this important debate on the future of our railways. I congratulate the hon. Member for South West Devon (Rebecca Smith) on her passionate speech, which was infused with pride for the community she serves and a strong commitment to her new role, particularly to help the people of Dawlish to rebuild after the flooding and to speak up for those who have experienced the care system. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline and Dollar (Graeme Downie) on such a brilliant speech, which was infused with peacocks and train puns, which I will not try to outdo. I will steam ahead, get back on track and diesel-power on with the main body of my speech!

I would like to begin by talking a little about my predecessor, Jackie Doyle-Price. Although our politics are different, she served our community for 14 years and was a vocal campaigner against violence towards women and girls, both in this country and internationally. She highlighted the role that rape and sexual violence play as a weapon of war, and the lifelong impact that these appalling crimes have on women and girls here in the UK. She was a strong supporter of SERICC, the groundbreaking rape and abuse service based in my constituency, which found her a listening ear and a vocal advocate for its work. I will ensure that I will carry on that relationship and continue that work.

I would also like to thank the former Member of Parliament for Barking, Margaret Hodge, who gave me my first job in politics and taught a newly graduated, idealistic young woman that politics is more often than not about who gets the potholes filled, the grass verges cut and people’s individual problems solved than the big issues of the day. Moreover, she taught me that being a visible, vocal advocate for one’s constituents is the fundamental job of being an MP. In doing so, she defeated the extremists of the British National party by demonstrating that politics can be a force for good—work that I was extremely proud to play a part in at the time, and something that I will continue to take forward, to counter the threats from extremism and populism that our communities face today. She has also shown kindness and support as I, like many others who are new in this House, struggle to navigate the early days of this unique role.

It is an incredible privilege to have the honour of representing my home in this place. Thurrock has had representation from across this House since its creation in 1945, but this is the first time that someone born

there has addressed the House as its Member of Parliament. I am that much unfairly maligned of creatures—a true Essex girl. I prefer Dr. Martens to white stilettos, but I am extremely proud of the county of my birth and the history of our community and the people who live there.

Thurrock has a fighting spirit, having played an important role in the decoy operations prior to the Normandy landings in the second world war. It provided a muster and departure point for those leaving to take part in the D-day operations. Several hundred years earlier, Tilbury is where Queen Elizabeth I rallied her troops before fighting the Spanish armada, famously declaring:

“I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too”.

The Empire Windrush landed at Tilbury docks in 1948, bringing those who answered the call to help restore and rebuild our country after the second world war. A permanent exhibition, “Tilbury bridge walkway of memories”, is a moving testimony to those who came. Unfortunately, it is currently closed as a side effect of the Tilbury to Gravesend ferry ceasing to operate for the first time in nearly 600 years, something my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Dr Sullivan) and I are determined to rectify.

Further down the river, we can find the Purfleet heritage centre which, among its extensive collection of local military memorabilia, also hosts an exhibition honouring the contribution of the Gurkha regiments to our armed forces, reflecting the significant Gurkha and Nepalese community who have chosen to make Thurrock their home. The museum is well worth a visit, although I would take with a pinch of salt anything one of the volunteer guides says about the etymology of Purfleet and its deriving from an exclamation of Elizabeth I, “My poor fleet”.

The towns of Tilbury and Purfleet are just two of the many that make up Thurrock. Aveley, Ockendon, Stifford Clays and Chafford Hundred all have their stories to tell. One reason I am so pleased to be making my maiden speech today as part of the debate on the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill is that one of the uniting factors of all of these towns is the role they play as key commuter locations for jobs in the City of London and the docklands—journeys that are primarily made using the rail network. The public ownership of our railways, delivering a better service and better value for taxpayers’ money, will make a daily difference to the lives of many of my constituents, and, indeed, to many of my friends and family.

I would not be here without the support of many people, but in particular my family: my children, my mum and dad, my husband Ali—a stronger or kinder partner you would struggle to find—and my in-laws Mike and Sue. It really does take a village.

I would like to share my own personal story about my motivation for being here, beyond the love of my community and my desire to serve. Almost seven years ago, I found out that the baby I was carrying had Down’s syndrome—a rug-pulling, life-altering moment which I did not realise, but wish I had, would be the making of my family and the start of a truly incredible journey. As the actress Sally Phillips says, the special educational needs and disabilities parent club is the one no one wants to be in,



but once you are there you realise that all the best people are there. However, the world does not work for families like mine. It does not work for children like mine, and it does not work for people like me and my daughter. When I received her diagnosis, I made her a promise that I would do everything I could to make her life easier. Little did I realise that it would lead me here.

I am here to serve my community, to speak up for the home that I love and the people who live there. If by being here I can make a difference to the lives of children and families such as mine, I will consider it a job well done, however long my constituents may opt to keep me.

**Olly Glover** (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): I speak in support of amendment 20, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), which would create an independent body to ensure that scrutiny and transparency are at the heart of the public service train operating contracts the Government propose to award. With the end of competitive tendering of franchise contracts, which historically, despite their flaws, have contributed to some improvements to cost control and passenger growth, it will at least ensure that quality and accountability are present in the process, and will be important. I welcome the Government's desire to improve our railways, but it is important that there is accountability and to remember that public ownership and direction have historically caused problems as well as improvements. Although the majority of current train operating contracts are in the private sector, since the pandemic they have been subject to even more significant direction and sometimes micromanagement by the Government than before.

My journey into London today shows how the public versus private debate is not all that is needed to improve our railway. At Didcot Parkway this morning, only one out of three ticket offices was working and two out of four ticket windows were closed. That led me to miss train number one as a result of private sector problems, and I was prevented from catching the next couple of trains as a result of public sector problems, namely Network Rail signalling problems. Again, the ideology is less important than the delivery.

5.15 pm

In Oxfordshire, there are many examples of actions with negative effects that have been taken with at least partial public sector approval or sign-off. They include the withdrawal of high-speed trains from Great Western Railway, leading to inter-city trains with fewer carriages elsewhere; CrossCountry's current temporary timetable, leading to major service gaps through Oxford, particularly in the evening peak period, which I am pleased to say the Secretary of State has heavily criticised; and timetable cuts on Chiltern Railways since the pandemic, combined with rolling-stock reliability problems that contribute to overcrowding.

Ensuring that the best-quality public sector arrangements are in place will make it easier for the Government to focus on the investment that our railway needs, so that it can play its full part in the economic transformation that our country deserves. Examples of proposed beneficial projects in Oxfordshire include a new station at Grove, a new Oxford to Witney railway, the completion of East West Rail to Cambridge, Didcot to Oxford electrification,

passenger trains on Oxford's Cowley branch, and—this was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bicester and Woodstock (Calum Miller)—an effective solution for the impact on local traffic of the Bicester London Road level crossing.

**Wera Hobhouse:** I agree with everything that my hon. Friend is saying, and I thank him for giving way. I just wanted to congratulate the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jen Craft) on her maiden speech. We should not forget that there are so many new Members. It was such a wonderful speech, and I wish the hon. Lady, and her daughter, all the best on her journey. I am sure that my hon. Friend will want to mention her speech at the end of his own.

**Olly Glover:** My hon. Friend is absolutely correct, and I am sorry I omitted to do that earlier. The passion expressed by the hon. Member for Thurrock and her tribute to her constituency were very clear, and it was touching and moving to hear about her child and her family. I know that she will be a great champion for special educational needs and disabilities provision.

Let me end by saying that I hope the Government will extend their passion for public ownership to the investment in rail infrastructure that we in Oxfordshire need, and from which, as many other Members have said, the rest of the country will benefit.

**Jonathan Hinder** (Pendle and Clitheroe) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jen Craft) on her maiden speech. I am not sure I can compete with one that ranged from Essex girls to Elizabeth I, but I will do my best.

It is an incredible honour to stand here today as the newly elected Member of Parliament for Pendle and Clitheroe, where I grew up; the place that made me. As the Member for a significantly redrawn constituency, I want to begin by paying tribute to both my predecessors, Andrew Stephenson on the Pendle side and Nigel Evans on the Clitheroe side. Andrew Stephenson, most recently a Health Minister following a number of other Government roles, was a widely respected constituency MP who worked hard for Pendle for 14 years. Nigel Evans was a parliamentarian for 32 years who loved working in this place. He served as its Deputy Speaker in two spells, and brought great distinction to his role. I wish them both well for the future.

I also want to pay tribute to two of my Labour predecessors, Gordon Prentice and Sydney Silverman. Gordon was the Labour MP for Pendle from 1992 to 2010; he was a principled, independent-minded MP, whose work on "right to roam" legislation improved access to our countryside for all. Sydney Silverman, MP for the predecessor seat of Nelson and Colne for 33 years, stands as a true giant of parliamentary history for his leadership in the campaign to abolish capital punishment. It is an honour to follow in the footsteps of two men who fought so passionately for justice and human dignity.

Pendle and Clitheroe is an area that has a rich history, stunning natural beauty, and a strong sense of community spirit. From Barnoldswick, Barrowford, Clitheroe, Colne, Earby, Nelson, and Whalley to our villages that stretch to the edges of the Ribble Valley, the Pennines and the Yorkshire Dales, every part of the constituency has its

[Jonathan Hinder]

own unique identity. At its centre stands Pendle Hill, a landmark that unites us, dominating the landscape on both sides of this new constituency. Pendle Hill is not just famous for its witch trials, though they often steal the spotlight. It has also been a source of inspiration for radicals and non-conformists who have left their mark on history. It was on Pendle Hill that George Fox experienced the vision that led to the founding of the Quakers.

We can also claim Katharine Bruce Glasier, a formidable Christian socialist and founding member of the Independent Labour party, who lived in Earby and championed the rights of working people. Then there is Selina Cooper, a hero of the suffrage movement, who emerged from working in the mills from the age of 12 to lead the charge for women's rights.

Pendle was a powerhouse of the industrial revolution, driven by its iconic cotton mills, and the same grit and ingenuity that saw our mills thrive continues today in world-class engineering firms such as Hope Technology. Its track bikes, designed and manufactured in Barnoldswick, were ridden by Team GB to break a world record three times and secure a gold medal at this year's Olympic games.

But while we celebrate our past and present achievements, we must face the challenges of today. Pendle has the highest rate of child poverty in the entire country, so I will be focused on the material needs of ordinary people in my constituency: reducing the cost of living, rebuilding our public services, revitalising our high streets and supporting our local businesses to create good, meaningful jobs. I will champion our local farmers so that we can boost food security and sustain the rural economy that forms an important part of my constituency.

I want to touch on my background as a former police inspector. We saw the best of British policing just a few weeks ago. In the face of violent disorder aimed directly at them, our officers showed great courage, professionalism and restraint. They worked long, hot shifts in full riot gear—many on their cancelled days off—with thousands of other officers redeployed at a moment's notice to plug the gaps in day-to-day policing. I want to express my deepest gratitude to Lancashire police, and to thousands of my former colleagues nationwide, for their service to our country. Where others seem intent on undermining our police, I look forward to being an outspoken advocate for policing in Parliament.

The demands on policing have grown dramatically in recent decades, with increased reporting of domestic abuse, sexual offences and fraud, while policing has also felt the strain of other public services that have been run down and are not fit for purpose: the criminal justice system, mental health services and children's care. As we rebuild our public services—and we will—we need to simplify the policing mission, which has become blurred and, frankly, too broad. Let us decide what we really want from our police, which means deciding what we do not want our police to do, and where policing stops and other public services are better placed to step in. If we can provide that clarity of purpose for our officers, we can create a better police service that is more focused on preventing and investigating crime.

I am delighted to be making my maiden speech during a debate on taking the railways into public ownership, and I commend my right hon. Friend the

Transport Secretary for the speed with which she has set to work in her new office. But on the subject of speed, in my constituency, the Clitheroe to Manchester train takes an hour and 20 minutes to travel a mere 30 miles. The Colne to Preston train takes an hour and 15 minutes to travel just 25 miles. Both offer one diesel train per hour, and they are totally unreliable.

While public ownership is by no means a cure-all, this Bill is a crucial first step in creating a reliable, well-integrated railway that serves every part of our country. Regional inequality in our country is stark, and we need serious investment in infrastructure, such as by reinstating the short rail link between Colne in Lancashire and Skipton in Yorkshire, if we are to see small towns in the north of England thrive and prosper. I believe that public services should be in public ownership, and the railways are no different, so I am delighted to support this Bill.

In conclusion, let me finish by saying to every one of my constituents in Pendle and Clitheroe: whether you voted for me or not, I will be your champion. I will fight for you. It is my privilege to serve you.

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Judith Cummins):** I call David Smith to make his maiden speech.

**David Smith** (North Northumberland) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Chair. It is a real honour and privilege to be able to make my maiden speech today, as the House debates the role of our railways. Before I continue, I must give credit to all those who have given their maiden speeches today. It is quite a daunting prospect to follow them all. I must comment on a few of the amazing journeys that have brought people here. I think of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Abtisam Mohamed) and the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sorcha Eastwood); it was quite inspiring to hear their stories. I must also comment on the speech of the hon. Member for South West Devon (Rebecca Smith), as we are mutual friends of Sir Gary Streeter. It must have been quite a sight to see him do the loco-motion all those years ago.

It is of special importance to me to talk in the debate today on the role of our railways. The east coast main line goes right through my constituency. In fact, I think about half of it does, because we are the third largest constituency in England, with stations in Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick. Today we are debating the Government's plans, over time, to put the railways back into public ownership, or as some might say, into public service. That is really what I want to address today—the idea and ideals of public service. All of us are here to serve the public, but we can only serve here because of the people who have gone before us, the people who support us, and of course the people who vote for us. So first, my thanks must go to the people of North Northumberland, including those who voted Labour for the first time. Indeed, whether they voted for me or not, I will serve them to the best of my ability.

My thanks also go to my family—first and foremost my wife, daughter and son, who are my bedrock and whose patience with me is frankly astonishing, but also to the generations that have gone before. When I think about public service, I think of my grandparents' world war two generation. We have already heard about Monte Cassino a couple of times. Well, my grandfather fought

at Monte Cassino, El Alamein and elsewhere, and it would have been beyond his wildest dreams that his grandson would one day be standing here.

Speaking of those who have gone before in public service, I must recognise the great work of my predecessors as Members of Parliament for what is now North Northumberland. First, those two political peas in a pod, the right hon. former Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, and my hon. Friend the former Member for Wansbeck, now the Member for Blyth and Ashington (Ian Lavery). As a former miner and engineer, my hon. Friend will have a great interest in the success of the railways, and he has also served his constituents with great distinction and tenacity for many years now. Anne-Marie Trevelyan's public service included many significant roles in government, including Secretary of State for Transport, and I would like to thank her for her graciousness in the handover of the constituency casework. I must also mention Lord Beith. Although he retired from this place in 2015, he is still held in very high regard in Northumberland for his nearly 42 years of service. If I can earn just a small portion of the respect that he garnered, I will consider myself fortunate.

So now I pick up the baton, and I confess that one of the first things I checked, with a name as distinctive as my own, was whether I was the only David Smith MP elected on 4 July. Imagine my surprise and disappointment, then, when on the following day I received a congratulatory email from a Labour Member of Parliament called David Smith. Thankfully, that particular David Smith MP is a member of the Australian Parliament. I am, for now at least, the only David Smith in this place.

It is a convention for Members to try and mention every settlement in their constituency when giving their maiden speech. I have mentioned that mine is the third largest in England, so that may be a challenge. It is also traditional for Members of this place to make competing claims about how theirs is the most beautiful constituency in the land, so I am pleased to be able to put that debate to bed. Surely it is a certainty that the land of Bamburgh and Warkworth castles, of Druridge bay and Holy Island, of Rothbury, Wooler and the Cheviot hills and of the historic county towns of Berwick, Alnwick and Morpeth is the most beautiful in England. The number of Members who have holidayed in my constituency seems to confirm my conclusion. I am sure that those who have travelled on the east coast main line through my constituency, along our magnificent coastline, will do so again.

5.30 pm

North Northumberland is not only beautiful, but has produced and given a home to some of the most notable public servants in British history. Who can look past the role that Northumberland played in the establishment of early British Christianity? The Northumbrian saints, especially Cuthbert and Aidan, are renowned for their faith, wisdom, compassion and miracles, even if today, at least according to my daughter, the most famous North Northumberland resident with magical powers is a certain Mr Harry Potter.

Emily Wilding Davison, the suffragette from Morpeth, is another North Northumbrian who fought for what is right. Emily famously hid herself in a broom cupboard here in Parliament on the night of the 1911 census so that she could record her address as the House of

Commons to confound those who would deny women the right to vote. I am delighted to follow in her footsteps, and those of William Beveridge, the MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed who authored the eponymous Beveridge report, which served as the basis for that great innovation, the welfare state introduced by the Labour Government in 1945. What would so many of us do without it?

North Northumberland is also home to vibrant and hard-working communities that serve in their own way. Whether it is those in the fisheries of Amble and Seahouses, the farmers working the land across the constituency from Alwinton to Norham to keep us fed, or the servicemen and women at RAF Boulmer who protect the UK's airspace, the people of North Northumberland rightly take great pride in the work of their hands, in the county that they call home, and in the contribution that they make to the common good. Nowhere is that more true than in the grand town of Berwick-upon-Tweed, with its historic walls and majestic bridges, one of which, the Royal Border bridge, serves the east coast main line. My particular favourite, though, is the Union chain bridge, for all that it represents for the Union between Scotland and England. We truly have cross-border lives in North Northumberland. Today we have a choice to build either walls or bridges across that border, and I choose to be a bridge builder.

The truth is that when it comes to transport infrastructure, and even public service, we have a choice. Will we use it for private benefit or for the common good? For me, the common good must be paramount. We are of equal value by virtue of our humanity, but not all of us have the same opportunities, the same start in life or the same challenges to overcome. Many communities in my constituency feel left behind, and many feel out of sight and out of mind. Seeing the humanity in each other is a proactive choice. At times over the summer, some people in our country chose to ignore the humanity of others, with terrible consequences.

One of the most famous pieces of literature in our country's history, a national treasure, comes from my constituency: the Lindisfarne gospels. How good it would be if they could return home to Holy Island one day, perhaps on the east coast main line. As beautiful as their calligraphy is, to me their primary value comes in the wisdom they contain and the story they tell. As I set out on the task of being a Member of Parliament, my thoughts turn to the wisdom of another part of the good book. Proverbs, chapter 31, says:

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.

Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

Those are wise words for all with a heart for public service, especially those of us who call ourselves parliamentarians. As for me, they will be the axiom by which I expect my public service to be judged, however long I remain in this place.

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Ms Ghani):** I call Katrina Murray to make her maiden speech.

**Katrina Murray** (Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch) (Lab): As a lifelong trade unionist who has spent the last 20 years championing bringing public services back from the private sector, this debate is understandably close to my heart. I congratulate all the other new Members



[*Katrina Murray*]

who have made their maiden speech today. They have shown passion and reasons for being here. I very much appreciated the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Northumberland (David Smith) for reasons that may become apparent.

It is a great honour to be the first Member of Parliament for the new constituency of Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch. My thanks to the people of the communities that make up the constituency for placing their trust in me. I pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, Stuart C. McDonald, who was MP for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East for the last nine years. It is appropriate that I am making my maiden speech as the ballot for private Members' Bills takes place in the Lobby, because the progression into law of his private Member's Bill, protecting the rights of parents of premature babies, shows that we can all make a difference when we work together in the House.

As Stuart C. McDonald said in his maiden speech, the former Member for Glasgow South was also called Stewart McDonald, and there continued to be significant confusion. Many Members may not be aware—well, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Douglas McAllister) will know—that there is a further complicating factor locally, in that East Dunbartonshire council's Kirkintilloch East and North and Twechar ward is very ably represented by Councillor Stewart MacDonald. I thank all of them for the commitment that they have shown to their communities.

I wish to thank a further predecessor, Rosemary McKenna. She served initially as Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, then as Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East, from 1997 to 2010. When I was a young woman activist in the Scottish Labour party, Rosemary was one of the big influences on me that eventually brought me to this place. She was one of the people who sat me down and said, "Maybe just think about standing."

The new constituency of Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch runs from the boundary of Glasgow in Millerston to the boundary with Falkirk at Castlecary, and is bisected by the M80 motorway. It is served by Croy station on the main Glasgow to Edinburgh express railway line, with Stepps, Greenfaulds and Cumbernauld being on the local line from Glasgow. Rail services are vital in a constituency where people travel to work.

Cumbernauld was designated a new town in 1955, but it has a very rich history. It includes Cumbernauld village and its weavers, and Condorrat, and the rich farmland between the Campsie hills to the north and the Luggie water to the south. There have been settlements there since before Roman times. The northern boundary of Roman Britain, the Antonine wall, runs through the constituency. The Bar Hill fort, garrisoned by people from across ancient Europe and the middle east, established to protect the wall, is still accessible from Twechar.

Evidence of the mining history of the constituency remains strong. There is the Kilsyth Victoria cottage hospital, one of the places in the constituency where I first went to work; the remnants of the miners' rows, which are now farm outhouses; and the vast swathes of new housing built on former colliery land in Cardowan, Chryston, Kilsyth and Twechar.

It would take a far braver woman than me to make comments about football in the weeks leading up to or following an Old Firm game. Cumbernauld's most famous outing on film was in the 1980's Bill Forsyth classic, "Gregory's Girl". For those who are not familiar with the film, it centres around a school football team who experience a significant improvement in form when one of the girls, Dorothy, turns up for the trials and subsequently plays up front as a striker. This film is a firm Murray family favourite. Our house was burgled when I was quite young, and the younger members of the Murray family were probably more upset that the "Gregory's Girl" video was in the recorder that had been stolen, so it is poetic that one of Scotland's biggest women's teams, Rangers Women, play all their home matches in Broadwood in Cumbernauld. I am sure that I can pass on the best wishes of probably most in this House for when the team faces Arsenal's women's team in the semi-finals of the first qualifying round of the champions league tomorrow.

As I have said, one of the big selling points of the constituency is its connectivity to Scotland's central-belt cities. If there is to be that connectivity, we need a proper, integrated public transport system, based on public need, rather than on the most profitable routes. No matter which part of the constituency I am in, what people want to talk to me about most is public transport—whether it is an amended railway timetable that means that there are no services after 10 am on a Sunday, or a bus service that gets cancelled because there is no cover to allow the driver to take a break. During the summer holidays, the youth group at Twechar Healthy Living and Enterprise Centre planned a day trip to Millport using the bus service. It involved multiple buses and ferries, but it required phoning around to get lifts back to the village for the last leg of the journey, as the Twechar bus stopped running at 5 pm.

Like most of us, I have spent more time than is healthy considering the basis of my politics and values. One benefit of making my speech later on is that I have been able to listen to the maiden speeches of so many other Members. When the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (John Cooper) made his maiden speech, he spoke about Galloway dairy farms, which was important to me because I immediately thought of my grandmother. She grew up on one of those farms. The oldest daughter of the dairyman, she was bright; she passed her 11-plus and was entitled to a place at the grammar school. But in the 1920s, dairymen's daughters did not go to grammar schools, certainly not if they were the eldest and they had six younger siblings. She never forgot that, and among her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren there was an expectation that we would take all the educational chances open to us, and fight for them when they were not obvious. We were expected to "stick in" at school, go to university and, when we had got our qualification, embrace a life of service.

I am proud to come from a family of teachers, doctors, civil servants, health workers, school staff and social care staff. I am also proud of the fact that my parents are here today. We were supported in challenging things that were not fair and standing up for ourselves. It is probably no surprise that I ended up a trade unionist in the health service, fighting for public services and never shutting up.

For the whole of my working life, I have worked in partnerships and tried to build alliances between workers, and between communities. Many of the communities of Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch are at a point of transition. It is in a spirit of partnership and alliance that I will work to strengthen the bonds that bind our people together. I will work in this place, and in Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch, to confront the challenges that we face around those points of transition, and to ensure that what unites us guides us. This afternoon, we have heard from across the House all the points that unite us. Let us focus not on difference, but on areas of agreement, because we cross paths far more often than we cross swords.

**The Chairman:** I call David Pinto-Duschinsky to make his maiden speech.

**David Pinto-Duschinsky** (Hendon) (Lab): I wish to start by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch (Katrina Murray) on her witty and passionate speech. Her commitment to public service and her drive to improve the lives of her constituents shine through. I would also like to compliment all those who have given their maiden speech today. The standard has been exceptional. What an honour it is to speak after so many inspiring colleagues, and what an honour it is to give my first speech in this Chamber during a debate on the future of our railways. So many of my constituents depend on Mill Hill Broadway and Hendon stations, and this Bill, bringing the railways back into public ownership, placing passengers at the heart of our rail system and ensuring value for money for the taxpayer, will make a real difference to them. Getting the management of our railways and the numbers underpinning them on a sound footing is crucial.

5.45 pm

I think I can justifiably claim to have a strong personal understanding of just how important it is to get your numbers exactly right, because, Madam Chair, if you ask me to think of a number, I do not need to ponder long. My lucky number is 15. Why? Because 15 is the size of my majority. I have the honour of holding the smallest majority in Parliament. It reminds me every day who sent me here, who I serve in this place, how grateful I am to the people who voted for me and how life turns on the very smallest of margins. So I pledge now to serve the people of Hendon, no matter how they voted, with every fibre of my being.

Small margins run as a theme in our family. 2024 is the 80th anniversary of my father being smuggled out of the Munkács ghetto in what is today Ukraine. In April 1944, my infant father was herded, along with the rest of the Jewish population of the town and surrounding countryside, into the crowded, squalid ghetto, with thousands jammed into barely more than a handful of city blocks. But on 5 May 1944, a Christian woman pretending to be his mother spirited him out, just days before over 28,000 people—including, unfortunately, many members of my own family—were put on trains to Auschwitz, never to return. Small margins, Madam Chair; small margins and the kindness of strangers.

As a child refugee, my father landed in London and was given great opportunities by this great country. His story inspires me every day and reminds me of the importance of compassion, courage and the bonds that connect us all. As I talk to people in Hendon, I hear so

many similar stories—stories of refuge and rebirth, of contribution and belonging. Our Jewish community; our Somali community; our Afghan community; our Iranian community; our Tamil community; those who have recently arrived from Hong Kong; our Nepalese community, many of whom served so valiantly in the Gurkha regiment; our Filipino community, who do so much for the NHS; our Gujarati community—the list goes on. There are so many wonderful communities enriching this, the greatest of cities.

Hendon, in its diversity, represents what this country can be at its very best. It brings together not just different communities, but different places, from Burnt Oak to West Hendon, from Colindale to Edgware, from Mill Hill to Hendon, all stitched together by the backbone of the Northern line.

There are our vibrant mosques, synagogues, temples and churches; community organisations like the Centre of Excellence in Grahame Park; exceptional charities like GIFT and Kisharon in Hendon; the Royal British Legion in Edgware; groups like Friends of the Welsh Harp in West Hendon. We are blessed with organisations and inspiring people who work hard every single day to make our community a better place and help others.

We are the site of the first Tesco shop and of London's first airport; home of Saracens rugby club and the RAF Museum; one of the epicentres of the fight against covid with the Health Security Agency labs; and home of the beautiful Welsh Harp and of sweeping views from Mill Hill.

What a privilege it is to represent such a place. But small margins are never far from the surface. Too many households in our community struggle to get by, their ability to cope resting on the finest of margins, just one pay cheque away from catastrophe. More than a third of children in Hendon are growing up poor after housing costs. In places like Colindale and Burnt Oak, the figure is significantly higher. That must change. Tackling this unfairness and disadvantage is what motivates me to be here. It is why I am determined to use my experience from many years working in business and from my time in Government at the Treasury, the Home Office and the Prime Minister's strategy unit, to bring change and deliver for the people of Hendon.

I will never forget those who went before me as Members for Hendon. I want to pay tribute to Dr Matthew Offord, who represented Hendon for 14 years. I am grateful for his work on behalf of residents and for his advocacy, as chair of the APPG on explosive threats, for a landmine-free world. I thank Andrew Dismore, who was the personification of a dedicated constituency MP. Even today, 14 years after he left office, residents still talk of him. The impact he made was immense.

There is someone else I would like to mention, a giant of our politics, someone who touched the lives of millions, and whom I was privileged to serve as an advisor at the Treasury: Alistair Darling. If I can summon up just a small portion of his decency, his resolution in crisis, his clarity in chaos and his composure when so many were losing their heads, not to mention his Sahara-dry wit, I will be doing very well indeed. He embodied our mantra of country first, party second, and we miss him. I was also lucky to work with Charles Clarke when he was Home Secretary in the aftermath of the terrible 7/7 attacks in our capital. He showed what strength and determination looks like on those darkest of days.

Ms Ghani, you may have detected by now that I have a slight stammer. As a child, I could not even say my own name some days. Mind you, there are still people who have that trouble today—it is not their fault; it is part-Ashkenazi, part-Sephardi and wholly unpronounceable. But I know that I am not alone in overcoming a stammer: Bevan had one and overcame it by reciting the poetry of William Morris. In my case it was not poetry but the NHS that came to the rescue. Dedicated NHS speech therapists worked with me for years, which means that I can talk to you—that I could stand up in class, stand for Parliament and be here today. They gave me my voice so I can now give voice to others, and I am determined to pay that forward by fighting for world-class NHS speech therapy for those who need it—those on the Treasury Bench should take note.

We are all beyond lucky to be on these Benches, no matter how we got here and whether our majorities are 15 or 15,000. I hope that we all remember why we are here: to serve. We are here to serve our constituents, serve our communities and serve our country, to remain true to our principles and conscience, and to avoid being dazzled by the theatre of this place or tempted by its theatrics. I believe that politics is ultimately about the practical work of changing people's lives for the better, helping others, and serving our community and the common good. Especially at a time when we have seen record numbers of antisemitic incidents and a surge in Islamophobic attacks, it is about coming together and acting with purpose to confront hatred and make sure that all people in our community can feel safe.

When I think of our duty of service, I think of the woman who took my father from the ghetto and saved his life. I see her face every day in the people I seek to serve. I reflect on the small margins that make big differences and how what we say and how we act impacts on the lives of others. Whether it is uniting to tackle hate or building bridges across communities and across this House, I pledge to honour her example, reflect that spirit of service in everything I do, and work hard every day to serve the people of our country and the people of Hendon.

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Ms Ghani):** I call Rachel Taylor to make her maiden speech.

**Rachel Taylor** (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (David Pinto-Duschinsky), particularly after his eloquent speech, talking without hesitation about his history, his ancestors and the struggles that he has faced—thank you.

It is a great honour to make this speech during the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill. The Bill is important to me and my constituents, who face many years of disruption and confusion because our trains and stations are operated by different companies. It will bring our trains back under the control of the public sector, generate investment in our stations, and make it easier for constituents like mine to book travel and tickets. Hopefully, it means that our rail services will be made truly accessible for disabled passengers, with support and help always guaranteed.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Craig Tracey, who was hard-working and served our constituency well. He did important work for breast cancer awareness and

raised questions in Parliament on issues that matter to our constituents. He was supportive of local events. I am sure that constituents and Members of this House will join me in thanking Craig for his work and wishing him and his family all the best for the future.

I also pay tribute to my friend Mike O'Brien, who was the Labour MP for North Warwickshire between 1992 and 2010. While in Parliament, Mike held numerous ministerial positions. He was on the Home Affairs Committee that helped to increase the number of refuges for victims of domestic violence. As Minister of State for Pensions, he worked on the Pensions Act 2008, which improved working peoples' pensions. As Minister of State for Health Services, he negotiated compensation for victims of thalidomide. I appreciated his help and guidance during my campaign. He was well loved by his constituents, and I hope to live up to his legacy.

I have always been someone who gets stuck in to change things that need changing and speak up against injustice. That started from a young age, growing up in North Warwickshire, where I campaigned for girls to be able to wear trousers at my school. I credit that attitude to my parents. My dad's family could not afford for him to stay on at school, so he left to become a trainee mining surveyor, and went on to do qualifications throughout his working life. He became one of the youngest magistrates in the country, worked in urban renewal in Birmingham, and, in his spare time, drew plans to help individuals and community groups to secure planning permissions. He also paid for our many summer holidays. My mum worked as a registrar for births, deaths and marriages, and was the local parish council clerk, but still found the time to make most of my clothes. I thank them both for being here with us today, along with my partner, Dawn, who was a great support throughout my campaign—thank you.

My parents were both driven by a desire to do their best for their family. They instilled those values of public service and hard work in me, and supported me and my brother to follow our passions. I went to my local comprehensive school, which has evolved to become what is now the Queen Elizabeth academy. That school has made great strides to improve attendance and results, but it still struggles with inadequate facilities.

I worked as a tennis umpire at Wimbledon for 10 years, and I have watched in recent years as grassroots tennis has flourished and become more inclusive, particularly at my local club in Coleshill. That is part of the legacy of Sir Andy Murray and the valuable work of the Lawn Tennis Association. I remember trying my hand, as an umpire, at wheelchair tennis—the professionals make it look so much easier than it is. It was wonderful to see Lucy Shuker bearing the flag for Team GB at the Paralympics, and to see British players doing so well at the US Open. Even in my 50s, I was honoured to play tennis for my county of Warwickshire.

Now, I can reflect on how much sport and drama have contributed to my life and the lives of those I have met through those activities. For me, sport and drama were drivers of social mobility, and they help to give confidence and aspiration to so many young people, breaking down barriers to opportunity. That is why I will work hard to ensure that young people gain access to activities and local facilities that have sadly been lost across the country.



I went to university in Leeds in the mid-1980s, in the midst of the Thatcher Government's attack on working people and the divisive dialogue that made it a frightening time to come out as gay. In 1988, this place passed into law section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, banning schools from telling young people that it was okay to be gay, so that a generation of young people were frightened, bullied and held back. I played my part in the protests against section 28, and I was proud that the last Labour Government did so much to improve rights for our community.

Research by the Campaign Against Censorship, which was reported by Stonewall this August, shows that, even in this day and age, LGBT books are being removed from school libraries after complaints. Last week, the TUC reported the shocking news that over half of LGBT workers have experienced bullying, harassment or discrimination at work. It is important to take stock and recognise the great strides that we have made towards equality, as well as the important strides that the new Labour Government will make, including the vital ban on conversion therapy and the commitment to ensuring that young trans people receive high-quality healthcare. I want to assure my constituents and LGBT people across the country that I will work hard to protect the important gains we have made and to tackle the over-simplistic and often hateful discourse that we hear about trans people, just as I campaigned against section 28 almost 40 years ago.

6 pm

In my 30s, I retrained as a solicitor and went into property law, because it is property that shapes our lives and our communities, from the building of new leisure facilities to the provision of affordable homes. There is nothing like the feeling of working with someone through the ups and downs of buying their dream home. Sadly, though, through my career I have watched as fewer and fewer young people have become able to realise that dream. That is why I am proud to be part of this Government, who know that the security of affordable housing is something that nobody should ever be without. I pay tribute to those people I have worked with throughout my career and recently at Evans Derry solicitors, who have ensured that the people of Atherstone and Coleshill have access to high-quality legal services on their doorstep, and who were incredibly supportive of my becoming their next MP.

North Warwickshire and Bedworth is where I grew up, and I am so proud to be representing the place where I have spent most of my life. It is a thriving mixture of towns and villages—way too many to mention—and is part of Britain's impressive history of coalmining and industry. Today, it is the logistics golden triangle in the midlands, home to FedEx and Aldi, as well as to many smaller family-run businesses in the sector. That is why I am delighted that I will be joining the all-party parliamentary group for road freight and logistics in order to represent businesses and workers in my constituency, working with them to tackle freight crime and address the skills shortages in that industry.

Atherstone is a market town famous for its hatting industry and has retained its traditional charm, including the Shrove Tuesday ball game, where grown men and women kick an oversized ball up and down Long Street for two hours until the final klaxon sounds, declaring whoever is holding the ball the winner. It is a historic

tradition that has been played for over 800 years; it is a sight to behold, and is certainly not a game for the faint-hearted—a bit like politics sometimes.

Coleshill is a market town named after the River Cole, with a long history as a coaching town. I have had the pleasure of meeting residents at the Coleshill warm room and have played tennis there for many years, and can say that it is a wonderful community that I am proud to represent. I will work closely with businesses across the constituency, such as HT Brigham and Co, Tow-Trust Towbars, Jaguar Land Rover, BMW, Bristan and LTS Global Solutions, to make sure the local community is benefiting from the innovation taking place in my constituency. LTS Global recently let me take a trip in one of the first electric heavy goods vehicles on the road in the west midlands. These companies show that green energy solutions are possible and bring investment into our communities. The world-class golf resort of the Belfry is also in my constituency, where just a few days ago we enjoyed the British Masters golf, hosted by Sir Nick Faldo. I learned about its Eagles programme, an innovative programme training young golfers.

Bedworth is the largest town in our constituency. It, too, used to be a coalmining town, and contributed to the textile and ribbon-weaving industries. My grandad was a coalminer, so I remember the impact that the mines closing had on our communities. It is also why I am pleased to say that the Newdigate Colliery social club and the Miners' Welfare Park remain as proud reminders of the town's history.

In the centre of Bedworth stand the Nicholas Chamberlaine alms houses, which are managed by the trust and remain in use for their original purpose—an indication of the kindness of those in Bedworth over many generations. The local school is named after that benefactor, and I have been lucky enough to meet teachers and sixth-form students there, as well as at the nearby Ash Green school, and to help the students with their important road safety campaign. In July, I visited Bedworth civic hall to watch its first show after reopening as a volunteer-run venue. That is a fantastic example of why we need community arts, and of what can happen when local groups of volunteers get together to save our community facilities.

Bedworth is home to several thriving companies producing high-quality goods, such as Toye, Kenning and Spencer, which specialises in masonic wear and ribbons and also supplies buttonholes for the Order of the British Empire insignia. In Exhall, the Premier Group produced 12,000 Olympic torches for the 2012 Olympic games.

Bedworth is very proud of our Armistice day parade—one of the largest in the country held on 11 November every year—and I will be honoured to attend and pay my respects to the members of our armed forces, past and present.

The constituency is blessed to have many smaller, picturesque villages which I have explored over the years on many walks in our beautiful countryside and followed by visits to our great local pubs, such as the Rose in Baxterley, the Office at Warton, the Horse and Jockey in Bentley, Austrey's the Bird in Hand, the Plough at Shustoke, the Beehive in Curdworth and the Blue Boar Inn in Mancetter, to name only a few. I assure my constituents that I will continue to visit them all, and all of our beautiful and unique villages.

North Warwickshire and Bedworth face two big local transport issues, which I will begin to tackle immediately. The first is the A5. Improvements from the M42 to the A426 would enable our local authorities to plan for the future and unlock economic potential for the constituency and across the west and east midlands. The second is HS2. Delays and uncertainty have disrupted the lives of my constituents, especially those in Water Orton, without seeing any benefit. There has not been adequate recognition of the effect that this daily disruption has had on the lives and health of local residents. Bringing trains back into public ownership is the first step towards fixing some of the transport issues we are facing, which is why I support the Bill.

I want to finish my first speech in Parliament by thanking the people of North Warwickshire and Bedworth for sending me to this place to do this very special job. The people of my constituency are down to earth, straightforward, direct, honest, hard-working people. Those are the values that I was raised with, and those are the values that will continue to guide me in my role. I am so very proud to be representing North Warwickshire and Bedworth and all its towns and villages—my home—and I have not underestimated the challenges ahead. I promise I will work hard and do my very best for all my constituents, and stay true to my values, for as long as I have the honour of representing them in this place.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Simon Lightwood):** It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Madam Chair. I thank hon. Members of all parties for their amendments, and for their considered contributions. I commend those Members who have delivered some fabulous maiden speeches today, with such quality, passion and dedication to serve, and a love for their communities. It makes me really proud to be a Member of this House, and I am certain that the memory of delivering their maiden speeches will live with them forever.

I will begin with amendments 18 and 8 to 12, tabled by the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately). These relate to monitoring, reporting and scrutinising the impacts of public ownership and the effectiveness of train operators. Amendment 18 would require the publication of two reports. The first would outline the anticipated impact of public ownership. That would simply duplicate the impact assessment published earlier this year, and therefore would be redundant. The second report would assess the actual impact of public ownership, some years after implementation. A wide variety of data is already routinely published about both public and private sector train operators' performance. That includes reliability, punctuality, service quality, customer complaints and financial performance among other measures. The Bill does not change any of that and there is no need to wait five years to consider whether train operators' performance is improving.

Amendment 9 would require the Secretary of State to procure independent reports about the costs of the contracts awarded to public sector operators. The Department already publishes information on payments made to operators, whether private or public. There is therefore no need for the taxpayer to fund a separate body to report the same data. Nevertheless, the hon. Lady is entirely right to take an interest in the cost of

these contracts. In that spirit, I would gently remind her that ending the taxpayer funding of private profits will result in an immediate and enduring reduction in these costs.

Amendment 9 also raises the specific question of whether public ownership will expose the Government to liabilities that have previously sat with private operators. Under the current national rail contracts, the Government fund the costs legitimately incurred by train operating companies. That includes, for example, the net operational cost of running services and the cost of meeting pension liabilities. Prior to the pandemic, franchised operators bore some cost risk, but were protected by the taxpayer against, among other things, inflation and, in more recent contracts, risk on movements in pension deficit recovery payments. The franchising system meant that bidders simply priced any change in liabilities into their bids, meaning that the taxpayer was exposed to liabilities in the long term. Public ownership therefore does not materially change the Government's exposure to liabilities in the long run.

Amendment 10 would require the annual reporting to Parliament on various aspects of the performance of public sector operators, and amendment 12 would require an independent report on the impact of public ownership on the performance and efficiency of the UK rail network. Again, data is already published on a wide variety of aspects of train operator performance, including by the Office of Rail and Road in its role as a regulator. The Bill does not change that. The Office of Rail and Road also provides independent scrutiny of the performance and effectiveness of Network Rail, enforcing compliance with its licences and conducting five-yearly reviews that set its funding and what must be delivered with that funding.

Amendments 8 and 11 look to require independent monitoring of the financial and operational performance of public sector train operators. The Department holds train operating companies to account for their financial management through regular reviews of their management accounts and business plans. That applies to both public and privately owned operators. In addition, in England publicly owned operators are overseen by DfT OLR Holdings Ltd, known as DOHL. As a holding company owned by the Secretary of State, DOHL is experienced in reviewing and monitoring the financial arrangements of the companies it manages, and contrary to what the hon. Lady said, it is building its capacity in readiness to take over more services. At the same time, public ownership will reduce the other contract management costs, because there will no longer be the same commercial tension of the taxpayer interacting with private profit. Amendment 8 refers specifically to the auditing of publicly owned train operating companies' accounts. It is already the case that DOHL and the operators it oversees must publish their audited accounts annually.

Turning to amendment 11, train operators are already monitored under their existing contracts against targets for punctuality, reliability and service quality. They are also held to account for managing within pre-set cost budget limits each financial year. Driving up operators' performance in those areas is vital, and the Government will continue to review train operator performance regularly in those and other areas. This has been an early priority for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. For example, in her first weeks in office, Ministers held

meetings with the managing directors of Avanti West Coast, TransPennine Express and their Network Rail counterparts to set clear expectations for immediate improvement. In parallel with these arrangements, the Government are developing detailed proposals for holding the future Great British Railways to account for performance. This will form part of the broader package of reform that we will set out in the forthcoming railways Bill. We expect these arrangements will be in place long before the five-year reviews proposed in a number of amendments tabled.

Amendment 11 also refers to performance improvement plans. Mechanisms to require improvement plans are already a feature of the Government's contracts with both public and private sector operators. The Secretary of State has recently put in place formal remedial plans with CrossCountry in view of its unacceptable levels of cancellations and service reductions. Finally, amendment 11 raises the question of senior management remuneration when performance is poor. This matter can be considered when remedial plans are being put in place, taking account of the circumstances in each case.

Amendment 19, also tabled by the hon. Lady, and amendment 20, from the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), both propose additional procedural steps to be followed before a contract is awarded to a public sector operator. Amendment 19 would require the Office of Rail and Road to publish an opinion on the practicability of transferring services to each public sector operator. Clearly it is vital that services are transferred to public ownership smoothly, without detriment to the quality of service during the transition. For that reason, the transfer of services will take place using a well-established arrangement and process. DOHL has significant experience of managing the transition of services from private to public operation in recent years.

6.15 pm

**Helen Whately:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Simon Lightwood:** I will not give way to the hon. Lady, as she has had plenty of time to put her case.

Those transfers of services have been completed successfully and smoothly despite the challenging timescales and circumstances, which have included financial failure and poor operator performance. We have also made it clear that we will transfer services on a phased basis as existing contracts expire over the next few years. This is a measured, responsible approach that will further de-risk the process. The Bill does not alter the ORR's role in granting operators' licences and issuing their safety certificates; in that role the ORR already independently assesses the suitability and readiness of any operator, public or private, to take over services and operate them safely. In light of those safeguards the Government do not see the need to commission further analysis from the ORR, as amendment 19 proposes.

On amendment 20, the Department for Transport has already awarded multiple contracts to publicly owned operators and has considerable experience of managing them in practice, taking legal, financial and technical advice as needed. We consider a new independent advisory body to be an unnecessary additional step that would add cost and risk delaying progress. I can assure the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent that the Department for Transport is conducting a full review of

the standard terms of service contracts entered into with public sector operators, reflecting the fact that public sector operation is to be the Government's long-term approach, not just a temporary measure of last resort.

On amendments 13 and 14, the Government do not consider it appropriate to spell out such specific contractual requirements in primary legislation, which would risk constraining future flexibility to adapt operators' contractual obligations to suit changing circumstances. On amendment 13 specifically, it would not be efficient for the taxpayer to require up to 14 different operators in England, plus those in Scotland and Wales, to each pursue its own separate wide-ranging innovation strategy. Indeed, a key purpose of our wider reform plans is to drive a much more coherent cross-industry approach in such areas. On amendment 14, I question why the four groups identified, while clearly of course very important, should be singled out for a specific mention when there are many other relevant considerations to take into account in service design, including the interests of the taxpayer, freight users, people with disabilities and residents of urban areas to name just a few. The list could be endless, and the important point is that decisions about future service levels should take into account all relevant considerations.

Amendment 1, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Middleton South (Graham Stringer), would remove the power of the Secretary of State to continue existing franchises. I am happy to reassure my hon. Friend that this provision is included in the Bill as a contingency measure only. It exists in case a short continuation is needed to ensure that services transfer to public ownership smoothly and without disruption to passengers. It is intended to be used only in exceptional circumstances and only for so long as necessary to ensure the smooth transfer. It will be available to the Secretary of State only when

"it will not be reasonably practicable"

for a transfer to proceed. Any continuation would be limited by procurement regulations to a maximum of two years in duration, but in practice we would expect the period to be much shorter. The power is clearly transitional in nature; once services are transferred to the public sector it will no longer be relevant, and clause 2 therefore gives us the power to repeal it in its entirety. This is a sensible, pragmatic precaution that exists simply to smooth the transition to public ownership and protect the travelling public from disruption. I hope that explanation offers my hon. Friend some reassurance.

I move now to amendment 6, tabled by the hon. Member for Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey (Graham Leadbitter). The Bill does not affect the provision of rolling stock. It would not be responsible or affordable for the Government to take on the cost of renationalising billions of pounds-worth of rolling stock when there are so many other urgent pressures on the public purse. However, public ownership will open the door for a much more coherent approach to planning the longer-term rolling stock needs of the whole industry. Once Great British Railways is established, planning the provision of rolling stock across the network will be one of many areas where a single directing mind for the railway will add real value.

We will develop a long-term industrial strategy for rolling stock that supports manufacturing, innovation and interoperability and aligns with the wider objectives



[Simon Lightwood]

of the industry. It will look to end the boom and bust cycle of rolling stock procurement, ensure sustainable pipelines for future work and consider the best financing structures for future orders in partnership with private capital. I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) that we will consider the points he has raised as we undertake work on this matter. My officials are engaging with Eurofima to consider the potential of UK membership and the role that could play in the UK market. We will set out more plans on that in due course. A report mandating that in primary legislation is therefore not necessary in the Government's view.

Amendment 7, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Catherine Atkinson), seeks details of the Government's proposed approach to procurement and the impact of public ownership on the procurement process and the supply chain. She is absolutely right to highlight the crucial role of the broad and diverse private sector supply chain in helping to deliver high-quality rail services, and I very much welcome the contribution made by businesses in her constituency and right across the country. I can assure her and those businesses that innovation and technical progress will remain as fundamental as they have ever been in delivering improvements for passengers, cost efficiency for taxpayers and benefits for the environment.

I can confirm that there will be no immediate impact on the approach to procurement when services transfer to public ownership. Existing private sector operators are already required to follow the same procurement rules as public sector operators. Under the governance reforms, Great British Railways will provide much clearer long-term direction across the whole railway system, giving businesses and the supply chain the certainty and confidence they need to plan, invest and innovate for the future.

Amendment 15, tabled by the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent, considers the Bill's potential effects on open access operators. The Bill is specifically about the ownership of services currently operated under the contract with the Secretary of State and Scottish and Welsh Ministers. Public ownership of those services will not prevent open access services from running as they do now. The report proposed by her amendment is therefore unnecessary. However, I take this opportunity to reassure her about the role of open access in the future in the context of the Government's wider reforms. How we make use of network capacity and grant access is fundamental to the performance of the railway and what it delivers for all its users. Open access operators such as Hull Trains, Lumo and Grand Central are a valuable part of our railway. We are keen for such services to continue to operate alongside publicly owned services, where they add value and capacity to the network.

The hon. Lady's amendment 16, along with amendment 22 from the hon. Member for Bath and amendments 2 to 5 from the hon. Member for Brighton Pavilion (Siân Berry), touches on the role of devolved and local authorities in the planning and delivery of rail services. Amendments 16 and 22 each refer to exemptions granted under section 24 of the Railways Act 1993. Those exemptions allow services in London and the

Liverpool city region to be procured by the relevant authorities in those areas, outside the franchising system. The Bill makes no change to those existing arrangements and it will remain for those authorities to decide how best to deliver the services for which they are responsible.

Amendments 2 to 5 would allow the Secretary of State and Scottish and Welsh Ministers to award contracts to companies owned by certain elected public bodies. While the Government are committed to strengthening local involvement in the planning and delivery of rail services, it will be important to ensure that does not undermine the plan for Great British Railways to act as a directing mind that provides coherence, consistency and clarity for the whole railway. To support that, the Government intend to award contracts specifically to public sector companies owned by the Secretary of State via DOHL.

**Wera Hobhouse:** Our amendment 22 is not just about the current arrangement with Merseyrail and Transport for London; it is much more about having the discussion about how local authorities and local areas can enter into franchising agreements in future if they so wish.

**Simon Lightwood:** I do not think that the Bill stops them doing that now, though we have no plans to extend the scope of that.

Looking ahead to the railways Bill, the Government have already said that there will be a statutory role for devolved leaders in Scotland, Wales and mayoral combined authorities in governing, managing and planning and developing the railway network. That will ensure that decision making is brought as close as possible to local communities.

I turn to amendment 17, tabled by the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent, which proposes an independent body to advise the Government on employment terms and pay for rail staff under public ownership. That is an important issue, and one that the Government are determined to get right. My officials are at the early stages of exploring a number of options—including a pay review body—so that we can consider the most appropriate approach to meet the needs of a transformed industry.

Last but by no means least, I come to amendment 21, tabled by the hon. Member for Bath, which deals with fares, ticketing and passenger compensation. Naturally, we are keen to see rapid progress in those areas. We are committed to reviewing the overly complicated fare system. Change is already being delivered by extending pay-as-you-go in the south-east and through fares reform on LNER. We will explore the options for expanding ticketing innovations such as digital pay-as-you-go and digital season tickets across the network, and we will hold operators—and, in due course, Great British Railways—accountable for progress on these vital reforms. We also intend that a powerful new passenger watchdog—the passenger standards authority—will independently monitor standards and champion improvement in service performance against a range of measures.

I thank hon. Members on both sides of the Committee for their contributions to the debate. I hope that my responses will have provided the explanations and reassurances that colleagues were seeking, and that that will enable them not to press their amendments and to support the Bill on Third Reading.

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a pleasure to conclude the Committee of the whole House for the Opposition, and it has been a pleasure to sit and listen to another set of distinguished maiden speeches from Members on both sides. I join the Minister in the tributes he paid to the speeches made from the Government Benches. I pay tribute in particular to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jen Craft) for her moving remarks about her commitment to her daughter and to the hon. Member for Hendon (David Pinto-Duschinsky) for his powerful remarks about how his life is inspired by the bravery of the woman who saved his father's life.

On the Opposition side of the House, we had maiden speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Bridlington and The Wolds (Charlie Dewhurst) and for South West Devon (Rebecca Smith). My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington and The Wolds did a fantastic job of selling the tourist credentials of his constituency and proudly declared himself the Member for both pigs and lobsters. I am sure that his passion for the place where he grew up will serve his constituents well. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon spoke proudly of the history and beauty of her constituency. The House will be richer for her experience working for the War Graves Commission and her interest in foster caring.

We also heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), who used her previous experience as a rail Minister to explain clearly the changes that we need and have sought. She also highlighted the lack of evidence and arbitrary nature of the Government's approach as well as the lack of thinking about the Bill's implications at a local level for projects such as the west midlands rail hub.

That brings me to the matter before us, where I am afraid my ability to find words of praise dries up. As my hon. Friend the shadow Transport Secretary outlined, we have been asked today to rush through a major change to the operation of our railways on the back of a rushed Second Reading and without all the benefits of a full Bill Committee.

What exactly was it about giving stakeholders in the railway industry the chance to share their views in Bill evidence sessions that the Secretary of State was so afraid of? I wonder what witnesses might have raised—perhaps the fact that the facade of a simple solution to the challenges on the railway presented by the Secretary of State has already fallen away in the intervening weeks since Second Reading. On Second Reading, she praised the already nationalised LNER service while chastising private sector operators, warning them that they needed to get their house in order. I cannot decide whether the ASLEF leadership are just being unkind to her or have a mischievous sense of humour, because the day after crudely championing the no-strings deal they had secured from the Government, where did union bosses announce they intended their next round of industrial action to be? Not in one of the private sector operators that the Secretary of State is rushing to wrest back into public control, but in the publicly owned and run LNER. There could be no more definitive answer to the question of whether the Bill will make any real difference. If public sector operators are the answer, the Secretary of State might want to ask ASLEF why it described its public sector managers as brutal, bullying, promise-breakers. The risks for passengers and taxpayers

are in stark headlights. Thankfully, the industrial action has been called off, though passengers' travel plans were disrupted this weekend. It seems that we will avoid a protracted strike, but what concessions were made to ASLEF, and what involvement did Ministers have? We have no idea, and we will have a similar lack of transparency in future, if the Bill passes unamended.

What of the private sector operators that the Secretary of State has been so critical of, and critical of us for allowing to continue? What can we learn from her dealings with them? Despite all her warm words to her Back Benchers, what has she done since Second Reading, using her existing contractual powers, to bring operators such as Avanti back into public ownership, if she really believes that will make a difference? She has quite literally spent years repeatedly describing it as failing. She has had almost two months to remove the franchise from it, which she could legally do if it were in breach of contract and not delivering, as she has repeatedly implied. I am sure that some of her Back Benchers will have noticed that she has not done that. It is yet further proof that she knows that the question of who runs the railways will not make a material difference.

The Secretary of State knows that bringing Avanti and others into public ownership will not miraculously solve anything. In fact, the seven most punctual operators last year were private sector operators. Of the seven worst performing operators for cancellations in 2023-24, four were publicly run.

At the start of the Committee, the shadow Transport Secretary outlined a number of important questions, which I hoped the Minister would answer in support of his argument that we should vote with him tonight. How will accountability for improving performance be achieved? How will costs be controlled? How will innovation and reform be driven forward? How will pay negotiations be conducted fairly for taxpayers? Those are basic questions that, after 14 years, Labour should be able to answer, but we will vote tonight with them unanswered.

I want services to improve—in that respect, we all want the same thing—but the Bill as is has little chance of making that happen. It will just result in back-room deals that will, more likely, put union bosses first and bring no guarantees of improved performance for passengers. I respect and value railway staff, but Governments have wider responsibilities to taxpayers. The Government have the right to proceed anyway, but our amendments aim to at least ensure accountability and transparency, and would make passengers, not union bosses, the focus.

We seek to ensure the best use of the Committee's time, so we will not press amendment 18 to a Division, but with permission of the Chair, we will press amendments 14 and 17 to a vote, as the ones most able to secure the best version of the Bill. Amendment 14 makes it crystal clear that the primary duty of public sector operators is to passengers. Whatever ideological change this Government make to the ownership of the railways, that should never change. Amendment 17 aims to prevent a repetition of the no-strings deal given by Labour to its union boss donors, and to ensure independence in the process. Time and again, Labour Ministers have supported the importance of independent advice in determining the pay of public sector workers. Every single Labour MP voting against this amendment lays bare the stranglehold that the rail union bosses

[Dr Kieran Mullan]

have over their Prime Minister and Secretary of State. If they single them out for special treatment, they will need to justify to other public sector workers in their constituencies why rail union bosses are exempt from the processes that to apply to teachers, soldiers, nurses and millions of other staff.

To reiterate, we on the Opposition Benches are in agreement that change is needed, but practicality and what works should come first, not this rushed, ideological approach. Members in all parts of the Chamber can see that our amendments simply create safeguards for passengers and taxpayers, and ensure transparency and fairness. I hope that Government Members can see the benefit of that, and agree, even if they are convinced of the benefits of nationalisation, that there are better ways to do it. In that spirit, I call on them and all Members to support our amendments, and to deliver a better Bill in the Division Lobbies this evening.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

*Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 2

### FUTURE PROVISION OF SERVICES

*Amendment proposed:* 14, page 2, line 17, at end insert—

“(1BA) Every contract made in accordance with subsection (1A) shall place a duty on the public sector company to consider the needs of—

- (a) passengers;
- (b) residents of rural areas;
- (c) residents of areas underserved by the rail network; and
- (d) the wider rail network

when considering making changes to existing service levels.”

—(*Helen Whately.*)

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The Committee proceeded to a Division.*

**The Chairman:** Will the Serjeant at Arms investigate the delay in the No Lobby?

*The Committee having divided:* Ayes 111, Noes 362.

**Division No. 7]**

**[6.34 pm]**

### AYES

Anderson, Stuart	Cleverly, rh Mr James
Andrew, rh Stuart	Cocking, Lewis
Argar, rh Edward	Cooper, John
Atkins, rh Victoria	Costa, Alberto
Bacon, Gareth	Coutinho, rh Claire
Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi	Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Baldwin, Dame Harriett	Cross, Harriet
Barclay, rh Steve	Davies, Gareth
Bedford, Mr Peter	Davies, Mims
Bhatti, Saqib	Davis, rh Sir David
Blackman, Bob	Dewhurst, Charlie
Bool, Sarah	Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Bowie, Andrew	Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
Bradley, rh Dame Karen	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Brandreth, Aphra	Fortune, Peter
Braverman, rh Suella	Fox, Sir Ashley
Burghart, Alex	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Freeman, George
Cartledge, James	French, Mr Louie

Fuller, Richard  
Garnier, Mark  
Glen, rh John  
Griffiths, Alison  
Harris, Rebecca  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Holden, rh Mr Richard  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
Hunt, rh Jeremy  
Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
Jenrick, rh Robert  
Johnson, Dr Caroline  
Jopp, Lincoln  
Kearns, Alicia  
Kruger, Danny  
Lam, Katie  
Lamont, John  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Lewis, rh Sir Julian  
Lockhart, Carla  
Lopez, Julia  
Mak, Alan  
Malthouse, rh Kit  
Mayhew, Jerome  
Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
Moore, Robbie  
Morrissey, Joy  
Morton, rh Wendy  
Mullan, Dr Kieran  
Mundell, rh David  
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
Norman, rh Jesse  
Obese-Jecty, Ben  
O'Brien, Neil  
Patel, rh Priti

Paul, Rebecca  
Philp, rh Chris  
Pritchard, rh Mark  
Raja, Shivani  
Rankin, Jack  
Reed, David  
Robertson, Joe  
Robinson, rh Gavin  
Rosindell, Andrew  
Shannon, Jim  
Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
Simmonds, David  
Smith, Greg  
Smith, Rebecca  
Snowden, Mr Andrew  
Spencer, Dr Ben  
Spencer, Patrick  
Stafford, Gregory  
Stephenson, Blake  
Stride, rh Mel  
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
Thomas, Bradley  
Timothy, Nick  
Trott, rh Laura  
Tugendhat, rh Tom  
Vickers, Martin  
Vickers, Matt  
Whately, Helen  
Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
Wild, James  
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Wood, Mike  
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

### Tellers for the Ayes:

**Dr Luke Evans and  
Paul Holmes**

### NOES

Abbott, Jack	Beales, Danny
Abrahams, Debbie	Begum, Apsana
Adam, Shockat	Bell, Torsten
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Betts, Mr Clive
Akehurst, Luke	Billington, Ms Polly
Alaba, Mr Bayo	Bishop, Matt
Aldridge, Dan	Blake, Olivia
Alexander, Mr Douglas	Blake, Rachel
Alexander, Heidi	Bloore, Chris
Al-Hassan, Sadik	Blundell, Mrs Elsie
Ali, Tahir	Bonavia, Kevin
Amesbury, Mike	Botterill, Jade
Anderson, Callum	Brackenridge, Sureena
Anderson, Fleur	Brash, Mr Jonathan
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Brickell, Phil
Arthur, Dr Scott	Buckley, Julia
Asato, Jess	Burgon, Richard
Asser, James	Burke, Maureen
Atkinson, Catherine	Burton-Sampson, David
Atkinson, Lewis	Butler, Dawn
Bailey, Mr Calvin	Byrne, rh Liam
Bailey, Olivia	Cadbury, Ruth
Baker, Alex	Caliskan, Nesil
Baker, Richard	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Ballinger, Alex	Campbell, Irene
Bance, Antonia	Campbell, Juliet
Barker, Paula	Campbell-Savours, Markus
Barron, Lee	Carden, Dan
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Carling, Sam
Baxter, Johanna	Carns, Al



Champion, Sarah  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Charters, Mr Luke  
 Coleman, Ben  
 Collier, Jacob  
 Collinge, Lizzi  
 Collins, Tom  
 Conlon, Liam  
 Coombes, Sarah  
 Cooper, Andrew  
 Cooper, Dr Beccy  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Costigan, Deirdre  
 Cox, Pam  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Craft, Jen  
 Creasy, Ms Stella  
 Crichton, Torcuil  
 Curtis, Chris  
 Daby, Janet  
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
 Dalton, Ashley  
 Darlington, Emily  
 Davies, Jonathan  
 Davies, Paul  
 Davies, Shaun  
 Davies-Jones, Alex  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 Dean, Josh  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dickson, Jim  
 Dixon, Anna  
 Dixon, Samantha  
 Dodds, rh Anneliese  
 Dollimore, Helena  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Downie, Graeme  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eastwood, Colum  
 Edwards, Lauren  
 Edwards, Sarah  
 Efford, Clive  
 Egan, Damien  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Entwistle, Kirith  
 Eshalomi, Florence  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta  
 Farnsworth, Linsey  
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh  
 Ferguson, Mark  
 Ferguson, Patricia  
 Fleet, Natalie  
 Foody, Emma  
 Fookes, Catherine  
 Foster, Mr Paul  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Foy, Mary Kelly  
 Francis, Daniel  
 Frith, Mr James  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gardner, Dr Allison  
 Gelderd, Anna  
 Gemmell, Alan  
 German, Gill  
 Gilbert, Tracy  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Gittins, Becky  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Goldsborough, Ben  
 Gosling, Jodie  
 Grady, John  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Griffith, Dame Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Hack, Amanda  
 Haigh, rh Louise  
 Hall, Sarah  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Paulette  
 Hanna, Claire  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hatton, Lloyd  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayes, Tom  
 Hazelgrove, Claire  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hinchliff, Chris  
 Hinder, Jonathan  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hughes, Claire  
 Hume, Alison  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hurley, Patrick  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Ingham, Leigh  
 Irons, Natasha  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Lillian  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Josan, Gurinder  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kaur, Satvir  
 Kendall, rh Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Khan, Ayoub  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kitchen, Gen  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kumaran, Uma  
 Kyle, rh Peter  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Leishman, Brian  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 MacAlister, Josh  
 Macdonald, Alice  
 MacNae, Andy

Madders, Justin  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mayer, Alex  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McDougall, Blair  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McFadden, rh Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McIntyre, Alex  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahon, Jim  
 McMorris, Anna  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 Minns, Ms Julie  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Moon, Perran  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Mullane, Margaret  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, Chris  
 Murray, rh Ian  
 Murray, Katrina  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Nash, Pamela  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Norris, Dan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Pakes, Andrew  
 Patrick, Matthew  
 Payne, Michael  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Jon  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Powell, Joe  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Race, Steve  
 Rand, Mr Connor  
 Ranger, Andrew  
 Reader, Mike  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reid, Joani  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rigby, Lucy  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sackman, Sarah  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Scrogg, Michelle  
 Seward, Mr Mark  
 Shanker, Baggy  
 Shanks, Michael  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, David  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevens, rh Jo  
 Stewart, Elaine  
 Stone, Will  
 Strathern, Alistair  
 Streeting, rh Wes  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sullivan, Kirsteen  
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Swallow, Peter  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tufnell, Henry  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Karl  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vince, Chris  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Chris  
 Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Webb, Chris

Welsh, Michelle  
West, Catherine  
Western, Andrew  
Western, Matt  
Wheeler, Michael  
Whitby, John  
White, Jo  
White, Katie  
Whittome, Nadia

Witherden, Steve  
Woodcock, Sean  
Yang, Yuan  
Yasin, Mohammad  
Yemm, Steve

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Martin McCluskey and**  
**Kate Dearden**

*Question accordingly negated.*

6.53 pm

*More than four hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, 29 July).*

*The Chair put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83D).*

*Amendment proposed:* 17, page 2, line 22, at end insert—

*“30ZH Independent body to advise on pay and terms and conditions of employment for employees of public sector companies*

(1) The Secretary of State must, within three months of the coming into force of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, establish an independent body with responsibility for—

- (a) providing advice to Government on the—
  - (i) remuneration, and
  - (ii) terms and conditions of employment

of employees of the public sector companies providing passenger railway services under a contract awarded in accordance with section 30(1A);

- (b) advising the Government on value for money during the negotiation of the terms and conditions of employment of employees of the public sector companies providing passenger railway services under a contract awarded in accordance with section 30(1A); and

- (c) preparing an annual report to be laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State on the terms and conditions of employment of employees of the public sector companies providing passenger railway services under a contract awarded in accordance with section 30(1A).

(2) Advice provided in accordance with subsections (1)(a) and (b) shall be based on annual investigations of working practices conducted by the independent body and consider—

- (a) value for money;
- (b) affordability;
- (c) domestic and international comparators;
- (d) the future of the rail network, including the modernisation of working practices.

(3) Advice provided in accordance with subsection (1)(b) shall include advice on whether any conflicts of interest exist between any Government Minister and any union involved in the negotiation of the terms and conditions of employment, and how any such conflicts should be managed.

(4) An annual report under subsection (1)(c) shall include a comparison with the terms and conditions of employment under the franchise which provided the relevant passenger railway services prior to the awarding of a contract in accordance with section 30(1A).

(5) The first annual report under subsection (1)(c) must be laid before Parliament within twelve months of the first award of a public sector contract in accordance with section 30(1A).”—  
(*Helen Whately.*)

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The Committee divided: Ayes 113, Noes 372.*  
**Division No. 8]**

**[6.53 pm]**

# **AYES**

Anderson, Stuart  
Andrew, rh Stuart  
Argar, rh Edward  
Atkins, rh Victoria  
Bacon, Gareth  
Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi  
Baldwin, Dame Harriett  
Barclay, rh Steve  
Bedford, Mr Peter  
Bhatti, Saqib  
Blackman, Bob  
Bool, Sarah  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, rh Dame Karen  
Brandreth, Aphra  
Braverman, rh Suella  
Burghart, Alex  
Campbell, Mr Gregory  
Cartlidge, James  
Cleverly, rh Mr James  
Cocking, Lewis  
Cooper, John  
Costa, Alberto  
Coutinho, rh Claire  
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
Cross, Harriet  
Davies, Gareth  
Davies, Mims  
Davis, rh Sir David  
Dewhurst, Charlie  
Dinenage, Dame Caroline  
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver  
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
Fortune, Peter  
Fox, Sir Ashley  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Freeman, George  
French, Mr Louie  
Fuller, Richard  
Garnier, Mark  
Glen, rh John  
Griffiths, Alison  
Harris, Rebecca  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Holden, rh Mr Richard  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
Hunt, rh Jeremy  
Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
Jenrick, rh Robert  
Johnson, Dr Caroline  
Jopp, Lincoln  
Kearns, Alicia  
Kruger, Danny  
Lam, Katie

Lamont, John  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Lewis, rh Sir Julian  
Lockhart, Carla  
Lopez, Julia  
Mak, Alan  
Malthouse, rh Kit  
Mayhew, Jerome  
Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
Moore, Robbie  
Morrissey, Joy  
Morton, rh Wendy  
Mullan, Dr Kieran  
Mundell, rh David  
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
Norman, rh Jesse  
Obese-Jecty, Ben  
O'Brien, Neil  
Patel, rh Priti  
Paul, Rebecca  
Philp, rh Chris  
Pritchard, rh Mark  
Raja, Shivani  
Rankin, Jack  
Reed, David  
Robertson, Joe  
Robinson, rh Gavin  
Rosindell, Andrew  
Shannon, Jim  
Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
Simmonds, David  
Smith, Greg  
Smith, rh Sir Julian  
Smith, Rebecca  
Snowden, Mr Andrew  
Spencer, Dr Ben  
Spencer, Patrick  
Stafford, Gregory  
Stephenson, Blake  
Stride, rh Mel  
Stuart, rh Graham  
Thomas, Bradley  
Timothy, Nick  
Trott, rh Laura  
Tugendhat, rh Tom  
Vickers, Martin  
Vickers, Matt  
Whately, Helen  
Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
Wild, James  
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Wood, Mike  
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Dr Luke Evans and**  
**Paul Holmes**

# **NOES**

Abbott, Jack  
Abrahams, Debbie  
Adam, Shockat  
Ahmed, Dr Zubir  
Akehurst, Luke  
Alaba, Mr Bayo  
Aldridge, Dan  
Alexander, Mr Douglas  
Alexander, Heidi  
Al-Hassan, Sadik  
Ali, Tahir  
Amesbury, Mike  
Anderson, Callum  
Anderson, Fleur

Antoniazzi, Tonia  
 Arthur, Dr Scott  
 Asato, Jess  
 Asser, James  
 Atkinson, Catherine  
 Atkinson, Lewis  
 Bailey, Mr Calvin  
 Bailey, Olivia  
 Baker, Alex  
 Baker, Richard  
 Ballinger, Alex  
 Bance, Antonia  
 Barker, Paula  
 Barron, Lee  
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex  
 Baxter, Johanna  
 Beales, Danny  
 Begum, Apsana  
 Bell, Torsten  
 Berry, Siân  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Billington, Ms Polly  
 Bishop, Matt  
 Blake, Olivia  
 Blake, Rachel  
 Bloore, Chris  
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie  
 Bonavia, Kevin  
 Botterill, Jade  
 Brackenridge, Sureena  
 Brash, Mr Jonathan  
 Brickell, Phil  
 Buckley, Julia  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Burke, Maureen  
 Burton-Sampson, David  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Caliskan, Nesil  
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
 Campbell, Juliet  
 Campbell-Savours, Markus  
 Carden, Dan  
 Carling, Sam  
 Carns, Al  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Charters, Mr Luke  
 Chowns, Ellie  
 Coleman, Ben  
 Collier, Jacob  
 Collinge, Lizzi  
 Collins, Tom  
 Conlon, Liam  
 Coombes, Sarah  
 Cooper, Andrew  
 Cooper, Dr Beccy  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Costigan, Deirdre  
 Cox, Pam  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Craft, Jen  
 Creasy, Ms Stella  
 Crichton, Torcuil  
 Curtis, Chris  
 Daby, Janet  
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
 Dalton, Ashley  
 Darlington, Emily  
 Davies, Ann  
 Davies, Jonathan

Davies, Paul  
 Davies, Shaun  
 Davies-Jones, Alex  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 Dean, Josh  
 Denyer, Carla  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dickson, Jim  
 Dixon, Anna  
 Dixon, Samantha  
 Dodds, rh Anneliese  
 Dollimore, Helena  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Downie, Graeme  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eastwood, Colum  
 Edwards, Lauren  
 Edwards, Sarah  
 Efford, Clive  
 Egan, Damien  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Entwistle, Kirith  
 Eshalomi, Florence  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta  
 Farnsworth, Linsey  
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh  
 Ferguson, Mark  
 Ferguson, Patricia  
 Fleet, Natalie  
 Foody, Emma  
 Fookes, Catherine  
 Foster, Mr Paul  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Foy, Mary Kelly  
 Francis, Daniel  
 Frith, Mr James  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gardner, Dr Allison  
 Gelderd, Anna  
 Gemmell, Alan  
 German, Gill  
 Gilbert, Tracy  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Gittins, Becky  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Goldsborough, Ben  
 Gosling, Jodie  
 Grady, John  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Griffith, Dame Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Hack, Amanda  
 Haigh, rh Louise  
 Hall, Sarah  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Paulette  
 Hanna, Claire  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hatton, Lloyd  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayes, Tom  
 Hazelgrove, Claire  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hinchliff, Chris  
 Hinder, Jonathan

Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hughes, Claire  
 Hume, Alison  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hurley, Patrick  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Ingham, Leigh  
 Irons, Natasha  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Lillian  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Josan, Gurinder  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kaur, Satvir  
 Kendall, rh Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Khan, Ayoub  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kitchen, Gen  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kumaran, Uma  
 Kyle, rh Peter  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Leishman, Brian  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 MacAlister, Josh  
 Macdonald, Alice  
 MacNae, Andy  
 Madders, Justin  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mayer, Alex  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McDougall, Blair  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McFadden, rh Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McIntyre, Alex  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McMorris, Anna  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty

Medi, Llinos  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 Minns, Ms Julie  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Moon, Perran  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Mullane, Margaret  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, Chris  
 Murray, rh Ian  
 Murray, Katrina  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Nash, Pamela  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Norris, Dan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Pakes, Andrew  
 Patrick, Matthew  
 Payne, Michael  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Jon  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Joe  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Race, Steve  
 Ramsay, Adrian  
 Rand, Mr Connor  
 Ranger, Andrew  
 Reader, Mike  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reid, Joani  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rigby, Lucy  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sackman, Sarah  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Scrogg, Michelle  
 Seward, Mr Mark



Shanker, Baggy  
Shanks, Michael  
Simons, Josh  
Slaughter, Andy  
Slinger, John  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, David  
Smith, Jeff  
Smith, Nick  
Smyth, Karin  
Snell, Gareth  
Sobel, Alex  
Stainbank, Euan  
Stevens, rh Jo  
Stewart, Elaine  
Stone, Will  
Strathern, Alistair  
Streeting, rh Wes  
Strickland, Alan  
Stringer, Graham  
Sullivan, Kirsteen  
Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
Sultana, Zarah  
Swallow, Peter  
Tami, rh Mark  
Tapp, Mike  
Taylor, Alison  
Taylor, David  
Taylor, Rachel  
Thomas, Gareth  
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
Thompson, Adam  
Thornberry, rh Emily  
Tidball, Dr Marie  
Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
Toale, Jessica

Tomlinson, Dan  
Trickett, Jon  
Tufnell, Henry  
Turley, Anna  
Turmaine, Matt  
Turner, Karl  
Turner, Laurence  
Twigg, Derek  
Twist, Liz  
Uppal, Harpreet  
Vaughan, Tony  
Vaz, rh Valerie  
Vince, Chris  
Wakeford, Christian  
Walker, Imogen  
Ward, Chris  
Ward, Melanie  
Waugh, Paul  
Webb, Chris  
Welsh, Michelle  
West, Catherine  
Western, Andrew  
Western, Matt  
Wheeler, Michael  
Whitby, John  
White, Jo  
White, Katie  
Whittome, Nadia  
Witherden, Steve  
Woodcock, Sean  
Yang, Yuan  
Yasin, Mohammad  
Yemm, Steve

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Martin McCluskey and**  
**Kate Dearden**

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Amendment proposed:* 21, page 3, line 32, at end insert—

*“30D Annual report on ticketing effects of public service contracts*

(1) The Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament an annual report on the effect of public sector contracts awarded in accordance with section 30(1A) on—

- (a) ticket pricing,
- (b) tap-in, tap-out options,
- (c) single-leg pricing,
- (d) digital season tickets,
- (e) compensation for delays and cancellations,
- (f) ticketing interoperability with—
  - (i) other train operators, and
  - (ii) bus and light rail system operators.

(2) The Secretary of State shall consult other franchising authorities before finalising a report under subsection (1).

(3) The first annual report under this section must be laid before Parliament within twelve months of the first award of a public sector contract in accordance with section 30(1A).

(4) Each subsequent annual report must be laid before Parliament before the end of July in each subsequent calendar year.”—(*Wera Hobhouse.*)

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The Committee divided: Ayes 82, Noes 360.*

**Division No. 9]**

**[7.10 pm**

#### AYES

Adam, Shockat  
Amos, Mr Gideon  
Babarinde, Josh  
Bennett, Alison

Berry, Siân  
Brewer, Alex  
Brown-Fuller, Jess  
Campbell, Mr Gregory

Cane, Charlotte  
Chadwick, David  
Chamberlain, Wendy  
Chambers, Dr Danny  
Chowns, Ellie  
Coghlan, Chris  
Collins, Victoria  
Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
Dance, Adam  
Darling, Steve  
Davey, rh Ed  
Davies, Ann  
Dean, Bobby  
Denyer, Carla  
Dillon, Mr Lee  
Dyke, Sarah  
Eastwood, Sorcha  
Farron, Tim  
Foord, Richard  
Forster, Mr Will  
Franklin, Zöe  
George, Andrew  
Gibson, Sarah  
Glover, Olly  
Goldman, Marie  
Gordon, Tom  
Green, Sarah  
Harding, Monica  
Heylings, Pippa  
Hobhouse, Wera  
Jardine, Christine  
Jarvis, Liz  
Jones, Clive  
Khan, Ayoub  
Kohler, Mr Paul  
Lake, Ben  
Lockhart, Carla  
MacCleary, James  
MacDonald, Mr Angus

Maguire, Ben  
Maguire, Helen  
Martin, Mike  
Mathew, Brian  
Maynard, Charlie  
Medi, Llinos  
van Mierlo, Freddie  
Miller, Calum  
Milne, John  
Moran, Layla  
Morello, Edward  
Morgan, Helen  
Munt, Tessa  
Murray, Susan  
Olney, Sarah  
Perteghella, Manuela  
Pinkerton, Dr Al  
Ramsay, Adrian  
Reynolds, Mr Joshua  
Robinson, rh Gavin  
Roome, Ian  
Sabine, Anna  
Savage, Dr Roz  
Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
Shannon, Jim  
Slade, Vikki  
Smart, Lisa  
Sollom, Ian  
Taylor, Luke  
Thomas, Cameron  
Voaden, Caroline  
Wilkinson, Max  
Wilson, Munira  
Wrigley, Martin  
Young, Claire

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Mr Alistair Carmichael and**  
**Jamie Stone**

#### NOES

Abbott, Jack  
Abrahams, Debbie  
Ahmed, Dr Zubir  
Akehurst, Luke  
Alaba, Mr Bayo  
Aldridge, Dan  
Alexander, Mr Douglas  
Alexander, Heidi  
Al-Hassan, Sadik  
Ali, Tahir  
Amesbury, Mike  
Anderson, Callum  
Anderson, Fleur  
Antoniazzi, Tonia  
Arthur, Dr Scott  
Asato, Jess  
Asser, James  
Atkinson, Catherine  
Atkinson, Lewis  
Bailey, Mr Calvin  
Bailey, Olivia  
Baker, Alex  
Baker, Richard  
Ballinger, Alex  
Bance, Antonia  
Barker, Paula  
Barron, Lee  
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex  
Baxter, Johanna  
Beales, Danny

Begum, Apsana  
Bell, Torsten  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Billington, Ms Polly  
Bishop, Matt  
Blake, Olivia  
Blake, Rachel  
Bloore, Chris  
Blundell, Mrs Elsie  
Bonavia, Kevin  
Botterill, Jade  
Brackenridge, Sureena  
Brash, Mr Jonathan  
Brickell, Phil  
Buckley, Julia  
Burgon, Richard  
Burke, Maureen  
Burton-Sampson, David  
Butler, Dawn  
Byrne, rh Liam  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Caliskan, Nesil  
Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
Campbell, Irene  
Campbell, Juliet  
Campbell-Savours, Markus  
Carden, Dan  
Carling, Sam  
Carns, Al  
Champion, Sarah

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  
 Craft, Jen  
 Creasy, Ms Stella  
 Crichton, Torcuil  
 Curtis, Chris  
 Daby, Janet  
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas  
 Dalton, Ashley  
 Darlington, Emily  
 Davies, Jonathan  
 Davies, Paul  
 Davies, Shaun  
 Davies-Jones, Alex  
 Dean, Josh  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dickson, Jim  
 Dixon, Anna  
 Dixon, Samantha  
 Dodds, rh Anneliese  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Downie, Graeme  
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eastwood, Colum  
 Edwards, Lauren  
 Edwards, Sarah  
 Efford, Clive  
 Egan, Damien  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Entwistle, Kirith  
 Eshalomi, Florence  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta  
 Farnsworth, Linsey  
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh  
 Ferguson, Mark  
 Ferguson, Patricia  
 Fleet, Natalie  
 Foody, Emma  
 Fookes, Catherine  
 Foster, Mr Paul  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Foy, Mary Kelly  
 Francis, Daniel  
 Frith, Mr James  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gardner, Dr Allison  
 Gelderd, Anna  
 Gemmell, Alan  
 German, Gill  
 Gilbert, Tracy  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Gittins, Becky  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Goldsborough, Ben  
 Gosling, Jodie  
 Grady, John  
 Greenwood, Lilian

Griffith, Dame Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Hack, Amanda  
 Haigh, rh Louise  
 Hall, Sarah  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Paulette  
 Hanna, Claire  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hatton, Lloyd  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayes, Tom  
 Hazelgrove, Claire  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hinchliff, Chris  
 Hinder, Jonathan  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hughes, Claire  
 Hume, Alison  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hurley, Patrick  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Ingham, Leigh  
 Irons, Natasha  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Lillian  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Josan, Gurinder  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kaur, Satvir  
 Kendall, rh Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kitchen, Gen  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kumaran, Uma  
 Kyle, rh Peter  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Leishman, Brian  
 Lowell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 MacAlister, Josh  
 Macdonald, Alice  
 MacNae, Andy  
 Madders, Justin  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mayer, Alex

McAllister, Douglas  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McDougall, Blair  
 McEvoy, Lola  
 McFadden, rh Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McIntyre, Alex  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahon, Jim  
 McMorris, Anna  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 Minns, Ms Julie  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Moon, Perran  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Mullane, Margaret  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, Chris  
 Murray, rh Ian  
 Murray, Katrina  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Nash, Pamela  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Norris, Dan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Pakes, Andrew  
 Patrick, Matthew  
 Payne, Michael  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Jon  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Joe  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Race, Steve  
 Rand, Mr Connor  
 Ranger, Andrew  
 Reader, Mike  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reid, Joani

Rhodes, Martin  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rigby, Lucy  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sackman, Sarah  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Scrogham, Michelle  
 Sowards, Mr Mark  
 Shanker, Baggy  
 Shanks, Michael  
 Simons, Josh  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, David  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevens, rh Jo  
 Stewart, Elaine  
 Stone, Will  
 Strathern, Alistair  
 Streeting, rh Wes  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sullivan, Kirsteen  
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Swallow, Peter  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison  
 Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tufnell, Henry  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Karl  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vince, Chris  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Chris  
 Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Webb, Chris  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt

Wheeler, Michael  
Whitby, John  
White, Jo  
White, Katie  
Whittome, Nadia  
Witherden, Steve  
Woodcock, Sean

Yang, Yuan  
Yasin, Mohammad  
Yemm, Steve

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Martin McCluskey and**  
**Kate Dearden**

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Clauses 2 to 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Schedule agreed to.*

*The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.*

*Bill, not amended, reported.*

*Bill, not amended in the Committee, considered.*

*Third Reading*

7.26 pm

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Louise Haigh):**  
I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It has been an extraordinary privilege to take this Bill through the House, as the first major piece of legislation to pass through the Commons under this Labour Government. The work to rebuild Britain and return to a politics of service started the moment we entered office. We pledged to act decisively to get our country moving and our public services working. I set out my motto for the Department for Transport—to move fast and fix things—which is why this Bill wastes no time in fulfilling one of our central manifesto commitments, calling time on the 30-year ideological privatised experiment on our railways that failed passengers, failed to modernise our railways and failed our economy. It is why this Government have begun the work of reform by bringing services back into public ownership, so that our railways will finally be run in the interests of passengers.

There will be immediate benefits. Our railways will serve the British public, be they passengers or the taxpayer, and as we bring services into public ownership, we will drive up performance. We will remove the burden of the millions of pounds squandered every year in private sector management fees. We will bring services into public hands as soon as their contracts expire, but if operators fail to deliver in line with those contracts—if they continue to let passengers down time and time again—I will not hesitate to use every tool at my disposal to drive up standards, including terminating contracts early where appropriate. In my meetings with Avanti and TransPennine and in the rail Minister's meetings with Northern, London North Eastern Railway, East Midlands Railway and CrossCountry, as well as their Network Rail counterparts, we have been clear that we will not tolerate for any longer the poor performance that the last Government tolerated. My officials will drive improvements using the mechanisms in those contracts.

That work is already bearing fruit. Last week, LNER and ASLEF resolved their long-standing local dispute at no cost to the taxpayer, preventing 22 days of industrial action while ensuring an improved service for passengers. As a result, there were no driver cancellations over the weekend or this morning—the first time that has occurred for many years. Last month, we ended the longest strike in our railways' history. It was a strike that cost the taxpayer hundreds of millions of pounds in lost revenue

and cost the economy more than a billion pounds, and a strike that the Conservative party deliberately prolonged and provoked, at enormous cost to the taxpayer and passengers.

A passenger-centred railway needs workforce reform; I do not shy away from that fact. As we move towards Great British Railways, we will waste no time driving those reforms forward. This is an area where the party opposite totally “failed”. That is a quote from the former Conservative Rail Minister, who is no longer in this place. To his credit, unlike his colleagues, he has at least had the decency to apologise for what he put our country and our railways through.

We are under no illusion: the Bill is not a silver bullet. It is the first stop on our journey to a modern railway for a modern Britain. We will introduce separate legislation later in the Session on the wider reforms that are required. Fixing the industry's crumbling foundations is the only way to deliver the lasting improvements that passengers expect and deserve. Providing national leadership and a single point of accountability, Great British Railways will bring track and train together. It will plan services on a whole-system basis. It will increase innovation while cutting waste. It will put an end to outdated working and management practices, and end the operational meddling of Whitehall that has characterised the industry, particularly post covid. In short, we will create a simpler, safer and more reliable rail industry, relentlessly focused on passengers and on growing our economy.

That, of course, cannot happen overnight, but as passenger in chief, I am not prepared to wait. That is why today I have made a written ministerial statement formally standing up shadow Great British Railways, in order to bring together the Department's passenger services, Network Rail and the operator of last resort. For the first time in 30 years, the railways will begin to act as one coherent system, and there will be the political backing for decisions to be made in the public interest. Shadow Great British Railways will review performance and finances. It will begin work to modernise our railways and unblock barriers to ticket reform, and will start to make urgent improvements now for passengers and freight.

Before I finish, I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield and Rothwell (Simon Lightwood), for his excellent work, support and dedication of time to getting the Bill through the House. I also thank the Clerks, Chairs and parliamentary counsel, and of course my fantastic officials, who have worked at pace and done an excellent job supporting us in our first two very short months in office. Finally, I am hugely grateful to hon. Members from all parts of the House for their scrutiny and collaborative approach. I add my congratulations to the many hon. Members who made their maiden speech during the Bill's passage.

The Bill represents a line in the sand. It shows that the Government are willing to roll up their sleeves and do the hard work to fix what is broken and reform what does not work. Getting this right matters for people up and down the country, for whom the railways are their route to opportunity. It matters for communities that need a reliable railway to support businesses, retain talent and attract investment, and it matters for this mission-focused Government, because the railways underpin our efforts to rebuild Britain, from building economic



growth to providing clean energy, and to deliver hope and opportunity to everyone, wherever they live. I commend the Bill to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani):** I call the shadow Secretary of State.

7.34 pm

**Helen Whately:** We recognise the Government's mandate to nationalise the railways. We are not seeking to frustrate that, but simply to improve their legislation. I have heard the arguments of Government Members and the Secretary of State in support of the Bill, but I remain unconvinced and unreassured. We agree that rail needs reform, but we disagree on how to do that. I thought we agreed that passengers were the priority, but it seems that we disagree on that too, because Government Members have just voted against a simple amendment that would have ensured that public operators served the needs of passengers, including in rural and underserved areas.

I would have hoped that we could agree on the importance of controlling costs, including one of the biggest costs that the railways face, which is that of the workforce, but again we clearly disagree on that. The Government have caved into ASLEF's pay demands with a "no strings, no modernisation" pay deal, and now Government Members have voted against our proposal for an independent pay review body, a simple mechanism to help the right hon. Lady make sure she is not steamrollered into conceding to excessive and expensive pay demands by Labour's powerful union paymasters. However, I welcome the hint from the Minister with responsibility for local transport that the Government may be considering introducing something along those lines, and I look forward to hearing more about that.

Here we are on Third Reading of the Bill after just a few hours of debate. Rushing this Bill through makes no sense at all. Why? Are the Government throwing a bone to their Back Benchers in return for their backing cuts to the winter fuel allowance? Is it to please the unions that donated to Labour Members' campaigns?

Is it a distraction from dodgy appointments and the conduct of their Rail Minister in the other place? Or do the Government Front Benchers believe this to be a minor change, though it is not? Is that why they think so little scrutiny and parliamentary time is required?

I urge the Government to think long and hard about the amendments we have put forward. Although we do not agree with this plan, as I have said, we accept their mandate to deliver it. We are simply proposing sensible changes to protect passengers and taxpayers, and I urge them to reconsider during the Lords stages of the Bill.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

## PETITION

### Closure of High Lane Post Office

7.37 pm

**Lisa Smart** (Hazel Grove) (LD): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Hazel Grove constituency. It relates to the proposed closure of High Lane post office. I should also mention the related petition with over 600 signatures collected by the staff from the post office—Anita, Natalie and Georgia—and the online petition on my website, which has over 800 signatures. The petitioners request that the House of Commons urge the Government to keep the post office open in its current location and not to close it.

*Following is the full text of the petition:*

*[The petition of residents of the Hazel Grove constituency,*

*Declares that High Lane Post Office should not close on 19 September; and further declares that the post office service is vital for the local community.*

*The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to remain open the Post Office in its current location and not to close.*

*And the petitioners remain, etc.]*

[P003007]

## Unpaid Carers

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Christian Wakeford.)*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani):** I call Wendy Chamberlain.

7.38 pm

**Wendy Chamberlain** (North East Fife) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is great to be back, and to see you in the Chair. I congratulate you on your new position.

Caring or being cared for is an almost universal experience. Almost everybody will find themselves being an unpaid carer for their loved ones at some point in their life, or being cared for by loved ones. Who among us does not know somebody who is helping an elderly parent, or supporting a family member with a long-term illness? As new MPs will come to learn, almost every week here, we have an opportunity to learn about and mark a national awareness day for a different devastating illness. For every person suffering from those illnesses, there will inevitably be a family member—unseen—supporting and caring for them.

According to the recent census, there are 5.7 million unpaid carers in England and Wales, but those are just the people who recognise themselves as such. In 2022, Carers UK research estimated that there were up to 10.6 million unpaid carers. Whichever figure we use, that is a huge number, and the figure is growing. According to very recent research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, by 2035 there will be an 11% increase in the number of unpaid carers, and as degenerative conditions, including chronic degenerative conditions, become more prevalent, the amount of care that carers do is predicted to go up; it is expected that ever more will provide more than 35 hours of care each week.

The Government should care about carers, not just because that is the right thing to do, and not even because unpaid carers are in homes across every constituency in the UK, but because we need them. Unpaid carers are absolutely vital to our economy and our society.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for bringing this debate forward. The House is fuller than usual for this Adjournment debate, which indicates the importance of the issue. Every one of us knows people who are carers. I care for my brother, who had a big accident 20 years ago, and I understand what it means to be a carer and to be available at all times, as others do. Does the hon. Lady agree that respite for carers is an essential component of support, and that inability to access respite care will push many into making the unwanted decision to give up caring and instead institutionalise the people they care for, due to the unbearable pressure on their mental health?

**Wendy Chamberlain:** I am grateful to the hon. Member for that intervention. He is absolutely right, and as he and I know, having served in the last Parliament, during covid the lack of respite care was a critical factor for many carers. It is clear that we all need to do more in that area.

We were talking about how vital carers are to our economy and society. The economic value of unpaid care is £162 billion a year in England and Wales,

£13.1 billion in Scotland and £5.8 billion in Northern Ireland. We know the country's finances have been left in a ruinous state by the last Government, and that the social care system is already stretched to breaking point. We must also know that we cannot take the contribution of unpaid carers for granted, so I hope that the Minister will take tonight as an opportunity to show that the Government do care about unpaid carers.

In a debate shortly before the general election was called, the then shadow Minister for care, who is now a Minister, the hon. Member for Gorton and Denton (Andrew Gwynne), committed Labour to developing a new carers strategy if it formed the next Government:

“There will be a carers strategy under the next Labour Government, because we value the vital work our carers do. It will be a cross-Government strategy with the Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Education and the future of work review all feeding into it along with the Department of Health and Social Care. There is a brighter future for those living with dementia and their families and carers. Labour will deliver it.”

Given that promise, I hope that the Minister can understand why I and many whom I have spoken to in the care third sector were disappointed that unpaid carers were not mentioned at all in the Labour manifesto. At the same point in the speech I just referred to, the then shadow Minister said that unpaid carers

“will be at the heart of Labour's plans in Government.” —[*Official Report*, 16 May 2024; Vol. 750, c. 228WH.]

I hope the Minister will take tonight's debate as an opportunity to make that case.

**Tom Gordon** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing forward this Adjournment debate, and of course for the work she did before this parliamentary Session on what is now the Carer's Leave Act 2023. One of the reasons why I became involved in politics is that the day before I started my master's degree, my mum was diagnosed with breast cancer. I studied my degree part-time over two years to look after her and my little sister, who was just five. Looking back, it is clear that I was filling the role of a carer, but I did not identify as one. That is a key point to note if we are to have a carers strategy. A recent Carers Trust survey found that 73% of those who provide or have provided unpaid care do not identify as unpaid carers. Does my hon. Friend agree that a national carers strategy should prioritise the identification of carers across all sectors?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani):** Order. This is an Adjournment debate and interventions must be super-short.

**Wendy Chamberlain:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It demonstrates how prevalent caring is in our society when we have Members who have direct experience of it. Identification of carers, or people identifying themselves as carers, is a key issue that any strategy should address.

The then shadow Minister was right that we need a cross-Government strategy. This is not a new idea, because we have had such strategies before; the last one was drawn up all the way back in 2008, but the problems that unpaid carers face have not gone away. Unpaid carers are significantly more likely to be in poverty than the rest of the population. The most recent data available from the Department for Work and Pensions—the 2023

family resources survey—shows that just under a third of households in receipt of carer's allowance are food insecure, compared with 10% of households as a whole. That is a huge difference.

To assess food insecurity, the survey asks the respondent whether in the past 30 days: they have eaten less than they felt they should because of lack of funds; they have been hungry, but not eaten due to lack of funds; or they have lost weight due to not enough money for food. It also asks whether they or someone in their household has gone without eating for an entire day because they lack money for food. Further, the survey found that 13.3% of households in receipt of carer's allowance—that is just more than one in every eight—had used a food bank in the previous 12 months, compared with just 3% of households overall.

**Anna Dixon** (Shipley) (Lab): I commend the hon. Lady for her work to ensure that the millions of unpaid carers in the UK are both valued and supported. As has already been mentioned, I commend her for successfully bringing forward her private Member's Bill, the Carer's Leave Act 2023. Under that Act, carers have an entitlement to a week of unpaid leave. Does she agree that further action is needed to ensure that those carers juggling work and care can continue to stay in employment, avoiding the poverty trap that she describes?

**Wendy Chamberlain:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Member. My party's policy is that carer's leave should be paid. At the moment, we are formalising a system that already worked for people in asking for time off unpaid with the employer's agreement, and potentially not taking sickness or annual leave. They are not getting remunerated for taking that leave, and I am cognisant of that.

Going back to my evidence on food banks, the research from the sector aligns with that survey data. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's 2024 report on UK poverty found that 29% of carers live in poverty. More than half of the carers who responded to the Carers Trust adult carer survey in 2022 said that they are struggling to make ends meet as a result of those caring responsibilities. As the hon. Member just said, one of the main reasons for unpaid carers being in poverty is that it is difficult to stay in work as a carer, especially full-time work.

**Carla Lockhart** (Upper Bann) (DUP): I commend the hon. Member for securing this excellent debate. Across the United Kingdom, some 60% of carers are women, with many having to give up employment, reduce their hours or take a less qualified job. Does she agree that needs to be a top priority when the Government are looking at this issue?

**Wendy Chamberlain:** Yes, I absolutely agree. When we think about pension inequality, we know that women are more likely to be caring and so are unlikely to be able to build up a full pension entitlement, which compounds the poverty that the hon. Member describes.

A 2019 Carers UK report on the difficulties of juggling unpaid care with employment found that around 600 people a day are giving up work. A snapshot from the family resources survey I referred to earlier showed that 22% of adult informal carers were retired and 25% were economically inactive. I am proud to acknowledge that

since then we have hopefully seen some improvement in the ability of carers to balance work and caring, having passed my Carer's Leave Act in 2023, giving employment rights for the very first time to unpaid carers. However, I know from the work that I have done that that is not enough.

One of the reasons for this debate is because there is a Minister in the Department responsible for unpaid carers. The DWP sees the impact of families living in poverty. The Treasury is in charge of the overall picture, but the Department for Business and Trade has responsibility for employment practices. I want to highlight the need, which the Government previously recognised, for cross-Government working on supporting unpaid carers. The one thing that the DWP is responsible for that could help unpaid carers—I would be grateful if the Minister took this away—is carer's leave. As the Minister knows, I could give a whole speech on how that benefit needs reforming, which would help rather than hinder unpaid carers, but I accept that is not his remit.

**Sorcha Eastwood** (Lagan Valley) (Alliance): I appreciate the hon. Member bringing this matter to the House. We can see clearly from the cross-party representation in the Chamber that it matters to everybody. Many in those roles are actually young people. Whenever we are talking about employment rights and workers' rights, it is important that we remember young people, and particularly young carers, who may be care-experienced on top of that. Does she have an opinion on that?

**Wendy Chamberlain:** I am grateful to the hon. Member. I will be saying a bit about young carers, but carer's allowance, which I am talking about at the moment, does need reform. My understanding, from speaking to colleagues, is that young people undertaking T-levels are potentially losing out on carer's allowance because of the number of hours they are required to do. I am sure that that oversight needs to be corrected.

When unpaid carers are told that they can work only 13 hours a week at the national minimum wage—the number of hours keeps going down because of how the calculations are made—without losing their benefits, when they are left struggling because carer's allowance provides the lowest level of benefits of its kind, and when systems are set up so that unpaid carers find themselves thousands of pounds in debt from inadvertent overpayments, that inevitably has an impact on their own health and ability to provide care to their loved ones.

The resilience of our ageing population is also very much in the remit of the Department of Health and Social Care. We know that pensioner poverty is deeply linked to health outcomes and the demand for NHS services during the cold winter months. We also know that providing care during someone's working years means missing out on vital opportunities to save for retirement, leading to a much higher prevalence of poverty among unpaid carers.

I appreciate that the Minister can control pensions, but I want to mention another thing outwith his remit: education. Being a young carer is more uncommon than being an adult carer, but the impact over that person's whole life is so much greater, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Tom Gordon) said.



**Richard Foord** (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): Does my hon. Friend agree that one other Department that might be quite interested in a cross-Government strategy is the Treasury? My constituent Amanda had a civil penalty applied on the basis that she misrepresented her earnings, which has made her frightened to go back to work or to work more hours. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is damaging to the economy if we have people not going out to work?

**Wendy Chamberlain:** I agree with my hon. Friend. If the Government's aim is to grow the economy, they must, in addition to other measures, be targeting those people who are economically inactive not because they cannot work as a result of their skills, knowledge or capacity, but because their caring responsibilities prevent them from doing so.

I am conscious of your direction, Madam Deputy Speaker, so if the House allows I intend not to take any further interventions. Otherwise, I will not get through the remarks that I want to make.

I want to mention Fife Young Carers, which supports 207 young people in North East Fife, and about 1,300 overall across Fife. Some of those carers are as young as five years old. Caring for a loved one as a child has a significant impact on their education. In the last Parliament, the all-party parliamentary group on young carers and young adult carers carried out an inquiry that found that young carers are missing on average 27 days of school each year and are 38% less likely to go to university than their peers. We know that how children do in school has a vital long-term impact on their future employment—indeed, the Education Secretary was talking about that the other day—and just about everything in their future. The position of young carers gives us a clear example of how the lack of an overarching strategy fails unpaid carers.

Earlier this year, I wanted to question the then Government over the exclusion of young carers from carer's allowance, building on a question asked by the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi). The reason that the DWP gave me was that supposedly young carers in education can rely on educational grants for support. I therefore asked the Department for Education about support for young carers. It turns out that there is no specific support for them because they are not considered to be part of a vulnerable group. It means that the DWP can abandon financial support of young carers to the Department for Education, which seems to think that young carers can rely on their parents for income. That shows what happens and how support for arguably an incredibly vulnerable group can get lost without overall leadership.

Yet more Government Departments have a role in the health and wellbeing of unpaid carers. According to Carers UK's 2023 state of caring report, 50% of unpaid carers are lonely and 58% of carers had to cut down on their hobbies and leisure activities. Caring for a loved one should not mean being isolated from your own support networks or having to give up the things that bring meaning and joy, but clearly it does for many, either because they cannot find the time in the day for themselves between work—if they can stay in it—and caring, or because often they simply cannot afford to participate any more. This is the moment for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to

get involved, with its overarching responsibility for leisure and the services provided at local level. I am talking about respite breaks, which the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned, support services, and access to local leisure facilities. A cross-Government strategy could also engage the Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland Offices, and ensure that similar priorities are discussed in intergovernmental meetings with the devolved nations.

There are many root causes and solutions to the problems faced by unpaid carers, and they span all Government Departments. The Minister is here as the Minister for Care, but I hope that he is also aware of the impact of all the cross-Government issues that I have set out on the health of unpaid carers. I am sure that he has learned much in recent weeks. Last year's "State of Caring" report on health found that 82% of unpaid carers said that the impact of caring on their physical and mental health would be a challenge. It found a significant impact on mental health, with 79% saying that they were stressed or anxious and 49% saying that they were depressed. It is therefore no surprise that research carried out by Dr O'Dwyer at the University of Birmingham has found that unpaid carers are a group at high risk of suicide. That is particularly true for parent carers of children with a long-term illness or disability. Of the participants in her study, 41% of unpaid carers had thought about killing themselves.

It is clear that we need vital preventive healthcare for unpaid carers, but clearly that is not in the remit just of the Department of Health and Social Care. Again, I reiterate why we need a cross-Government strategy. I appreciate that even if a strategy were announced this evening, it would not just be in place overnight—it could not be and it should not be. Its goals need to be co-designed with unpaid carers and the organisations that represent them. It needs organisation, buy-in and leadership. For it to work and take meaningful action, it ought to be sponsored at the highest level of Government and engage all the Departments that I have mentioned. It needs ringfenced funding. It will not surprise the House that I have mentioned funding. The last strategy was supported by £255 million in funding. That may sound like a big figure when we keep being told that difficult decisions have to be made, but it is nothing compared with the economic value of unpaid care, which, as I have said, amounts to £190 billion per year.

I do not want to pre-empt the goals of the strategy—they need to be designed with unpaid carers themselves—but a first priority should be, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough said, the proper identification of unpaid carers. Unpaid carers may not recognise themselves as such or know what support services are available to them. Professionals and organisations play a vital role in identifying them, through GPs, hospitals, local authorities, workplaces and educational settings. A national carer's strategy will provide leadership and strategic direction. It will put the needs of unpaid carers at the highest level of Government. Morally, practically and politically, it is the right thing for the Government to do.

I do not particularly like the title of this debate on the Order Paper. The word "potential" was inserted to keep me in line with the rules on neutrality in debate titles. It makes it sound like the merits of the strategy are arguable, which clearly they are not. I chose to read

“potential” in a different way: a national carer’s strategy has an abundance of potential to create improvements that have not yet been realised. I look forward to hearing the Minister’s remarks.

7.57 pm

**The Minister for Care (Stephen Kinnock):** I thank the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) for securing this debate on this critical issue. As she rightly stated, it touches the lives of millions of people across our country, and I agree that it requires our full attention.

I want to start by paying tribute to our unpaid carers and young carers, who play such an important role in our communities. They give so much to others, and I want to take a moment to thank them for the enormous contribution that they make. Let us also recognise and appreciate the work that the hon. Member has accomplished in bringing about the Carer’s Leave Act last year. It is an important piece of legislation, which takes a significant step towards helping unpaid carers juggle work and their caring responsibilities. As she will be aware, this Government are committed to reviewing the implementation of carer’s leave and to examining all the benefits of introducing paid carer’s leave.

This Government are also committed to ensuring that families have the support that they need. We want to ensure that families are better able to look after their own health and wellbeing, not just that of those they care for. We are aware of the importance of unpaid carers having a break from caring. The better care fund includes funding that can be used for unpaid carer’s support, including short breaks and respite services for carers.

I have heard the calls for a cross-Government carer’s strategy. This must be addressed in the wider context of the urgent need for a renewed vision for adult social care. As part of that renewed vision we will consider how best to support unpaid carers, because the reality is that our adult social care system is facing immense challenges. Too many people, including unpaid carers, are left navigating a complex and often inadequate system to secure the support they need. Reports of inconsistent service standards, chronic staff shortages and a lack of dignity in care must drive us to action. Everyone deserves the chance to live independently and with dignity. Our approach is to create a sustainable health and care system built on national standards, but tailored to local needs.

However, we must be clear about the appalling economic circumstances we have inherited. We take very seriously our responsibility to deal with the £22 billion black hole that has been left to us by the previous Administration. As a result we have had to make, and will continue to have to make, some difficult decisions, but that in no way diminishes our commitment to reforming adult social care. It will not be easy, but we are committed to taking the steps needed to build a national care service.

I also recognise that many unpaid carers can face challenges balancing employment with caring. The Government’s plan to make work pay sets out a significant and ambitious agenda to ensure workplace rights are fit for a modern economy. That includes empowering working people who provide unpaid care. Flexible working can play a vital role in enabling carers to stay in work alongside those they support. Making flexible working

pay, the default from day one for all workers except where it is not reasonably feasible, is a key element of our plan to make work pay.

We must also ensure that carers are supported by the benefits system. We know there has been an increase carer’s allowance overpayments. We are keen to establish all the facts to understand fully what has gone wrong. Once we have done that, we will set out a plan to make it right. The Department for Work and Pensions is progressing an enhanced notification strategy as part of its existing commitment to improve customer engagement and make better use of data provided by His Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, building on its existing communications with customers. It is considering all forms of targeted contact to find the most effective and efficient solution to encourage claimants to contact the DWP about changes in their income. This will help claimants understand when they may have received an earnings-related overpayment or are at risk of doing so. Indeed, the Minister for Social Security and Disability, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms) recently met Carers UK and individual carers to hear their views and experiences. That is key to helping us to establish the facts and make more informed decisions. More broadly, the DWP will keep the carer’s allowance under review to see whether it is continuing to meet its objectives. The previous Work and Pensions Committee made a number of recommendations for changing the rules. We will respond to those recommendations in due course.

Our goal must be centred on reform. We are committed to building consensus for the longer-term reforms that are needed to create a sustainable national care service that our entire country can be proud of.

**Rachel Blake** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister agree that informal networks, such as the City of London Carers, provide a vital way for unpaid carers to keep in touch with each other and understand what services might be available through the adult social care system?

**Stephen Kinnock:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. She is absolutely right that many such networks, often informal, play a vital role in the community in providing that support and peer-to-peer support. So often unpaid carers can end up feeling quite isolated. Informal networks like the one she describes are vital and I commend the work of that network in achieving the objectives we all want to see.

**Jim Shannon:** The Minister outlines the need for reform. I think many of us in the Chamber would like compassion and understanding to be key to that. Reforms are okay, but they need compassion and understanding to make them work.

**Stephen Kinnock:** I thank the hon. Member for that intervention. He has reminded the House that caring for friends and family is an important part of what it means to be human. It is at the heart of the desire to support one’s community, as well as one’s friends and family.

We must always approach this issue with compassion. We know that we have certain constraints as a Government in terms of what we are able to do, but I can assure the hon. Member that we are absolutely committed to

[Stephen Kinnock]

fixing what is, broadly speaking, a broken system; indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has described the health and social care system as broken. We have to fix the foundations of that system, and unpaid carers are absolutely part of those foundations. We also have to ensure that unpaid carers have a strong voice in the consensus that we want to build around fixing the system. We know that if we are to build a national care service of which our entire country can be proud, we will need those reforms, but they must truly embody person-centred care and the role played by unpaid carers. To achieve that, I will engage with my counterparts across Government, with unpaid carers and with sector partners such as Carers UK and Carers Trust to ensure that their voices are heard.

I know that many of us were profoundly moved by the experiences of caring shared by the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey) during

the general election campaign. As we have heard this evening, this is a subject of great significance for, and close to the heart of, Members on both sides of the House—including, of course, the hon. Member for North East Fife. I look forward to engaging with colleagues throughout the House on a cross-party basis, because we know that the consensus we need to build transcends narrow party political partisan divides. This is about building a system that is truly fit for the future, and fit for the country in which we live. So let us forge ahead together with the promise of that future in which unpaid carers are visible, valued and supported.

*Question put and agreed to.*

8.6 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

*Tuesday 3 September 2024*

[SIR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

## Healthcare Provision: East of England

9.30 am

**Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered healthcare provision in the East of England.

It is an honour to conduct this debate with you in the Chair, Sir Christopher. Before getting into the meat of the debate, I will give a brief overview of the broad context. The beating heart of healthcare provision in this country is of course the national healthcare system, arguably the closest thing to socialism that this country has ever seen, based as it is on the provision of healthcare by need, not the size of someone's wallet. That is pretty unique, not just in this country but around the world. One could argue that this far-sighted policy has changed the very nature of our everyday reality.

Our health is everything. Without it, we are more insecure, less productive and less happy. The security of good health and of access to care free at the point of use has revolutionised our society, helping us to live longer, more secure lives, and arguably creating social stability that affects economic productivity and perhaps even the strength of our democracy itself. Or at least it did so until about 60 years ago, when it began to be picked apart.

**George Freeman** (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is my friend as well, for giving way. How wonderful it is to see so many people present for this debate at the beginning of term.

I point out gently that the NHS has also thrived under successive Conservative Governments and that, although it may be a great socialist idea, I believe it has come to be part of the fabric of our whole country and I think all parties present want to improve and support it. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the NHS also underpins our enterprise economy? In America and other places, it is difficult to start a company when the healthcare costs of the staff have to be thought about; here, by underwriting the cost, we help entrepreneurs to start businesses. That point is often overlooked.

**Clive Lewis:** On the hon. Gentleman's first point, yes, successive Governments have presided over the NHS, but with differing intentions. Until the mid-1970s, say, there was a broad consensus—I will come on to this—on what the welfare state was and how it operated. That has changed substantially in the past 60 years. The implementation of different policies by different Governments, including Conservative ones, has not always been in the best interests of the NHS. On enterprise, yes, a secure welfare state, good social security and the ability to give people good health—the NHS has been integral to that—have implications for our economy, as I have already pointed out.

I am sure I am not the first or the last to suspect a direct connection between the rise of angry and anti-democratic right-wing politics and the demise of the NHS's ability to look after us all effectively. The sheer far-reaching impact of the NHS and its crisis cannot be underestimated. One needs only to look at the US, where free universal healthcare does not exist, as the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) just mentioned, to see the state of politics, crime, drug addiction and social breakdown there. The free market in healthcare provision and medicines has led to a country with one of the least efficient and most high-cost healthcare systems in the western world, and where millions are hooked on drugs that are as heavily advertised as if they were cans of coke. Let us not indulge too much in English exceptionalism, though. We need only to look at dentistry and adult social care in this country to see what happens to healthcare provision that is, to all intents and purposes, privatised or well on its way to being so—the consequences of which I hope colleagues will discuss later in the debate.

The foresight of the 1945 Labour Government cannot be underestimated. When the NHS was launched in 1948, it was done in tandem with the advent of the welfare state, because Beveridge, Keynes and Bevan understood the three pillars necessary for a healthy nation. The first pillar—the NHS—would be there for people if they became sick, but it was the second and third pillars that meant the NHS would not be overburdened. They would work in tandem with it to prevent sickness.

The second pillar was, of course, the welfare state, providing a network of social institutions that would protect citizens from the market risks associated with unemployment, accidents and old age. The third pillar was an economic system that prioritised full employment in secure, well-paid, unionised jobs—a system that sought to reduce all forms of inequality, from wealth to health.

Over the last 60 years, the three pillars have been systematically smashed. The second and third pillars are in tatters, while the first—the NHS—is wobbling precariously. It is testament to the enduring nature of the national healthcare system that it has managed to survive as an almost solitary pillar for as long as it has. If a Labour Government are truly to fix the foundations of our broken healthcare system, they must acknowledge the nature of the three-pillar foundation, and acknowledge that the NHS cannot be fixed if we do not rebuild and replace the other two pillars as well.

The situation in the east of England—from dentistry deserts to sky-rocketing rates of mental health referrals and some of the worst ambulance waiting times in the country—is beyond one malfunctioning organisation. Norwich and the wider region are experiencing a systemic crisis that is institutional, social and economic. Healthcare reforms such as devolution to the integrated care boards have become about devolving who gets to wield the axe to make savings—known to many people as cuts. I will give an example. Our ICB in the east of England, part of NHS Norfolk and Waveney, has been told by national health bosses to cut its running costs by 30% by 2026. My first question to the Minister is: how will our Government deliver improved healthcare outcomes while simultaneously implementing the previous Government's frankly destructive cuts?

[Clive Lewis]

We know that vast areas such as dentistry and social care are largely privatised, with spiralling costs, and that undermines the NHS's central commitment to care being free at the point of use. Tendrils of the crisis extend into social care. It is often said that if social care is cut, the NHS bleeds too. Norfolk county council acknowledges a crisis in social care. With soaring demand and struggles to recruit staff, there is a backlog of hundreds of vulnerable people waiting to get their care needs assessed, and care providers fold on a regular basis. My second question to the Minister, then, is: what news can she give us on the last Government's unimplemented cap on care costs? Is it being implemented, as the Secretary of State implied during the general election campaign, or being dropped? If it is dropped, what plans are there to help those facing ruin given their complex care needs?

One consequence of the situation in Norfolk is that there are regularly hundreds of hospital patients who are medically fit to leave but unable to be discharged. It is clear that our healthcare system is struggling to respond to today's crisis, but it is also unprepared for the challenges of the future. East Anglia is the UK region most at risk from early climate impacts, and there is clear evidence of the link between climate breakdown and ill health. For example, from 2022 to 2023 the number of flood reports in Norfolk doubled, and stretches of Norwich are predicted to flood year after year. Victims of flooding in the UK are nine times more likely to experience long-term mental health issues, and flooding is linked to a greater instance of respiratory diseases because of dampness.

Prevention is better than cure—it is about treating the causes, not just symptom alleviation. We know that the Prime Minister is keen on the so-called preventive state and we have seen some early policy announcements, so my third question is: will the Minister elaborate on what that will look like? What does healthcare provision that prioritises prevention look like in the east of England?

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this issue forward. I know the debate is about the issues particular to his constituency, but they are ones apparent to all of us across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. First, does he understand and perhaps agree that the Minister and Government could look at pharmacies having a bigger role in treating minor ailments? Secondly, there is the issue of how people, particularly elderly people, can access GP appointments regularly. Thirdly, when it comes to cataract surgery there is a postcode lottery across the whole United Kingdom. If people get the surgery early, it stops them losing their sight. Is the hon. Gentleman experiencing issues in his constituency similar to those in mine?

**Clive Lewis:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his input, and his points were well made. When researching this debate, I probably spent more time working out what I did not have time to say than what I could actually put into the debate, so I have tried to do a broad overview. Many of the issues the hon. Gentleman raised are also of concern in my Norwich South constituency and across the eastern region. I am sure that during the debate many of those issues will be raised and dealt with in more detail.

Our Government have said they are a Government of service, but a legitimate fourth question that I ask the Minister is: in service of whom and to what end? It is clear to many that the interests of big business, of big tech and data companies and of private finance do not always sit well with the public interest, particularly when it comes to health. There are areas where they do, but there are also areas where they do not. We know with whom the last Government sided; whom will ours back when push comes to shove—big business, big tech, the finance industry or Joe public?

I want to briefly provide a snapshot of the scale of the crisis in the eastern region. Ambulance response times in the east of England are significantly worse than those in the rest of England. In 2023, response times for category 1 cases—that is, severe cases—were nearly 12 minutes in East Anglia, while the national target is seven minutes. They were nearly the worst on record. The Care Quality Commission, now under inquiry and investigation itself for its capability to do its job, has described Norwich university hospital as the

“worst in the East of England”

for ambulance handover times.

Referrals to mental health services increased by 18% between 2018 and 2020. Compared with the rest of England, Norwich and Norfolk have higher rates of self-harm, death by suicide and mental health issues among young people, as well as more self-diagnosed mental health issues generally. Our mental health trust—Norfolk and Suffolk NHS foundation trust—is notorious for being the worst in the country, and I do not think that can be said enough.

Norwich is a dental desert. In July, the Secretary of State branded Norwich North the “Sahara of dental deserts”. That is a rather romantic notion, but it is a desert where people pull their own teeth out in this burgeoning phenomenon of a do-it-yourself dentistry industry. Indeed, some of my Ukrainian constituents have told me that they find it preferable to dodge Russian missiles and artillery to use Ukrainian dentists. Ukraine arguably has a better dental system in the middle of a prolonged war. That is unsurprising given that in the east we have one NHS dentist—no, it is not even one NHS dentist; it is one dentist—per 2,600 people. Just picture that in your head: one dentist with their tools with 2,600 people queued up. That is what it feels like to many of my constituents.

For the second year running, no dental practices are accepting NHS patients. Norfolk children under five have some of the worst tooth decay in the entire country. Thousands of people have had to go to hospitals in Norwich and Norfolk for abscesses that should have been prevented. The list goes on and on. I am sure that many of my colleagues from the eastern region will also outline some of the issues and stories that they know are taking place on a daily basis, and that have been for many years now.

**George Freeman:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making the point about dentistry that I think we all understand, particularly in the east. Does he agree that the real cause is threefold—the tariff did not keep up with costs and inflation, we have not been training enough dentists and we have been losing too many—and that the previous Government's dental plan

was a big step in the right direction? Does he support that plan? I am interested to know whether the Opposition intend to continue to implement it.

**Clive Lewis:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention but will leave the response to the Minister, because it is a question that she would be better able to answer. Frankly, given that the last Government had 14 years to sort out that mess and have handed it over, pretty much complete, to the new Labour Administration, I will not be singing their praises when it comes to dentistry. That will not be going on the record.

I will conclude by looking at the social and economic roots of the healthcare crisis, which are the elephant in the room. As I have outlined, many of the causes of ill health are socially determined. Waiting lists, ill health and mental health issues are signs that our healthcare system is breaking down, but also that we have an economy with a degrading social fabric—one need only look at the race riots this summer to understand that. But do not take my word for it; listen to civil society organisations in my constituency that are at the coalface of this crisis. The Norfolk Care Association says:

“Around 10% of health outcomes result directly from healthcare delivery, with a more significant proportion derived from the physical, social, and economic factors that people experience day to day. The government must do more to tackle poverty, ensure quality housing, and create safe communities, as these are fundamental to improving health outcomes.”

Age UK Norwich says that the key healthcare issue older people face is

“chronic health conditions and limited spend/focus on prevention: around 55% of Norfolk’s older population have one or more long-term health conditions; however, most are treated independently”.

That organisation points to the need for

“Rebalancing healthcare focus and investment to underlying causal factors”—

the “wider determinants” that make up 80% of a person’s overall health status.

Let us have a quick look at some more drivers of ill health. Take, for example, fuel poverty: 10% of people in the east of England live in fuel poverty, and it is almost 12% in Norwich South. Fuel costs in the UK are on average 30% higher than the EU average.

**Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): The hon. Member makes an important point about fuel poverty and its direct link with illness, so will he support his Government’s removal of the winter fuel allowance?

**Clive Lewis:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his interesting question. I am not happy with the removal of the winter fuel payment—of course I am not—and I do not think anyone on this side of the House will be happy with it, but I also understand that there are two points in the year when you support your Government: the King’s Speech and the Budget. I am not looking to break that, but like many of my colleagues I have severe concerns about the impact this proposal will have on people’s health and wellbeing and on their pockets. I have every confidence that my Government will put in place the best possible response to the £22-billion hole left by Conservative Members. I just do not think that the removal of the winter fuel allowance is necessarily the right way forward, but we shall see what happens in the days and weeks ahead. My question to the Minister

is this: does she believe—this almost pre-empts the question asked by the hon. Member for Broadland and Fakenham (Jerome Mayhew)—that the cut to winter fuel payments will improve the situation in terms of fuel poverty and its impact on health?

Another example is financial insecurity. Age UK Norwich told us that 35% of Norwich wards fall within the top 10% of the most deprived areas in England. There has been a 35% rise in food bank use in the city, fuel poverty is at nearly 16%, and 68% of Age UK Norwich inquiries are about money, debt or bills.

Another example is poor housing and malnutrition. We have quite extreme malnutrition in Norwich. Norfolk has the highest malnutrition rate in England; malnutrition affects one in five people in Norfolk and Waveney. Jade Hunter, the headteacher of West Earlham infant and nursery school, told *The Guardian*:

“We do get a lot of bad chests because they’re in damp homes that are maybe mouldy, and we get a lot of sickness and diarrhoea because the quality of the food they’re eating isn’t great”.

She told me that one way teachers know children are hungry is that they chew their pens and chew sand. That shows that they are not being given what they need to thrive at school.

Before I conclude to allow others to contribute, I would like to ask the Minister some more questions. We know there will be a Government review of NHS England structures. There is an incomprehensible patchwork of bodies covering different geographical areas, including the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS foundation trust, the East of England ambulance service, the NHS Norfolk and Waveney integrated care board—the list goes on. Are there plans to simplify those structures and make those bodies more accountable? I understand that NHS reorganisations and reforms are not always popular, particularly with staff, but I wanted to ask that question.

Secondly, before the general election, all Norfolk MPs called for an undergraduate dental school to be established at the University of East Anglia. With my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Alice Macdonald) and many others across the region, I have been working on that proposal, so will the Minister tell us whether there has been any news or developments? Such a school will be critical to beginning to end the dental desert in Norfolk and Waveney—dentist provision in Suffolk is in almost as bad a state.

Finally, I campaigned for mental health before I was an MP, I and continue to do so to this day, despite the difficulties. Despite the past 15 years of so-called change and reform in our local mental health service, it is still arguably the worst in the country. Will there be a statutory public inquiry into the systemic failure of mental health services in Norfolk and Suffolk? This scandal—this slow-motion disaster—has gone on too long, disrupted and ruined too many lives, led to people dying unnecessarily, and caused much grief. People need answers, and if we are to learn lessons from what has happened in the past 15 years, we need an independent public inquiry to get to the bottom of these issues.

**Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair):** Before I call the next speaker, let me say that about 10 people have indicated that they wish to speak. The winding-up speeches will start just before 10.40 am. I believe in self-regulation, so I hope people will contain themselves so that their speeches meet the overall need.



9.53 am

**Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): I congratulate my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), on securing this important debate about the health service in the east of England.

We have just recovered from a general election, and I hope we have all had time off—a bit of a break—to recharge our batteries so that we can start thinking about how we should lead this country in the years and months ahead. Health and the health service was a key election issue on the doorsteps of Broadland and Fakenham. As the Conservative candidate, I was armed with a whole series of data about how we had 20,000 more doctors and had, I think, recruited 50,000 more nurses. We had paid for and secured 50 million more GP appointments each year—an increase to 350 million per year. We had provided a lot more funding for the NHS, increasing it by £28 billion, or 17%, since 2019. I would have the conversation on the doorstep and read off all these facts about how we had funded the health service, but that was not how things felt to our constituents, and that was a key negative impact for Conservative candidates such as myself. As a Government, we felt we had done what we could—we had increased the funding—but the outcomes our constituents experienced did not tally with that.

I have come up with a number of factors to explain that. One was the covid backlog for elective surgery. Back in early 2020, covid was thrown at the Government, who were caught unaware, and it created a huge backlog. Steps were taken to address it in Norfolk. We had two new operating theatres for elective surgery at the Norfolk and Norwich university hospital, and we got the diagnostic centres at the James Paget university hospital and the Queen Elizabeth hospital, as well as a new one at Cromer. However, these things take time to work through, and the election came before our constituents felt the benefits of that enormous local investment.

However, there was a bigger problem, which the Conservative Government failed to address. A key, proper criticism of our Government is that productivity in the health service went down between 2019 and 2024 by about 5.8%. We were putting much more money in and we had more staff, but what they achieved decreased. If there is one thing the Minister should address—I would be grateful if she could do so in her summing-up—it is what plans the Government have to improve productivity, rather than just funding and staffing, in the NHS, because that is the absolute key. My starter for 10 is that productivity will not improve if we have pay deals like that awarded to ASLEF, where money was provided and productivity improvements were removed from the deal.

**George Freeman:** My hon. Friend makes a really important point about productivity in the health system. I have been a Health Minister and I have observed that—not because of ministerial diktat, but just because of the way the health system works—if you deliver more for less, the Treasury and the Department of Health give you less, but if you struggle to deliver more for less, we give you more. If we ran a business like that, we would go bust. Does my hon. Friend agree that, ultimately, the east needs a much more decentralised, empowered system? In Norfolk, we have an ambulance

trust, a mental health trust, three hospital trusts and five clinical commissioning groups. That is bonkers. We need one Norfolk healthcare system that provides what patients need: an integrated patient pathway.

**Jerome Mayhew:** We have made progress in that direction with the integrated care board, which is a very good step in the right direction because it allows the whole care system in Norfolk to come under one remit. We were beginning to see some of the benefits of that with the mental health trust. Although it has a long and pretty disgraceful history of underperformance, there have been tentative signs of improvement since the ICB came in.

The next issue, particularly in Norfolk, is the physical state of our hospitals. We have the Queen Elizabeth hospital at King's Lynn, which is a RAAC—reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete—hospital, the James Paget in Yarmouth, and the pretty modern Norfolk and Norwich in Norwich. The last Government fully funded and agreed full rebuilds of the QEH and the James Paget, which are long overdue. Those hospitals should be rebuilt by 2030, and I am very concerned to hear that that funding commitment is now under review. The Minister might be constrained in what she can say at the Dispatch Box, but whatever reassurance she can give the residents of Norfolk about the Government's intention to continue those rebuilds would be much appreciated, because they are enormously important to my constituents.

Then there is dentistry. The hon. Member for Norwich South talked about our dental desert in Norfolk. We have 39 dentists per 100,000 of population, compared with a national average of 52. If someone who grows up in Norfolk wants to be a dentist, the nearest place they can train is Birmingham or London, so it is no surprise that we do not have domestic, home-grown talent becoming dentists in Norfolk. What incentive is there for a just-qualified 26 or 27-year-old who is not from the eastern region to move to a largely rural area? For those reasons, we desperately need an undergraduate dental training school at the UEA in Norwich, perhaps in partnership with other academic establishments in the east of England. I am not squeamish about what it might look like, but we need to have undergraduates being trained in the east of England and in Norwich, because 40% of UEA medical school graduates become “sticky”—they stay in the area because they fall in love, get married and develop commercial relationships with GP surgeries and the like.

The dental Minister in the last Government came to the UEA in about May for a lecture and a series of meetings. The impression given was that we were on the cusp of an announcement of a dental training school but that the election got in the way. All eastern region Members of Parliament, irrespective of their political colour, are wholly in support of that, and we would be very grateful, as the hon. Member for Norwich South said, if we could have some indication that it is still on track.

There is a huge amount to be done in the east of England and in Norwich in particular. We have great staff and good structures, but we need to get the productivity working and the expectation of early GP appointments back on schedule. One recurrent complaint I get from constituents is about how difficult it is to see a GP. I note that 43% of all GP appointments are now same-day

appointments, and that record needs to be built on. I have listed a number of areas on which I would be grateful if the Minister could give an indication of the Government's thinking, and I look forward to hearing her response.

10.2 am

**Jess Asato** (Lowestoft) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) for securing a debate on such an important issue, which I know is close to the hearts of all our constituents.

The NHS is clearly in crisis. Those who can afford to go private do so, while everyone else is forced to linger on long waiting lists. My constituents are frustrated, sometimes to the point of giving up waiting for urgent operations—and sometimes just for GP appointments. Lowestoft hospital in my constituency was closed a decade ago. The building now lies empty without a replacement, and we continue to wait for a long-term solution that benefits the community. As has been mentioned, the James Paget University hospitals rebuild is desperately needed. It is one of the two hospitals worst affected by RAAC—reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete—in the country.

It seems clear that the crisis in the NHS is no longer just an issue of funding and that investment must be coupled with reform to fundamentally improve health outcomes. I have been impressed, for example, by East Coast Community Healthcare, a staff-owned social enterprise that provides community-based NHS healthcare across Norfolk and Suffolk. ECCH demonstrates that things can be done differently, and that technical solutions and the freedom to innovate can allow providers to do more with the same funding and operate a system that is able to absorb rises in demand.

We sorely need to improve experiences of NHS care. For many, it has become something of a nightmare. I will focus on dental health. My constituents are particularly concerned about their inability to access NHS dentistry, and rightly so. Over the past 14 years, as we have heard, areas such as mine have become so-called dental deserts. As it stands, east Suffolk ranks seventh out of the 39 districts in the east of England for the lowest number of dentists.

Even where dentists are practising, residents find it impossible to get an appointment. In 2022, it was found that not a single dental practice in Suffolk was accepting new NHS patients. I have talked to far too many of my constituents who have been forced to rip out their own teeth. As we have already heard, that is happening right across East Anglia, and that is why I made improving access to dentistry one of my six election pledges. Although some progress has been made by the formation of the Norfolk and Waveney integrated care board, it is the dental system itself that is holding the NHS back from making improvements to accessibility. We currently have a system that does not work for patients or dentists. A survey by the Dental Defence Union of its members found that 41% are looking to reduce their hours and 31% are planning to leave the practice or retire early because of the sheer pressures of the system.

As NHS dentistry crumbles, I am particularly concerned about the impact on our children and young people. Data shows that almost a third of the 100,000 people who are admitted to A&E with tooth decay each year are children. It is the most common reason for children

aged six to 10 to be admitted to hospital. Analysis from the British Dental Association found that on average, 116 children had to have their teeth extracted each day in 2022. In that same year, it was revealed that 40% of children—4.4 million—had not seen a dentist in the previous 12 months.

This is clearly an issue of inequality. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds suffer from worse oral health than their more affluent counterparts. It is a significant gap: 34.3% of children from deprived areas had dental decay in 2019, compared with 13.7% in less deprived areas. Poor health contributes to poor life outcomes. For example, teacher surveys have shown that poor oral health contributes to social exclusion, leading to children missing school. Breaking that vicious cycle is essential. If we cannot improve people's health, how can we improve their lives? Instead of ensuring children get the best start possible in life, we are handing them rotten teeth and rotten chances to succeed.

I am glad that the Government have set their sights firmly on revolutionising dentistry in this country. Rebuilding NHS dentistry will be a difficult job but, unlike the previous Government, this Labour Government will not kick the can down the road. I am delighted that we have said we will create an extra 700,000 urgent and emergency dental appointments each year, including 100,000 for children. I welcome the financial incentives for new dentistry graduates to work in dental deserts such as mine. We will ingrain the importance of good dental health practice in children from a young age and crack down on the prevalence of hospital admissions for rotten teeth by introducing supervised tooth brushing for three to five-year-olds in schools. Most importantly, we will reform the dental contract, which is not fit for purpose and pushes dentists into private practice.

With an active Government willing to attack issues at the root—sorry for the pun—of the issue, I am confident that we can make significant progress in this and all other areas of healthcare. Ultimately, the NHS is the way in which most people interact with the Government. If we can rebuild trust there by delivering improvements, we can also rebuild trust in politics and the ability of the Government to improve lives. If we can get the basics right, then all the other issues become easier to solve.

10.7 am

**Pippa Heylings** (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): In my constituency of South Cambridgeshire, we are witnessing the tragic consequences of an outdated funding formula. It is entrenching deep inequality across the region and the country, but it is particularly deep in Cambridgeshire, which is the most impacted of all 42 healthcare systems in the country. We receive the lowest healthcare funding per person for primary healthcare. This is just wrong. A distressing example of this is happening right now in South Cambridgeshire, one of the fastest-growing places in the country. GPs—we have talked about productivity—are treating more patients than ever before, but cannot keep up with the demands of a growing population. This is particularly so because of the funding formula.

During the election campaign, I ran a survey that showed that 60% of respondents were struggling to access a GP appointment. We have heard that this is happening across the region and the country. It has come to a head this week, with four much-respected

[Pippa Heylings]

family GPs tragically handing back their contracts because it is financially impossible for them to continue. They are devastated by this decision. I have spoken with the integrated care board, which has been unable to stop this happening, and my constituents in Fulbourn, Fen Ditton, Marleigh and Cherry Hinton are hugely concerned.

This has occurred as a direct consequence of the Carr-Hill funding formula—an outdated funding formula that does not take into account deprivation in an area. The practices that are dealing with deprivation find themselves dealing with more patients than others and more complex needs than others, but the funding formula does not take this into account. The practice has tried to deal with this over the years, but this is the tragic consequence in the end. Will the Minister join the Royal College of General Practitioners, the NHS confederation of primary care networks, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough integrated care board and me in calling for a radical review of the outdated Carr-Hill funding formula, so that we can enable GPs to do their job sufficiently and well?

10.11 am

**Sam Carling** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) for securing this important debate.

Following the election, some of the earliest emails I received were from NHS staff from a variety of disciplines who feel deeply undervalued, under-appreciated and overworked. In May of this year, GPs in Cambridgeshire carried out 547,804 appointments, 62.5% of which were face to face. That is the equivalent of 64% of the county in just one month.

There are more patients per fully qualified GP in the east of England than the ratio for England as a whole. It is the same for my region of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and in my constituency of North West Cambridgeshire there are fewer fully qualified GPs than in 2017. Local practices simply do not have the funding to hire more GPs, so we find ourselves looking at a ridiculous situation where we invest as a nation in world-class training for new GPs, through six years of medical school followed by foundation years and more, but once they qualify they often cannot find work.

It is not just about putting more funding into the system as a whole; allocation is not working fairly either. As the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Pippa Heylings) just mentioned, the funding formula used for the general medical services contracts, under which most GP surgeries operate, is based in part on data originating before 2000. Leading GPs I have spoken to expressed a firm view that it discriminates against not just some of the areas the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire mentioned, but urban settings with younger patients, despite significant health needs in those areas. I represent a significant part of urban Peterborough, which last year was ranked as the least healthy place in the entirety of Britain. This must be seriously examined, with changes made.

GMS contracts are held by practices in perpetuity, but a number have had to hand back their contracts to local NHS commissioners, which leads to their practices being put under time-limited commercial contracts called APMS contracts—alternative provider medical services

contracts. That occurs when practices just cannot cope financially any more, and the rate in our region is truly shocking. Nationally, around 1% of GP practices are on APMS contracts. In Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, it is 12.5%, or one in eight, with many more on the edge.

These contracts are held by private companies whose loyalties lie with their shareholders. The stealth privatisation of our regional services is an appalling legacy of the last Government's 14 years of failure. Not only are these private contracts bad for patients, with continuity of care poorer due to a higher proportion of locum staff employed, but they are far more expensive for the taxpayer. I know of one practice in the region that is being given £40 of additional funding per patient under an APMS contract, when ironically even half of that extra funding added to the GMS contract they handed back would probably have solved the problem. That makes me even more pleased and proud that this new Government are taking immediate steps to address the situation, with a 7.4% increase to the global funding sum for GP practices announced for 2024-25. We will fix this mess, but it is going to take time.

Healthcare needs have become greater over time. This is particularly acute in the east, the fastest-growing region in the UK in the 2010s, where the population grew by 8.1% between 2011 and 2021. Like much of the UK, the east is ageing. As people live longer, their healthcare needs become more complex and challenging, and a thriving workforce is needed to address those appropriately. If those needs are left unaddressed, NHS England warns of a shortfall of between 260,000 and 360,000 staff by 2036-37, with patient demand increasing across the board.

In my maiden speech, I highlighted the dental desert that we face in Peterborough; others have mentioned their areas. Some people have to travel as far as Stevenage and Kettering to receive treatment because, in our city, there are no adult dental clinics accepting new NHS patients. The British Dental Association has warned that unmet need for NHS dentistry in the UK is at an all-time high, and the Government will need our support to bring that down.

Of course healthcare is a joined-up issue affected by several other policy areas. The crisis in social care, for example, has exacerbated many of the issues faced by the health sector. Some in our eastern region have championed innovative methods to tackle that, such as models using virtual beds—of which there are 190 in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough; feedback has been really positive there. We need to support that kind of innovation to make our NHS fit for the future, as I know the Government will.

However, the issues in healthcare seem never ending: RAAC-ridden hospitals are having to be replaced; GPs and NHS workers are burnt out; recruitment and retention are difficult yet, simultaneously, some cannot find work; access to dental care is non-existent for some; healthcare inequalities persist; and patient demand is growing and growing.

Dealing with all of that is a huge undertaking, and the Government have been left with a terrible inheritance. Addressing it will require a deftness, competency and compassion that we have not seen for 14 years. But the Government have started well, and I have every confidence that the east, and those in my constituency of North



West Cambridgeshire, will benefit from this Labour Government's approach and see a better experience for staff and patients alike.

10.16 am

**Blake Stephenson** (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) for securing this debate. We seem to be on a journey from east to west; we have covered Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, and now we are in Bedfordshire, one of the smallest counties in England—and I am pleased to be joined today by my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin). We are a small county, and my very rural constituency is squeezed between Bedford and Luton. I would like to dwell on three points: housing growth and primary care, hospital modernisations, and rural communities and health equality.

Our communities in Mid Bedfordshire have done more than their fair bit and taken more than their fair share of housing growth. We have seen population growth far outstrip the delivery of new infrastructure. Nowhere is this more apparent than in a planned new town called Wixams in my constituency. Residents had reasonably expected that the infrastructure they needed would be staged throughout the development so that they would have the healthcare that they need as that community grows, but that has not happened.

Seventeen years after shovels went in the ground, around 5,000 people now call Wixams home. That number could be as high as 20,000 when the development is finished, but they still do not have a GP surgery. The community has been fighting for years to have a GP surgery, and their demands have been falling on deaf ears, between the local authorities—Bedford and Central Bedfordshire—and the ICB. The ICB is not accountable to our local populations, and that demand for a GP surgery is falling on deaf ears. I ask the Minister, if I may, to respond to that and to join and help me to unblock the issues that we are facing with local, unaccountable integrated care boards, to deliver the healthcare in Wixams.

I know that that case in Wixams is not an isolated one. Across Mid Bedfordshire, I hear time and again of cases where GP surgery capacity has failed to grow and meet population growth. We have heard statistics from colleagues in this room; in our ICB area, the average number of patients per GP is now 2,955, up 651 since December 2016; in the same period, GP numbers have reduced by 44. That just is not good enough—we need better healthcare for our constituents. I am sure that that picture is painted in constituencies right across the east of England.

If the Government are serious about plans to deliver 300,000 new houses per year, they also need to be serious about their plans to deliver the infrastructure that our communities need, starting with a clear plan for a capital investment programme that will give local communities up front the funding they need to deliver GP surgeries rather than having to wait for developer contributions after the houses are built. I will be interested to hear what the Minister says about infrastructure alongside housing development.

My second point is on hospital modernisation. Communities across the east of England deserve access to modern and advanced hospitals. I welcomed the fact that the previous Government had committed to the

inclusion of the Cambridge Cancer Research Hospital and the Milton Keynes Women's and Children's Hospital in the new hospitals programme, and I urge the current Government to confirm that they will proceed with that investment. However, we cannot stop there.

Right across the east of England, we see hospitals failing to deliver the high-quality services that our constituents need. That is not the fault of the hard-working doctors and nurses who work in the hospitals; it is because of crumbling buildings and poor technology. In Bedfordshire, we are behind on NHS digitisation, and significant investment is needed in the fabric of our local hospitals—particularly in Bedford, where I understand there is a significant and serious maintenance backlog.

In the coming months, I look forward to engaging further with the Minister about the Government's plans to drive forward NHS digitisation in Bedfordshire, and to discussing how we can ensure that people using Bedford Hospital—mostly people from the north of my constituency—have access to the state-of-the-art facilities.

My third point is on rural communities and health inequality. Across the east of England, many of us represent highly rural constituencies. I do not think that I will “out-rural” colleagues from Norfolk, but Mid Bedfordshire is among the most rural; as a result, some of our residents face significant health inequalities. Those include difficulties for remote and isolated hamlets, which have poor access to poor health services, in accessing treatment; insufficient public transport; narrow roads; bad broadband; longer travel times to access the local GP and dentist—if there is a dentist; and all the challenges that many of our more rural healthcare settings face in recruiting staff.

During this Parliament, I would like to see the Government commit to delivering for rural areas, with focused efforts to deliver staff and services that reach out into the most isolated communities, to ensure that everyone can access the healthcare they need within a short journey from their front door. I hope that colleagues across the east of England share that ambition.

10.22 am

**Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Christopher.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) on securing this important debate. As we have heard from the contributions so far, the levels of disparity in healthcare in the east of England are significant; in my constituency of Luton North, they are very stark indeed. There are huge gaps in health and life expectancy across the town of Luton itself—I am not talking about the region, but just the town itself. Those gaps mean that someone in one area of Luton can expect to live up to 10 years longer than someone in another part of the town. I am sure that hon. Friends will agree that the fact the gaps in life expectancy within one town are so stark in 2024 is shocking.

We know that unfortunately there is a link between poverty and healthcare outcomes—and, indeed, healthy life expectancy. Those cannot be separated. Luton currently has the second lowest public spend figures in the NHS, local government, police and public health when compared to other towns in England with relative need, which comes after the 14 years of austerity that we in Luton have also suffered from.

[Sarah Owen]

Sadly, Luton has high levels of child poverty, with around 45% of children in the town living in poverty. There seems to be a misconception that when we talk about poverty and about child poverty in particular, we are talking about families where people are not in work. Actually, what I find when I see my constituents who are struggling and reliant on voluntary services, such as the food bank, the Curry Kitchen or the Breakfast Battery Boxes running out of Sundon Park, is that most of these people are in employment. They are working hard to try and support their families, but are unable to make ends meet.

There is one issue regarding child health that I will focus on, although I know that everyone who has spoken so far has already touched on it: access to dentistry. A report on children's oral health published by Luton Borough Council in March 2023 found that Luton had some of the highest prevalence of tooth decay among five-year-olds in England.

I want to dive into some of the reality behind those stats. I have visited countless primary schools across Luton North and one of the key things that teachers always raise with me is oral hygiene. Sadly, I have seen children with brown nubs where white teeth should be. Many of those children have never owned a toothbrush or had access to one at home. Many schools in Luton North now provide children with toothbrushes to be kept at school, and take time out of lessons to ensure that children are brushing their teeth. Most of these children have never seen a dentist before, and many require painful tooth extractions, with tooth decay being the most common reason why children aged six to 10 are hospitalised. The situation has a knock-on effect on children's vital early years of development: they are missing school and are unable to speak properly, learn phonics or eat a proper healthy and balanced diet.

There are organisations trying to fill the gap, such as the Dental Wellness Trust, which visited Waulud primary school in my constituency. It was lovely to see the trust working at the school to provide 250 children with free dental health screenings and fluoride varnishing. But despite these mechanisms to try to plug the gap and target the problem, it is clear we need a much more joined-up approach to dentistry in order to improve health and break the cycle of poverty, and to put children's smiles back into our community. However, the issue does not affect just children—it is about adults as well. Every time I knock on someone's door, I am asked where NHS dentists are available in Luton; shockingly, I have to point them outside of the constituency, into Harpenden.

That is why I am very proud of Labour's dentistry rescue plan, which will fill the current gap with an extra 700,000 urgent dental appointments a year and reform the dental contract, which, as we have heard, is a problem, to rebuild NHS dentistry to ensure that everyone has access to dentistry appointments and to improve incentives for dentistry graduates to work in the areas most in need of NHS dentists, such as Luton.

It is key that we draw on the knowledge of local community leaders, stakeholders and organisations to inform our approach on improving health in our local areas. This is something I would say is uniquely well done in Luton, where Pastor Lloyd Denny, who has lived in our town and worked with the local communities

through his faith for years, carried out an independent review of health inequalities. His review highlighted four key areas that needed urgent attention and improvement: communication, access, representation and cultural competency.

We had to lean on these four areas during the pandemic. We saw this with Imam Qazi Chishti, a friend of my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) and myself, who was one of the first faith leaders to take the covid vaccination—that is representation, cultural competency, access and communication right there in action. We see this with Love Luton RunFest, where I am always pressured to try to do the half-marathon. Forget it, guys—that's not happening. I will do 10k max.

We also see it with our primary care networks, such as the Equality PCN initiative that is working to target and work with our communities to ensure that people can live healthy lives. Dr Tahir Mehmood is doing fantastic work with our community. That is not to mention the fantastic representation in women's sport that we have in Luton, with Hina Shafi, who is one of the most brilliant representatives for women and inclusion in sport, and Dionne Manning, who is another fantastic woman—a local hero—working in women's football and to try to keep people like me in shape.

There is no doubt that brilliant work is being done at a local level, but there is undoubtedly still a devastating postcode lottery for people accessing cancer care, with major variation across England in terms of expectancies and outcomes. Something that is very close to my heart when it comes to cancer care is brain tumours. I have had a number of constituents impacted by this cruel disease, and I have been lucky enough to work closely with Khuram and Yasmin, the parents of Amani, who lost her battle with glioblastoma in April 2022, aged just 23.

Despite the significant leaps and bounds made in other forms of cancer treatment, which should be welcomed, outcomes for those diagnosed with brain tumours remain extremely poor, with no new treatments developed in the past 20 years. Patients with brain tumours today will receive exactly the same treatment as 20 years ago. Around 12,000 people are diagnosed with a brain tumour each year, and brain tumours remain the largest killer of those under 40. Fewer than 13% of those diagnosed with a brain tumour survive beyond five years, compared with an average of 54% across all cancers. I urge the Minister to continue working with MPs such as my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame Siobhain McDonagh) and I, and campaigners on this issue.

Let me take a moment to touch on an area of medical injustice that is particularly painful for a constituent I met just last week. She is a Primodos baby, which means her mother was given an oral hormonal pregnancy test that around 1.5 million women took in the 1960s and '70s. Although it was found to be harmful and was banned in other countries in 1970, the UK continued to circulate it until 1978. Tragically, the use of those pills resulted in many babies being born with disabilities such as missing limbs, heart defects and brain damage. Many babies did not survive beyond the womb.

Most patients were issued Primodos without prescription, which means there is no evidence that they ever took it. My constituent's mother just had it handed to her from the GP's desk drawer. For others, their medical records

were destroyed or lost. We have heard similar stories in the infected blood inquiry of medical records suspiciously going missing. That is extremely harmful, physically and psychologically, for the patients involved.

My constituent has suffered from a rare brain tumour and continues to suffer from many other health issues, all due to Primodos. In spite of that, she is inspirational in her continuing campaign for recognition and a response from the Government for victims such as herself and others. Sadly, she and her peers are yet to receive any sort of compensation, despite being victims of a mass case of medical negligence that has resulted in the painful lives and premature deaths of so many. Will the Minister agree to meet me and my constituent to discuss a way forward for those affected by the Primodos scandal?

I have chosen some specific issues—health inequalities, life expectancy and how healthily we can live our lives—as well as some acute cases in dentistry and cancer. However, I know that our Labour Government are committed to shifting the focus of the health systems towards prevention, and that is where we need to see focus. I am hopeful that health schemes such as those we heard about during the election campaign can be rolled out across the east of England and the country, to improve issues such as cancer care and outcomes for all who are suffering from that cruel disease, and especially to close the deep-rooted health inequalities that we see across our town and our region.

10.32 am

**Adrian Ramsay** (Waveney Valley) (Green): I thank the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) for securing this crucial debate. Our region is rural and many Members have talked about the decline in health services in rural areas. I want to talk about some issues that particularly affect my constituents in Waveney Valley, which straddles the Norfolk-Suffolk border.

Whether it is the long waiting lists for surgery, long delays in getting assessments for mental health or the difficulty in accessing a GP or a dentist, we have seen a decline in our health services and it is becoming harder and harder for people in our villages and market towns to access them. At the Budget in a few weeks' time, I very much hope the Government will look at all options for increasing funding to the NHS, including being willing to ask the very richest in society to pay a little more in tax—modestly more—in a way that could enable us to get the funding needed to keep pace with demand.

I want to raise three specific issues on the decline of rural health services that particularly affect my constituency. I would appreciate it if the Minister addressed them in summing up the debate. The first is the lack of hospital services in rural constituencies, which others have already referred to. For example, Hartismere hospital in Eye is a wonderful building that has had a lot of investment, but lacks the services that the local population, particularly older people and people without a car, would really like to be able to make more use of.

The League of Friends at the hospital showed me round the excellent facilities a couple of weeks ago. The hospital runs a range of clinics that people really value. However, both the league and local doctors would like to see facilities such as an X-ray scanning unit, the return of a community consultant, particularly in services

for older people, and a GP walk-in surgery. Will the Minister consider how hospitals in rural areas, such as Hartismere hospital in Eye, can be given the resources and support to provide a greater range of services?

**Victoria Collins** (Harpenden and Berkhamsted) (LD): The hon. Member talks about hospital services, especially for the more elderly in society. Will he join me in calling for more cross-party talks on social care, which is often the back door to the support that a lot of people who go into hospital need?

**Adrian Ramsay:** I totally agree with the hon. Member's point. I have had family experiences in recent months that have shown me, starkly and at first hand, just how much we need to address the crisis in social care and the lack of integration with the health service.

I want to highlight that on the Norfolk-Suffolk border, in towns such as Eye and Diss, people are 20 miles from the nearest big hospital in Norwich, Bury St Edmunds or Ipswich—and in towns such as Halesworth, which does not have a local community hospital at all, people are even further away. I ask the Minister to consider what support can be given to rural hospitals to provide more services, and particularly to encourage cross-county border working in the health services that will enable us to look at how services can be provided in a way that benefits communities straddling the county border, as they do around Diss and Eye in my constituency.

Secondly, is no surprise that we have heard about dentistry from nearly every hon. Member who has spoken in this debate. We have the Sahara of dental deserts in the east. In the winter, I conducted a survey of residents in Waveney Valley to which more than 800 people responded. A quarter had given up on dentistry treatment altogether because of lack of NHS provision, others were driving long distances to access a dentist and some had even pulled out their own teeth. That is just not tolerable in the 21st century.

I welcome the Government's commitment to reforming the dental contract. From my discussions with dentists and dental organisations such as the British Dental Association, it is clear that reform of the dental contracts is the root cause of the big exodus of dentists from the NHS. Dentists are not being paid appropriately for the work they do. Can the Minister set out the timescale for reviewing that contract? Health organisations have told me that for every effort they put in to getting new dentists into the NHS, dentists are leaving at a greater rate. We must address the root cause of the problem.

Thirdly, I want to highlight optometry. I received correspondence from an optometrist in Norfolk concerned about the lack of post-operative aftercare, particularly for operations such as cataract surgeries. They highlight that private companies are operating services of that kind and then discharging members to the community without aftercare, which is having a knock-on effect on A&E. Can the Minister ensure that, where private companies provide such services, the proper aftercare is also provided? Will she commit to looking at whether that highlights the problem of relying on private companies, which might seek to cut corners in the name of profit, to provide services?

To conclude, our rural services, particularly in market towns and villages, are severely affected by the decline in health services. Whether it is dentistry or a



[Adrian Ramsay]

lack of local hospital services, we need urgent action and I would welcome the Minister's addressing my specific points.

**Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair):** Mohammad Yasin, you have one minute.

10.39 am

**Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab):** Thank you, Sir Christopher. You said you would surprise me, and you really did. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

Like those in many other areas, Bedford's residents are suffering when it comes to GP and dentist appointments. One of the reasons my constituents are struggling is that we have shortages of GPs. We are trying to recruit from other countries, but we need local GPs. I am pleased that the Government have pledged to train more GPs locally.

Data from the 2021 census showed that the populations in each of the local authority areas covered by the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes integrated care board grew much faster than average, ranging from a 10.9% increase in Luton to 17.7% in Bedford. The population in England only grew by 6.6% in that period—

**Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair):** Order. I am afraid I have to call the hon. Gentleman to order because we have run out of time. I am sorry that a lot of people will not be able to give their speeches.

I try to promote self-regulation, but it is worth reminding ourselves that paragraph 7 of the "Rules of behaviour and courtesies in the House of Commons" says that even if time limits are not imposed, Members

"should speak with reasonable brevity and be mindful of others. Brevity in debate will give other Members a greater opportunity to speak and increase...chances of being called early",

on the next occasion on which a Member seeks to speak. I read that out as this is the first Westminster Hall debate of this Parliamentary Session. It is important that Members take into account that although I would prefer not to have to impose time limits, people then have to regulate themselves.

10.41 am

**Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) on securing this important debate.

The NHS used to be the envy of the world, but it is now in crisis, and services in the east of England are no exception. We have heard many examples in the debate of where our health and care services are in crisis. There is no doubt that the new Government inherit a litany of broken promises from the previous Conservative Government; that is why we Liberal Democrats have put health and social care front and centre of our campaigning in recent months and years. It is why, on the first day after the general election, we called for an emergency Budget to give the NHS and care services the money they so desperately need, and it is why we continue to urge the Government to act with real ambition and urgency on these issues.

In a debate on healthcare in the east of England, it is hardly surprising that dentistry comes out as the No. 1 issue. Dentistry is in an appalling state across the country, and particularly in the east of England, but arguably it is one of the easiest areas to fix. Under the previous Conservative Government we ended up in an absurd position where we had children having their teeth removed and people desperate for appointments, yet we had a £400 million underspend in one financial year. We also have thousands of dentists in this country who are willing to deliver NHS work, but who cannot because the contract is so convoluted.

I ask the Minister to outline the Government's timeline for negotiations with dentists on fixing the broken dental contract. I also have a specific request from my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone), who could not be here: he asks whether it could be made faster for people who want to operate NHS services to register to do so, because there are currently delays in the system.

A number of colleagues have spoken about the challenges with ambulance waiting times. The hon. Member for Norwich South and I have spoken in debates on this before and he will know, as I do, that the East of England ambulance service has had a very troubled history. To give credit where credit is due, there have been welcome improvements in the last 18 months, but there is no doubt that there are still huge delays in ambulance response times, which are very concerning to our constituents. Would the Minister support a Bill that I tabled in the previous Parliament to introduce localised reporting on ambulance response times, so we can see response times on a postcode basis?

Thirdly, I am surprised there has not been more talk about hospitals today. We know there is a legacy from the last Government of crumbling hospitals right across our region—the hospital in King's Lynn is one of the worst such examples in the country and is being held up by stilts. In my area in west Hertfordshire, we have West Hertfordshire teaching hospitals NHS trust and Watford general hospital is in dire need of a new hospital. It is one of the hospitals in the country that is ready to go—it has the land, it has permission, it has the plans and it just needs the green light from the Government. I urge Labour Ministers to recognise that delaying those plans does not come without a cost, because the repair bill is getting bigger and bigger.

Finally, does the Minister recognise that we need an ambitious plan of recruiting 8,000 GPs? The last Government promised 6,000 and failed to deliver them. Does she agree that we should align the primary care estates strategy with the shift to community care? Does she also agree that the Labour Government will, as part of its consultation on the national planning policy framework, make sure that infrastructure comes first, so that places such as Wixams are no longer let down by the planning system we had under the Conservatives, where people got housing without infrastructure, GPs or dentists?

10.45 am

**Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I thank you for your comments about self-regulation. In the first Westminster Hall debate of the parliamentary term, especially as it is on healthcare, it is good to start off in the spirit of self-regulation.

I thank the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) for securing the debate, and for his speech, which was a tour de force. It was wide ranging, reflecting on socialist history. From the topics that he covered, and from his history of advocating for his constituents over the years, his deep-seated passion for delivering high-quality health services is clear, particularly as regards the cross-party campaign for a new dental school. He put a very precise question to the Minister, and I look forward to hearing her response. One subject that piqued my interest was the question of the NHS being in service of whom and to what end—particularly with reference to his points about the NHS being the greatest representation of socialism in the modern day. Dare I say it: I believe the NHS exists to serve the people, but the state does not exist to serve the NHS.

I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Broadland and Fakenham (Jerome Mayhew) focused on the importance of productivity and on delivering tangible results to our constituents, as well as to hear about his support for the dental school. He was right to point out that the challenges of the Queen Elizabeth hospital and the rebuild programme, which I will return to.

I enjoyed the speech by the hon. Member for Lowestoft (Jess Asato), who again raised concerns about the James Paget centre and dental care, and the speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Blake Stephenson), which covered his campaign for a new GP surgery in Wixams, which he is a very strong advocate for. He also made important comments on the accountability of integrated care systems.

I cannot cover all the speeches made today, but dentistry and delivery were the themes. We are all here because, as re-elected and newly elected Members of Parliament, we are passionate about delivering health services for our constituents. We want success on that both in our constituencies and across the UK.

In some ways, I think it is a bit easier for the Minister to make her speech than it is for me to make mine, and I wish I was on the opposite Benches—although obviously not in the Labour party—to deliver it. I anticipate that she will start by saying that, in some way, the economy is broken or that there are huge financial pressures. She will probably go on to say that the NHS is, in inverted commas, “broken”. I am quite concerned about that language, and particularly about the morale of our NHS workers when such statements are made.

The Minister will then describe her plans. That is where I feel for her, because she will be very pleasant and supportive, and I know she is passionate about the subject—she will recognise that this speech is very similar to the one she gave in a debate on dentistry back in 2022. Unfortunately, she will be evasive about her Government’s plans because she is on a bit of a sticky wicket. The Labour Government have decided that they will review a lot of work that has already been put in to deliver for people in the east of England. Hinchingbrooke hospital is at risk. Queen Elizabeth hospital, James Paget university hospital, Watford general hospital, West Suffolk hospital, Cambridge cancer research hospital and many other projects across the UK are under review, despite all the work that has gone into them over the years. It is on the Minister, because that is how integrated care system accountability works in our system under the Health and Care Act 2022—we are accountable to our constituents, but ICSs are accountable to her—so I ask her to reassure our constituents and the people

who have put the work into developing those programmes that they will be delivered as promised by the previous Conservative Government. Will she think again about supporting dental vans to deal, on a temporary basis, with some of the dentistry challenges?

10.50 am

**The Minister for Secondary Care (Karin Smyth):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I will try not to be too evasive, and to be pleasant.

On his latter point, the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer) might want to look at some of the speeches I made during the passage of the Health and Care Act 2022; accountability is writ large through them, although we may disagree about the form it takes. The previous Government had an opportunity to resolve some of these issues, and they did not take it. They destroyed accountability and, indeed, the foundations of the health service with the disastrous Lansley Act—the Health and Social Care Act 2012—which propelled me into coming to this place.

It is a pleasure to be here for the first Westminster Hall debate, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) for securing it. I told my officials that it would be busy. Some of the people in this Chamber and some of those who have left are already my most frequent correspondents because of the state of the NHS in the east of England and more broadly. Getting the NHS back on its feet will be an enormous challenge, but we have the skill, motivation and commitment of our NHS staff. This Government will be unwavering in our support for them, and we will do what is needed to get the NHS back on its feet. We have committed to a 10-year plan because that is what it will take. We will deliver an NHS fit for the future. That is what we promised the British people at the election; that is what we were elected to do.

**Jerome Mayhew:** The Minister says she will deliver an NHS plan for the next 10 years. Does that include a full rebuild of the Queen Elizabeth hospital and the James Paget?

**Karin Smyth:** I will come on to those hospitals. As hon. Members will appreciate, we are in the early days of this, so “We will come back to people” may do a bit of lifting—I apologise for that.

We want to be clear and honest with Members of Parliament and the British people. We want to move the health service from treatment to prevention, which hon. Members have raised; from hospital to home, which is very important in the east of England, which has rural issues; and from analogue to digital. As a first step, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked Lord Darzi to give us a raw and frank assessment of the state of the NHS, and these debates and the work that hon. Members are doing will inform that. This autumn, we will also launch an extensive engagement exercise with the public, staff and stakeholders to inform the plan.

I have at least eight questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South and a number of others. I will do my best to get through them in the next eight minutes, but I will of course respond to people if they want to come back to me on anything I do not pick up.

[Karin Smyth]

My hon. Friend talked particularly about prevention, and touched on climate change, dentistry and mental health, which are clearly important to many people. Prevention is a key part of the Government's health mission and our mission across all Departments. We want to support people to stay healthier for longer. My hon. Friend said that we want the security of good health; the NHS was set up to provide that so that people can lead fulfilling lives. That promotes greater independence and shortens the time people spend in ill health. We have not touched on that much, but that is a critical target for this Government.

The NHS health check aims to prevent heart disease, stroke, diabetes, kidney disease and some cases of dementia among adults between 40 and 74 years of age. Thanks to the hard work of NHS staff, the programme engages more than 1 million people and prevents about 400 heart attacks or strokes, but take-up of the health check is low—hon. Members could perhaps encourage their constituents to take part. We want to improve access to the service and develop a new digital health check that people can use at home. We have now launched the next phase to develop the service, and I am pleased that Norfolk county council has been selected as one of the three pilot sites that are due to start in 2025.

Hon. Members are right that access to dentists is a pressing issue facing patients. We all knew that before the election campaign, and that is why that is a core part of our commitment to the British public. Only 40% of adults have seen an NHS dentist in the past two years. My hon. Friends the Members for Luton North (Sarah Owen) and for Lowestoft (Jess Asato), in particular, highlighted what we all see when we visit primary schools to look at young people's oral health. Hon. Members have read our manifesto and know what our plans are. To be clear, the Secretary of State and the Minister for Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberafan Maesteg (Stephen Kinnock), met the British Dental Association immediately on taking office and are meeting it regularly to resolve the issues with the contract. We will provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to areas that need them most. We will rebuild dentistry for the longer term by reforming the contract.

I cannot go into too much detail on the proposal from the UEA. It is a place close to my heart, as it is where I went, almost exactly 40 years ago, to university. It is where I fell in love and got married, but sadly I had to leave the east of England. That is a fantastic hospital. I know it is supported by the local ICB, and I understand that individual Members are seeking to meet with the Minister for Care. I hope we will be able to update Members on that shortly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South talked about the dire state of the mental health service and the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS foundation trust. To update Members—although most will know—the trust has been in the recovery support programme since July 2021, after the CQC's inspection report of "requires improvement". To address quality and safety, the trust has implemented and completed a range of actions from that inspection report. In July it published the "Learning from Deaths" report, which was commissioned by the chief executive to review every death that occurred

from April 2019 to October 2023. To improve the culture, the trust has launched Listening into Action, a trust-wide programme to improve how staff work together and listen to each other. In April, NHS England formally agreed a revised timeline for the trust to exit the recovery support programme at the end of 2024, and transition planning for post-exit has commenced. Obviously, we will be paying attention to that very closely, and I know hon. Members will also do so.

In response to the concerns about hospital buildings, we are all in no doubt about the inheritance that we have received from the last Government, particularly on capital, and about the state of our hospital estate. Each trust with a hospital with RAAC issues has invested significant levels of NHS capital to mitigate any safety risk. The safety of our patients must always come first. It is clear that the last Government's promise to deliver 40 new hospitals by 2030 was not achievable, and it did not have the funding required to deliver it. That is why we are reviewing the programme to put it on a sustainable footing, which means a realistic timetable for delivery and clarity of funding. We will be honest with the British people and transparent about what we can deliver, and we will update the House and hon. Members on the programme's next steps as soon as we can.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South touched on climate change. This is a really big issue for the east of England. I will not have time to go into some of the issues but personally, and, as far as this Government are concerned, the impact of climate change on health and the provision of the health service is a serious issue, with surges in demand for services during periods of extreme weather and heat-related disruption to utilities, such as power outages. We are cognisant of those, and I do think it is an important issue for the health service. The NHS is doing well to become on target to reach net zero by 2040, and all trusts have targets. That is something we will watch closely.

I will give some rapid fire responses. We are not going to look at changing structures. We want to work with the system that we have inherited. It has to work, it has to bring people together, and it has to bring services into neighbourhoods. We have talked about the contract as well. We are keen to work together with local services in the ICB structure. We all know in our own areas that geographies are never quite perfect, but we do not want another reorganisation. We think that detracts from what we need to get on with.

The matter of productivity raised by the hon. Member for Broadland and Fakenham (Jerome Mayhew) is an issue—the concern about what we measure and how we measure it, and making sure that every taxpayer's pound is used well within the NHS. Part of the issue is the breaking of the foundations of the system. Locally, that has meant it is very difficult for the service to deliver. That is why we are looking at this on a 10-year basis. The foundations need fixing.

Let me finish by once again thanking colleagues for bringing their own insights into health and care in the east of England. Many new Members have come here from all parties. These are important debates, and it is important for Ministers such as myself to hear directly from Members' constituents. Many of the issues are symptomatic of an NHS that is broken. That is why we are ending the sticking plaster politics. As the Prime Minister said a week ago, that is worth doing. It will be



harder, and it takes more time. We are not going to give deadlines that we cannot meet. I hope that after just about two months in this role, I given answers today that show that we understand the scale of the issues that we face, and that this Government are committed to tackling them. If I have missed anything in particular, I will of course, correspond with hon. Members.

10.59 am

**Clive Lewis:** I thank everyone who has taken part, as well as those who could not speak in the debate. I was hoping that—

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## Paris 2024 Olympics: Team GB Legacy

11 am

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the legacy of Team GB's performance at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

What a summer of sport we have been treated to! The Olympics, sadly, only come around every four years, but they leave us with enough to talk about until the next. Paris 2024 is no exception: a total of 327 Team GB athletes went to the games, winning 14 golds, 22 silvers and 29 bronzes, so Team GB secured 65 medals at Paris from 131 athletes over 18 different sports. Paris 2024 also saw Team GB's 1,000th Olympic sporting medal: silver in the men's cycling team pursuit.

The Olympics, however, are about more than medals. The spirit of the games is in every athlete who made it there and in everyone, like me, who was watching them on television. Behind the numbers, there are many stories to be told—stories of believing in oneself, overcoming adversity and working hard to achieve goals. We said an emotional farewell to Sir Andy Murray in his final tournament. We had Andy McDonald, aged 55, competing in the men's park skateboarding. We watched Katarina Johnson-Thompson finally win an Olympic medal at her fourth games.

Such stories are reflected in everyday life. Most of us will not compete in the Olympics—present company included—but many of us need to persevere, believe in ourselves and work hard to achieve what we want. The success and stories of Team GB are to be celebrated but, for me, it is what happens next that I want to discuss more. Members might know that sport is one of my personal passions, and I feel strongly about getting people more involved in sport, whether competitively or just for pleasure.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady on securing this debate. Every one of us takes joy in sporting achievement and memories of it. Does she agree that homecoming events, such as that at Newtownards for GB gold-winner Jack McMillan and gold-medal pommel-horse winner Rhys McClenaghan—both from my constituency—are truly inspirational for children? The real legacy must be change in the mindset of our children, so that they understand that hard work and the drive to push on after failure can make the moment golden. We can reinforce that with additional funding for sports clubs for our children.

**Tonia Antoniazzi:** I totally agree. It is lovely that the hon. Gentleman has had the opportunity to celebrate those Northern Irish athletes at their homecoming. That is really magic and I look forward to the homecoming that the Paralympians will have as well. It is important that we have that funding. How do we find the next Kate Shortman and Izzy Thorpe? They are our first ever artistic swimming medallists, who trained in their local community pool. "Legacy" is a word that is thrown around an awful lot, and we are very familiar with its use around the Olympics. Legacy was a huge part of London 2012: a pledge to get 2 million people involved in sport and physical activity was at the heart of the bid. However, it is not enough to rely on major sporting events to drive up participation at the grassroots level.

[Tonia Antoniazzi]

The sporting benefit promised by the London 2012 organisers sadly has not been fully realised. In 2022, a decade on from the games, only 13% of leaders across the sports sector agreed that the London 2012 Olympics had delivered the legacy promise—that was in a survey from the Sports Think Tank.

The biggest legacy failures were identified in the delivery of a sporting and physically active nation, and in inspiring a generation of young people to create a sporting habit for life. That is where I have an ask for the Minister. I have the passion and drive to work with the Minister and her Department in the new Government to make sport and activity something that we continue to do, from the time we can toddle around until we toddle off. I genuinely believe that that is what we need to do.

According to ukactive, 25.7% of people—11.9 million—in the UK still engage in less than 30 minutes of exercise a week. If we are going to create a legacy for future generations following on from the elite sporting events we saw this summer, we need a strategy and, importantly, we need infrastructure.

**Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on calling this debate. She has an obvious passion for sport, which we all know about. The whole of the Team GB track cycling team trained at the Newport velodrome in the International Sports Village, including the world record breakers Emma Finucane, Sophie Capewell and Katy Marchant. The team return to our city time and again, and cite the Newport effect as part of their success. Does my hon. Friend agree as a Welsh MP that championing those kinds of facilities is massively important for us in Wales and across the UK in order to see that group of young people come through for the future?

**Tonia Antoniazzi**: My hon. Friend is completely right. It is fantastic to see the velodrome in Newport in her constituency—it is a gem. In fact, if she does not mind, I would like to see one in Swansea.

I am pleased that UK Sport has taken the initiative of launching the changemakers fund, along with Team GB, Paralympics GB and the National Lottery. The aim of the fund is to get athletes into sports projects they are passionate about and to make a difference. Athletes can apply for funding towards projects that resonate with them. We saw that with the weightlifting bronze medallist Emily Campbell, who helped to launch the fund and said that she would be applying. She wants to use her platform to make a difference in her local community. We need to do more, and I will keep on saying so. I believe that we in Parliament should harness the buzz around Team GB going forward.

I am pleased to hear the Secretary of State commit to a review of the curriculum to put sport at its heart. Both sport and art are vital tools in allowing our young people to let off steam and express themselves. We all know that since covid that is something we need to put more emphasis on. I have another opportunity to invite the Minister to speak with me and Brian Moore about a project around sport in the curriculum that he has been vocal about.

We all know the health benefits of regular physical activity, so it is important that it is intertwined with education in a way that does not put students off. Having been a teacher for 20 years, I know that they are easily put off if they think they have to do something they do not want to do. It is all about engaging them in the right sports and activities at the right time, and making them want to improve. That improvement will drive their enthusiasm to be more active.

Sport needs to be accessible within our communities. The Secretary of State has committed to that, and I look forward to seeing how, through planning sport and new build houses and towns, we can push it forward. Sadly, according to Sport England, the opportunities to get involved in sport and physical activity continue to depend on people's background, sex, bank balance and postcode. According to ukactive, only 42% of children from less affluent families meet the chief medical officer's activity guidelines, compared with 52% from more affluent backgrounds. Worryingly, just 45% of children in the most deprived areas can swim 25 metres, compared with 76% in wealthier regions.

Research shows time and again that girls and women over all age groups are less likely to participate in sport than their male counterparts. We need to address that urgently. I hope that we will commit to a strategy to inspire women and girls to be more active. Women in Sport has found that only 29% of girls dream of reaching the top in their sport, compared with 52% of boys. I want to inspire all those girls in the future to be the best that they can. People know that I played rugby for Wales, but I did not have that opportunity growing up. When people have a sport or activity that they love and can share with their friends, it contributes to their wellbeing, happiness and future health. This Government will embrace that.

Sport England's Active Lives adult survey for 2022-23 found that those who identify as Black, Asian—excluding Chinese—Chinese or other were less likely to be active than those who identify as white British. We need to think about the statistics that are being produced. The facts repeat themselves time and again, and while there are root causes, which have been revealed, they are rarely acted on. I would like to ask the Minister what plans her Department has to review participation levels and take steps to address this imbalance, because there are more benefits to participation than just improving physical fitness.

This morning I came into Parliament having played tennis with my hon. Friend the Member for Spen Valley (Kim Leadbeater), which was a joy—

**Adam Jogee** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Jim wants to play.

**Jim Shannon**: I'm too old to play.

**Tonia Antoniazzi**: Jim, I'll drop you a text.

I had not picked up a tennis racket since I was a child, and the only reason I played tennis as a child was that it was the nearest place I could go to play sport. I could not play rugby or cricket, but the opportunity was there for me to play tennis—perhaps my parents wanted to get rid of me on a Saturday morning for 50p. Those opportunities are here now, and being active is key, whatever someone's size or ability. It makes me come to

work really happy every day. It is all about picking up a sport and having a community and sense of belonging through team sports—as well as making lifelong friendships and cross-party friendships, which we know in this House are very important.

I have spoken about my rugby career, and I still pick up my boots, gumshield and put my shorts on for the Wooden Spoon Welsh women's veterans team and for the Commons and Lords rugby team, which plays an important part in the lives of parliamentarians, who do not often have the chance to be active. That is why it is still important to me at the ripe old age of nearly 53.

Sport England's "Moving Communities" report found that 7 million participants at 563 leisure facilities in England in 2023-24 generated £891 million in wider social value, the most significant contribution being from the higher wellbeing derived by participants from engaging in sport and physical activity. The average total social value per participant is estimated to be £119 in 2023-24. There are other positive examples to learn from. The FA launched the Inspiring Positive Change strategy in 2020 to create a sustainable future for girls and women's football in England. When the Lionesses won the Euros in 2022, 41% of secondary schools in England offered football to girls in PE lessons. It should be 100%, but that is brilliant. After the team campaigned tirelessly, the previous Government committed to equal access to all sports in schools, and by the end of 2023, 75% of schools had met this target, a year before the FA's own target.

Inspiring Positive Change was a multi-layered scheme that covered grassroots through to professional football. It focused not only on the game but on wider structures such as coaching and refereeing. If a child in school feels that they love a sport, then they should have that opportunity. If they are not at the top, they feel that they cannot compete, but it is really important that they are part of the game. If we do not have coaches and referees, we are not on the pitch playing, so those people play an integral role. Getting children to understand that is the part of the process that we have to push forward. As a great example of how we can utilise good results to improve uptake while not relying on them, the structures were already in place when the Lionesses took the trophy, which is wonderful.

I prefer a different-shaped ball, which I have already spoken about, and 2025 sees the women's rugby world cup hosted in England. I hope that being able to see that, and believe it, will help women and girls across the United Kingdom to see that they can pull on the jersey for their country and represent themselves.

Getting people more active is, as I have impressed on everybody, not something that one Department can fix, because the reasons why people do not participate are so varied. Furthermore, there are metaphorical hurdles in the way even when people want to take part. Facilities may be too far away, too expensive or in too poor a condition. Over the past few years we will all have seen in our constituencies rising energy prices, which have led to so many leisure centres and swimming pools either closing or changing their opening hours.

We are seeing a lack of uptake in sports, and if we are serious about getting people moving, Departments across Westminster need to engage. This involves the Department of Health and Social Care, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Treasury—the

list goes on. We also need to work with devolved Governments, local authorities and community leaders, so will the Minister commit to a cross-Government approach to increasing participation in sport and physical activity and ensuring that, after Los Angeles 2028, we are in a much better place to discuss legacy?

I could talk all day—everybody knows that—but I want to end here and highlight the fact that 18 September is National Fitness Day. It is a great opportunity to grab the excitement from this summer and push it into long-term investment in sport and physical activity.

**Adam Jogee:** My hon. Friend is making an important and impressive speech, and I commend her for it. I agree with her that legacy is really important. The Paris Olympics have made me almost as proud as I was after London 2012—who could forget not just the brilliant sportsmen and women but Her late Majesty jumping out of the helicopter? In my view legacy has to be about our young people seeing themselves playing the sports and on the pitches. With that in mind, will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating Dan Bigham, who won silver on the cycling track? He was born and raised in Newcastle-under-Lyme, and his success speaks to how we can maintain a legacy through our young people seeing those who did so well and following their lead.

**Tonia Antoniazzi:** I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution. It is such a shame that we have only 30 minutes for the debate, because I think we could have filled this place and everybody could have spoken about how proud they are of their local Olympians and Paralympians—I am as well. Let us use National Fitness Day to see millions of people get involved, to highlight the role that physical activity plays across the UK, and to raise awareness of its importance in assisting us to lead healthier lifestyles.

We are being treated to a storming show from Paralympics GB. They are currently sitting in second place in the medal table. At the weekend, I was fortunate enough to be the guest of the national lottery operator Allwyn at the Paralympics. What an absolutely wonderful experience that was! If anyone is still not over the Olympics, I implore them to watch the Paralympics, because the coverage on Channel 4 is absolutely outstanding.

I have not touched on the legacy of Paralympics GB as the games are ongoing, so perhaps I will be back here soon to talk about grassroots disability sport. In the meantime, I pay tribute to Ben Pritchard from Mumbles, who won gold in the PR1 M1x rowing classification, and to Paul Karabardak, who took the bronze in the men's doubles MD14 table tennis. I also wish good luck in the men's discus throw F64 to another constituent, Harrison Walsh, whom I met a few weeks ago at the Principality stadium.

I feel very lucky to continue to feel the benefits of sport and physical activity. I do hope that in Scotland people will find a way to honour the legacy of Sir Andy Murray. I know there has been some disappointment around the planning arrangements there, so I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate his career and to celebrate the careers of all our Olympians and sportspeople. With a new Labour Government and a successful Olympic outing, I really hope that the whole



[Tonia Antoniazzi]

country—Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England—will get the opportunity to feel the joy that I do and to celebrate their Olympians and Paralympians.

11.19 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I of course congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) on securing this important debate and on such a thoughtful speech.

As the Minister responsible for sport, I could not be prouder of the performance of our Olympians in Paris. The team brought home 65 medals, which was the third-highest haul of all time, one more than the number won in Tokyo, and equal to the number won in London 2012. There were so many incredible moments, with Tom Pidcock's recovery from a puncture to take gold in the mountain biking, Alex Yee's sprint finish to snatch gold in the men's triathlon, and Keely Hodgkinson storming to gold on the track in the 800 metres, to name but a few. Barnsley's own Becky Moody also brought home a bronze as part of the Team GB dressage team. The breadth and depth of Team GB's success was amazing, winning medals across 18 of the 32 sports. All our athletes—whether they picked up medals or not—have had an impact that goes far beyond the pool, the velodrome or the track: they have inspired the nation and shown the next generation what is possible, and I hope they are all very proud of that.

I was fortunate enough to attend the games in Paris to see our athletes in action in road cycling and swimming, and to visit the Olympic village and witness at first hand how our athletes are supported. I was not alone in making it to France to cheer on Team GB—half a million tickets were snapped up by British fans—and for all of the fans who did not make it over there, there were millions more back home who were gripped by the amazing performances of our athletes on the other side of the channel.

With the Paralympic games now well under way, it would be remiss of me not to mention Paralympics GB and the incredible performances we are seeing from our athletes. The UK is the birthplace of the Paralympic movement, and Paralympics GB have finished in the top three at every game since Sydney 2000. I was delighted to be there last weekend to see the amazing team in action. It was fantastic to see Maisie Summers-Newton bring home a gold for Paralympics GB; I was absolutely gripped by the wheelchair tennis, where I was lucky to see both Andy Lapthorne and Greg Slade win their singles matches; and I really enjoyed seeing my first game of boccia and cheering on the amazing Claire Taggart. I know the nation is fully behind them to continue that success in Paris, and I wish them the very best of luck.

Sport is a huge part of our national story. British and Northern Irish athletes have competed at every single Olympic games since 1896, when the first modern Olympic games took place in Athens. The Great Britain and Northern Ireland teams have the distinction of being the only nation to have won a gold medal at every summer Olympic games since. Team GB have been in

the top seven in the Olympics since 2008 and, other than the USA and China, we are the only nation to win more than 60 medals at the last four games.

The success of this year's games was the culmination of years of hard work and dedication from not just our athletes but all the coaches and support staff behind the scenes, as well as the instrumental work of UK Sport and the national lottery. Every athlete has the raw ingredients of talent, determination and perseverance, but they need the right environment to nurture those skills.

When discussing the legacy for our future Olympians and Paralympians, the Government recognise the vital importance of funding. The investment of public money in Olympic and Paralympic sport allows UK athletes with the potential to achieve on the world stage to train full time and to fully focus on achieving their sporting potential. It provides UK athletes with access to the very best coaching in the world, as well as world-leading medical support and research, supporting athletes to achieve peak physical condition for competition and helping them to recover quickly from injury. Funding also provides access to the world's best sports science and technology to support athlete performance.

All that means that UK athletes are provided with the best possible chance to achieve their potential, and that they arrive at the Olympic and Paralympic games as among the best-prepared athletes in the world. That has transformed British fortunes at the games, with Team GB rising from 36th in the Olympic medal table in 1996 to the top-seven finishes at every Olympics since 2008. Paralympics GB have also achieved top-three finishes in every games since 2000.

UK Sport invested £385 million of Exchequer and lottery funding for the Paris Olympic and Paralympic cycle. As we look beyond Paris, the Government are fully committed to multi-year funding for our elite sports system, to enable our athletes to excel on the world stage. That means supporting them financially to match, and build on, their success in Paris as we look forward to Los Angeles 2028.

Our athletes are ordinary people who, through hard work and determination, have gone on to do extraordinary things and who will in turn inspire a generation. Our success on the world stage is a huge source of national pride and helps to encourage people of all ages to get involved in sport and physical activity. I see the enduring impact that it can have at a local level. Barnsley's Dorothy Hyman competed as a sprinter in Rome 1960 and Tokyo 1964, winning three medals, and she continues to inspire our community today. The sport centre in Cudworth named after her is a hub of sport and physical activity for the local community. We want to give the next generation every possible chance to chase their dreams of becoming the next Keely Hodgkinson, Max Whitlock, Caden Cunningham or Bryony Page.

From the chances it gives young people to the jobs that it creates, sport is helping to deliver this Government's mission of kick-starting economic growth and breaking down barriers to opportunity for all. Just last week, Sport England announced that, following Team GB's performance in Paris, it is investing £120 million into funding the next generation of Olympic and Paralympic talent. That funding will increase and enhance opportunities for talented young athletes in England to explore and develop their athletic potential, regardless of their

background or financial circumstances. It will support athletes starting out in grassroots environments, as well as those already on formal talent pathway programmes, and it will be available for the 2025-29 funding cycle.

The Youth Sport Trust hosted the school games national finals in Loughborough this weekend—a multi-sport event that brings together junior national ranked athletes and their peers who have shown potential via non-traditional roots. With more than 180 school games alumni represented at this year's Olympic and Paralympic games, it is great to see how nurturing young talent can transform lives.

Our Olympic and Paralympic athletes are also being supported to get out into their communities and make a difference to the causes they care about. The Changemaker initiative is a partnership between the national lottery operator Allwyn, Team GB, Paralympics GB and UK Sport. It aims to help athletes to maximise their impact upon their return from Paris 2024 and give back to the local communities that have supported them. Athletes can choose the social impact project they wish to support, and it could be anything from grassroots sports projects to mental health initiatives—whatever cause they are passionate about.

I have noted the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Gower about the Andy Murray centre. Andy has of course contributed a huge amount to British sport throughout his long career. I understand that plans for the centre have now been withdrawn, but I am sure that many people will be working hard to find other ways to honour Andy's legacy.

The legacy of the games is not limited to the elite support system. Team GB's performance has the power to inspire everyone. We want to help as many people as possible to get active, whether that is someone completing their first parkrun or someone who is an inspiring future Olympian or Paralympian. The Government recognise that high-quality, inclusive facilities help to ensure that everyone has access to sport, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) spoke about in her area. We will continue to support grassroots sport, including through the multi-sport

grassroots facilities programme, which will invest £123 million throughout the UK this year. We will also provide support through our arm's length body Sport England, which annually invests over £250 million of national lottery and Government money.

**Adam Jogee:** I welcome the Minister to her place in the first Westminster Hall debate since her appointment. I welcome the Sport England funding she just referred to, but I urge her to make representations to it to look beyond the big cities when it comes to how that funding is allocated—I see my hon. Friend the Member for Spen Valley (Kim Leadbeater) nodding—to places like Newcastle-under-Lyme.

**Stephanie Peacock:** As a Member of Parliament who represents a town, I hear my hon. Friend's comments.

In the interests of time, I want to address the questions that my hon. Friend the Member for Gower put to me. She asked that we work holistically across Government to address participation inequalities. As she will know, this Government are focused on delivering our five core missions, including breaking down barriers for everyone and fixing the NHS by improving the health of our nation. We recognise that increasing physical activity rates across the population is fundamental, which is why I will work with my ministerial colleagues to ensure that sport is a key part of delivering those missions. She also asked me to meet her and talk about the curriculum; as a former teacher, I would be delighted to do so.

This debate has been a brilliant opportunity to outline the Government's commitment to maximising the legacy of our biggest sporting events. We are of course committed to supporting sport and physical activity, whether that be our Olympic and Paralympic future stars or funding our grassroots sports system to ensure that everyone has the access to sport and physical activity that they deserve. I again thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.29 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## International Special Tribunal: Ukraine

[CLIVE EFFORD *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Richard Foord** (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the potential merits of an international special tribunal on crimes of aggression in Ukraine.

It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mr Efford. The motion should refer to “the crime” rather than “crimes”. It should be singular because this debate is about the crime of aggression. I think it might have been amended to the plural by the Table Office, but I very much hope that we can keep the crime of aggression as the topic for this debate.

It is 15 months since we last had a debate on the crime of aggression and the potential merits of a special tribunal on Ukraine. On 9 May 2023, I opened a debate in this Chamber some 15 months after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022. It is easy to forget the shock that many of us felt two and a half years ago when we woke up on 24 February to discover that our intelligence agencies had been right all along in their forecasts and that the Kremlin had deployed more than 150,000—some think nearer 200,000—of Russia’s armed forces personnel across the border into Ukraine. It is that original decision and original aggression on which this debate should focus.

The crime of aggression is defined as

“the planning, preparation, initiation or execution by a person in a position effectively to exercise control over or to direct the political or military action of a State”.

It is called a “leadership crime”, because under the Rome statute criminal responsibility is limited to

“a person in a position...to direct the political or military action of a State.”

The key thing about the crime of aggression is that it is the original sin—the leadership crime from which flow other international crimes, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

If Members have looked at newspapers this week, they may have seen that there has been press attention on Putin’s visit to Mongolia and suggestions that Mongolia should heed an International Criminal Court arrest warrant to transfer Putin to The Hague. That arrest warrant relates to an alleged war crime: the unlawful deportation of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation—like other war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Ukraine, that would not have occurred had it not been for the original aggression.

When I addressed the previous Government 15 months ago, I said to the Conservative Minister that the special tribunal should be as international in character as possible, because a national tribunal based on Ukrainian law, or a regional tribunal, would not be sufficiently international in character for the personal immunities—which relate to Heads of State, Foreign Secretaries and Presidents—to be disappplied.

The preference of G7 members has been for the creation of a Ukrainian court using Ukrainian law but based in The Hague, but the problem with such a proposal is that if the special tribunal is part of a domestic legal system, none of the international elements of the tribunal will apply. As Head of State, Putin

would have immunity in a foreign domestic court. Only Russia would be able to waive that immunity. Foreign Ministers and diplomats also have a similar personal immunity under the domestic courts of other countries, such as Ukraine.

With the Minsk agreements, we saw a willingness on the part of the Kremlin to accede to some demands only to row back on those agreements subsequently. In any future negotiation we cannot have some sort of bargaining or bartering away of personal immunities in favour of a political agreement that the Kremlin can then renege on, as it did before. Immunity applies to Heads of State and Governments for acts performed in the exercise of their functions, even after they have left office, and as such they should be dealt with by an international court at an intergovernmental level.

Fifteen months ago, the then Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Minister stated that the UK Government did not have a definitive view about whether a special tribunal should be a Ukrainian court established with international support or a fully international court. They said at that time that all options were on the table. Previously, the UK has traditionally held the position that only the UN Security Council has the power to disapply personal immunities, but clearly that idea would not fly given that Russia has veto power over any Security Council resolution.

The Minister responsible for Europe, the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), was present at the debate 15 months ago in his capacity then as a shadow Minister. He asked the Conservative Government about immunities and said they were a

“critical issue...that we would need to address in any model”—[*Official Report*, 9 May 2023; Vol. 732, c. 114WH.]

of a special tribunal.

In February this year, an international conference to consider a special tribunal took place just across the road from here, at Church House. The communiqué from the conference referred to the merit of a strictly international tribunal or a highly internationalised tribunal having key international features: an international agreement; reference to international law for the purposes of jurisdiction; significant international components, such as prosecutors, judges and venue; and firm international backing, where possible, from international and regional organisations. The communiqué said:

“We believe this would offer the best hope of disapplying relevant immunities and give a tribunal full legitimacy, and complement the ongoing work of the ICC (in investigating alleged acts of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed on the territory of Ukraine).”

The effect of lifting immunities could relate to that most precious thing for any tyrant: their reputation. The late Paddy Ashdown visited Slobodan Milošević several weeks before NATO military action against Belgrade in 1999. Lord Ashdown commented that Milošević “seemed more frightened by the threat of indictment by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, than...of NATO bombing”.

Twenty years ago, at the height of liberal interventionism by what at the time we called rather grandly “the international community”, Lord Ashdown reflected on international justice in relation to war, writing that

“these new courts and tribunals, which the world has established in recent years...have the potential to become instruments not only for justice, but also for prevention, since they can represent a...warning to belligerent or tyrannical leaders.”



These days, there is far less talk of a “global village”, and terms like “international community” are used far less readily and do not strike a chord in the way they did 25 years ago. In February 2022, when the UN Security Council considered a resolution condemning Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, both India and China abstained. The Council of Europe is seeking to fill the gap. An international tribunal based on a treaty with the Council of Europe would be sufficiently international to overcome the personal immunities, if its founding treaty was open to any state to sign and it was ratified by at least 60 states. The involvement of the Council of Europe in the creation of a special tribunal, together with the potential accession of non-member states from outside Europe to the treaty creating such a tribunal, would contribute legitimacy to the effort to prosecute the crime of aggression committed in Ukraine.

Yesterday evening, I talked to someone else who participated in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Sir Geoffrey Nice was the lead prosecutor of Slobodan Milošević for the UN, and he wrote the following to me after our conversation:

“No self-respecting lawyer—indeed, no self-respecting human—should have anything to do with any court premised”

on

“an immunity, granted by political agreement”.

I know that this issue is of genuine interest to the Minister, and I look forward to hearing any contribution from her or from other Members about whether the UK should have a stance whereby personal immunities should be disappplied. Surely, we cannot see immunities applying for President Putin, President Lukashenko, Sergey Lavrov and other senior architects of the aggression in Ukraine.

**Clive Efford (in the Chair):** I remind Members to bob in their place if they intend to speak in the debate.

2.40 pm

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Efford. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) for securing this important debate. The fact that it is the second time in a year that he has brought the issue to the House, and his first Westminster Hall debate in this Parliament, shows his and the Liberal Democrats’ commitment to Ukraine, which is unwavering, as is that of the entire House.

Like Members from all parties, I have been appalled by the violence and devastation that we have witnessed on our doorstep since Putin’s illegal invasion. Homes, schools and hospitals have been destroyed by Putin’s bombs. Communities have been turned into war zones. Although the conflict has faded from the headlines somewhat, the war wages on. Just one week ago, Ukraine was subject to an enormous air attack, with Russia launching 127 missiles and 109 attack drones overnight and into Monday morning. At least seven people were killed and dozens were wounded. The attack appeared to target Ukraine’s energy infrastructure. Ukrainian MP Kira Rudik, a member of our sister party Holos, raised concerns that Russia

“keeps bringing us closer and closer to that total blackout.”

She says that homes in Kyiv do not have electricity for the majority of the day and people are really worried about how they will get through the winter.

It is clear that Russia’s aggressive actions in Ukraine are dangerous and destabilising. Its war is illegal and it continues to press forward with egregious breaches of international law, so I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth has raised the potential for a special tribunal on the crime of aggression. Human rights and the rule of law are at the core of Liberal Democrat values. Where there are breaches of international law, it is right that those responsible are held to account without fear or favour.

A crime of aggression consists of

“the planning, preparation, initiation or execution, by a person in a position effectively to exercise control over or to direct the political or military action of a State, of an act of aggression”.

In the case of Russia’s actions in Ukraine, there is clearly a case to answer. The Liberal Democrats wholeheartedly back our international institutions like the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice. Their processes and judgments should be supported.

**Stephen Gethins** (Arbroath and Broughty Ferry) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for taking my intervention and pay tribute to the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) for securing this important debate. Does the hon. Lady agree that the international rules-based system has a crucial role to play and that, today of all days, the appalling attack on Poltava underlines the need for a tribunal?

**Layla Moran:** There is nothing in what the hon. Gentleman said to disagree with. The world is a tumultuous place and it has never been more important to have a strong international rules-based order. Right now, it feels very rickety. A special tribunal is another way in which we can show that the international community can act in concert to bring perpetrators of injustices to account.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth said so clearly, the courts are restricted in the case of the crime of aggression in Ukraine. As neither Ukraine nor the Russian Federation is party to the Rome statute, the court cannot exercise jurisdiction in the case of the crime of aggression. Given Russia’s membership of the Security Council, it would veto any efforts of that council to refer it to the court.

A special crimes tribunal would allow those responsible to be held accountable for their crimes and not escape international justice through legal loopholes. The fact that Ukraine supports a special tribunal should be reason enough to pursue one. President Zelensky said:

“If we want true justice, we should not look for excuses and should not refer to the shortcomings of the current international law, but make bold decisions that will correct the shortcomings of those norms”.

The Liberal Democrats were pleased to see the previous Government join the core group dedicated to achieving accountability for Russia’s aggression against Ukraine back in 2023, but there has been slow progress since then. Perhaps most concerningly, a lead King’s counsel suggested earlier this year that politicking within the ICC itself was halting the process. Philippe Sands KC, a leading advocate of an international tribunal, said it was

“so sad the institution that seems most opposed to this idea is the ICC in the form of its prosecutor and some of its judges. This is not an issue of principle for them, but an issue of turf.”

[Layla Moran]

I sincerely hope that he is wrong in that assessment and that they will not stand in the way—nor, indeed, should anyone else. I am interested to hear what the new Minister has to say about the Government's position and exactly what steps they are taking at a diplomatic level to advance the progress of a special tribunal.

Putin underestimates the brave resistance of Ukrainians and their commitment to their democracy, their liberty and their country. As Putin redoubles his efforts to attack Ukraine, so too must we redouble ours to stand in their defence. The spectre of a second Trump presidency has Putin rubbing his hands together. We only have one option: to stand with our Ukrainian allies as they seek to bravely resist Russia's illegal invasion. That means working with international partners to establish a special tribunal to make sure that Putin is held to account for his crimes. As the new Government look to re-establish Britain's place on the world stage, this is a golden opportunity to show the rest of the world that when we stand up for international law, we mean it.

2.46 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I am a well-known advocate for Ukraine and have proudly worn a ribbon on my jacket for the last two years. I, and others, do not do that as a habit; it is a reminder for those across the world who think that things are getting better in Ukraine. The fact is that they are not.

I thank the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) for bringing forward the debate. I was happy to be a co-signatory in his request to the Backbench Committee. It is also nice to see a lot of new faces here, as well as those of some returning Members. They all stand united to support Ukraine in the world in which we live.

Wearing the ribbon is a reminder that all is not well in the world. I have often referred to my hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell), who said, "I think the world's gone mad." All I will say is that I think it has. The Bible refers to

"wars and rumours of wars".

I cannot remember there being as many wars in the world as there are at this moment in time.

When I am opening a charity shop in my local high street, for example, my wearing the ribbon emboldens Ukrainian refugees—we all have them in our constituencies—to come and say that they are really pleased to see us wearing one. It is a way of encouraging the Ukrainians living in my and, indeed, everyone's constituencies to be aware that their Member of Parliament is doing his best for them.

I also wear the ribbon because I want to remind others that steps need to be taken not simply to help Ukraine but to remind the despots in this world that there is a core value that emboldens the allies and all of us in this room collectively, irrespective of our political aspirations, to stand together. That is the cause of freedom, liberty and democracy; the right to make our own decisions.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does my hon. Friend agree that in standing with Ukraine, as he quite rightly indicates, we should be pressing the

Government to ensure the sanctions put in place are more rigidly enforced? The mistake that many in the west made did not just happen two years ago but, in fact, 10 years ago when Crimea was invaded. Unless Putin sees that the west is prepared to stand up to him, he will continue with his aggression, murder and butchery as before.

**Jim Shannon:** My hon. Friend always speaks words of wisdom, and those words are appropriate for where we are. I am not smarter than anybody else—I never profess to be—but many of us at that time thought we needed to stand up to what was happening in Crimea. We did not. I am not blaming anybody for that; it is just a fact of where we were. If we had done it then, the attacks in Donbas would not have happened with the same level of ferocity. We need to be clear on where we stand and what we are trying to do.

Like others, I have a thriving Ukrainian population in my constituency. The previous Government's policy of letting in Ukrainians was very clear; I welcome what they did. I am pleased, by the way, to see the Minister in her place, and I look forward to her response. I do not mean to give her a big head, but she has shown a lot of confidence in the Chamber in the last few days and many of us have been impressed by how she has responded to questions. I am also pleased to see the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Rutland and Stamford (Alicia Kearns), in her place. She and I have been friends ever since she has been here, and we look forward to her contribution.

I am happy to have helped many Ukrainians in my constituency of Strangford with visas for their time staying here, and with jobs and places in school. Ballynahinch high school in Strangford has greatly embraced Ukrainians; it has a class of specifically Ukrainian students coming from families who work in the businesses around Ballynahinch and further afield. It has teachers, classroom assistants and domestic staff from Ukraine. That is what they are doing in Ballynahinch.

I have probably talked to my hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry about this, but our intention is to have an event in September, or certainly in October if we are spared. The principal of Ballynahinch high school, Paul Marks, wants to organise an event where the chefs will make the meals and the pupils will serve the tables, but the guests will be those of Ukrainian descent living in Northern Ireland. I think it is a great thing to do; I know others have done it across their constituencies. It is a way of encouraging those Ukrainians and showing that they are very much in our thoughts.

I welcome the debate. Again, I thank the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth for bringing it to the Floor to highlight not simply the plight of the Ukrainian people, but the fact that there is an onus on us all to call this issue out for what it is and take the appropriate international steps. The UN General Assembly in 1974 agreed the definition of aggression in article 1—and my goodness, we watch it every day with Russia against Ukraine. It lists some of the acts that could amount to aggression, and we could say that every one of them has happened yesterday in Ukraine or the day before that, because they have. Those acts include invasion, occupation or annexation of another state's territory, bombardment of another state's territory, blockades of ports or coasts, and attacks by one armed force against another. Russia is guilty of all those.

It is important to say this sometimes when we are blaming Russia. There are many good people in Russia who do not subscribe to what has happened, but they are not often heard because of the oppression that happens there. Sometimes it is good to remind ourselves that not all Russians are bad.

**Layla Moran:** I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for saying that. I speak to our sister party, Yabloko, on a regular basis using forms of communication that it deems safe at the time. Over and over again, its brave protesters have ended up in jail. Some have had death threats, and they describe their own horror at what Putin is doing. They are keen to say that he does not speak for them but they find themselves completely silenced, so I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that point. Does he agree that we should do more to raise their voices in this Parliament?

**Jim Shannon:** I do. When the Minister responds, perhaps she can give us some indication of what can be done to help those groups in Russia, as much as we can without drawing attention to them. I am conscious that it is easy for me to comment standing here in Westminster Hall, but if the Russian people we are encouraging take a stand, that may be detrimental to their future wellbeing. I am conscious of what we do, but the Minister may indicate some way in which we can do something.

It is abundantly clear that even in the most broad terms, Russia is guilty of aggression. The question is what we do with that information. This debate is an opportunity to show solidarity with Ukrainians, and to stand alongside Ukrainians both here at home and in Ukraine. Do we continue to sit on the sidelines and direct a few anti-tank missiles their way? The ones that we produce at Thales in Northern Ireland have been to the detriment of the Russian armoury, and they have been effective in every way. What makes them even more effective is that the Ukrainians have been able to adapt those weapons to take the threat and the battle straight to Russia.

I have had the opportunity, together with my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), to visit Thales—I know that we cannot talk about some of the things we were told, so I am not saying them. However, we can see, through their bravery and courage, what the Ukrainian soldiers can do with the right weaponry. So do we send another aid package, which will help in the short term but will not end this aggression? Or do we step up and stand with the Ukrainians to push back against the actions of Putin and his regime, and allow the country to rebuild?

Along with others in this House, and as a Christian, I regularly pray for the Ukrainians, and pray that God will deliver them. Simply put, I believe that that can happen, and that is why we lift those prayers to the God who answers them. I am always minded of the story in the Bible of David and Goliath; I suggest that Ukraine is clearly the David and Russia is clearly the Goliath—and we know what happened in that battle. We pray that this battle will be one that Ukraine will win.

It has long been my opinion that we should be doing more. That is not a criticism of anybody—I do not mean it that way. I just mean to ask: what more can we do? I believe there are things we can do collectively. We can encourage the Minister, our Government and our

Prime Minister to take the stand that the Ukrainians wish us to take. I believe we should be doing more, and I will use the debate introduced by the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth to hammer home that point.

If we have an international tribunal to report what we already know to be true, it follows that we must do more than what we are doing. I am minded also of the genocide that Russian soldiers have carried out against the Ukrainians—the murder of innocent people—as well as the sexual abuse of many women and young girls. I actually find it quite difficult to even imagine—indeed, I do not want to imagine—some of the things that have happened. Abuse has been carried out against children as young as eight and women as old as 80 by Russian monsters; that is what they are.

Like the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth, I want there to be accountability. That is what everyone across this House asks for today: to have that accountability. Whoever those people are and wherever they want to hide, there will be no hiding place for them if we have anything to do with it.

I make this plea also as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief. I have done it before—I did it way back at the time of Crimea, because I knew what was happening there. I am a member of the Baptist church, which does not make me any smarter or any better than anybody else, but it does give me access to some of the information that flows back. In the Donbas region, some Baptist pastors have gone missing and churches have been destroyed. There is a catalogue of hate, human rights abuse, physical torture and murder by Russians against people with a different religious viewpoint from that of the Orthodox Church. I am not being critical of those of the Orthodox Church; I am just making the point that there is no accountability. People have gone missing and we do not know where they are; I suspect they are no longer in this world. Again, that underlines that Russia has a lot to answer for.

It follows that the international community must determine together that the days of sitting on the sidelines are done and that attempts not to anger Putin must end. Putin must understand that his attempted invasion of Ukraine has failed and that he must withdraw his troops. His people must look to rebuilding their own nation, which he has ravaged with this war. It is not only the Ukrainians who deserve peace, as the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) said in her intervention—let us remember that the good people of Russia also deserve that. We must help them to achieve it as well. If there was a change of Government in Russia, it would undoubtedly bring peace within the region and let people have a life again.

In conclusion, I welcome this debate. More than that, I would welcome a determination by the UN. With every single ally determining that such action is taken, the message sent to China, North Korea and any other despotic regime would be that the UN is not a talking shop. Their guilt will make them accountable. I support the people of Ukraine and of Russia, and the motion we are debating. Let us call this what it is, and get the work that needs to be done finished—the quicker, the better.



3 pm

**Alicia Kearns** (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Efford. I thank the hon. and gallant Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) for securing this important debate. I was grateful for his co-operation in the previous Parliament on not only Ukraine but the Balkans, which is an area of particular interest to us both.

I am proud that, over the past few years, the UK has consistently led international efforts to support Ukraine. In government, the Conservative party made sure that we were the party that stood behind Ukraine and was its first port of call. In opposition, we will continue in that spirit of the UK being Ukraine's safe harbour. Whether on pursuing justice through international tribunals, seizing Russian state assets, supporting the ICC in its investigations, enforcing sanctions, or ensuring that Ukraine has the weaponry it requires to win, the UK must continue to lead.

However, I will start on a disappointing note. I was heartbroken to hear President Zelensky say that Britain's leadership on Ukraine has slowed down. It is vital that the new Government demonstrate the same commitment that we did; they must be resolute. It is extraordinary for another world leader to criticise the UK or to criticise any partner publicly. His words were that the UK had demonstrated

"true leadership—in arms, politics, and support for Ukrainian society",

which had "saved thousands of lives", but that that had now "slowed down". The Government will have the full support of everyone on the Conservative Benches and, indeed, of the party of the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth—if they step back up to the plate. We cannot have our greatest ally question our support in any way at this time. Conversely, although the Government will have our full support if they do that, we will provide full scrutiny should such support slip.

I welcome today's contributions by the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), who made a similar point, and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). They have both been consistent in their support for not only Ukraine but human rights around the world.

A special tribunal on Russia's crime of aggression would formalise Russian culpability for the invasion of Ukraine. It would prevent Putin from embedding his counterfactual narrative in history, which we should be in no doubt is what he is seeking to do. It would ensure that the brave women, men and children of Ukraine—such as Nika, from my team, who joins us in the Public Gallery—do not suffer from Russia's attempts to rewrite their history and eradicate their truth. It would give survivors their day in court, showing beyond doubt that the world cares and listens, and that they will be heard. It would also demonstrate—as the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth said—that even members of the UN Security Council are not immune from international law.

The moral case for seeking justice for Russia's crime of aggression is indisputable, and the Government's role is to find the legal means to deliver that. None of us should pretend it is easy; it is not, and the G7 countries have grappled with finding a way to deliver it. The crime of aggression was adopted into international law by the UN General Assembly in 1971. As the hon. Member for

Strangford set out, the definition agreed by the UN makes it clear that there is a clear case for Russia to answer. Rather than repeating the list that he provided, I will just add a couple of points. The sponsorship of armed irregulars since 2014—the so-called "little green men" in Donbas—is an additional reason to bring a case against Russia. There is also a case against Belarus for allowing the use of its territory as a launch pad for the invasion.

Why a special tribunal? As the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon stated, neither Ukraine nor Russia is a party to the Rome statute, meaning that the ICC cannot prosecute Russia for its acts of aggression, unlike in relation to other areas, such as Putin's abduction of Ukrainian children. Ukraine is clear that the world must devise an alternative legal route for justice. As the initial crime led to all subsequent atrocities, ensuring accountability for it is key.

Likewise, we need to demonstrate flexibility and a determination to guarantee accountability for crimes, both to deter future breaches of international law and to strengthen it in an increasingly dangerous world. Ukraine and the principle of justice demand a solution, and the Conservative Government devoted a huge amount of time and energy to trying to deliver one: the UK is part of the core group of 40 states working on a deliverable form of tribunal; we led on the G7 proposals for a hybrid tribunal, which would solve some of the issues to do with immunity and legitimacy; and as the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth said, there was a special conference in London on the topic of the special tribunal, where I contributed to the published communiqué.

The moral case for a special tribunal is clear and has a firm basis in international and UK law, and the previous Conservative Government led efforts to find a solution, but that was not straightforward. We now need to hear how this Government intend to carry on that important work. Ukraine has made it clear that a special tribunal with elements of international involvement is not possible on its territory without changes to its constitution, and it cannot deliver that during a time of martial law. Likewise, the conventional route of establishing a special international tribunal through the UN Security Council is blocked, due to Russia's veto. Finally, a tribunal must find a form that allows Russia's leadership to be tried in absentia—to the conversation that took place in this debate about individual culpability—and the diplomatic immunities given in domestic courts must be dealt with.

There have been suggestions about holding the tribunal in a third country, and the Dutch Government have now stepped forward and reportedly expressed their willingness to host this special court. Given that the Netherlands has a long history of hosting international human rights courts, that would seem an intelligent and practical option, but it still requires an international mandate. As Foreign Secretary, Lord Cameron supported the Council of Europe's work to establish a viable special tribunal in co-operation with Ukraine. Today, I urge the UK to lobby for a vote at the UN General Assembly in September to establish a special tribunal in a third country, in conjunction with the Netherlands.

Holding Russia accountable for the crime of aggression is vital, but it requires imagination and drive in the face of deeply complex legal questions. As the war approaches

its third year, the form of a viable tribunal appears to be taking shape: a special tribunal, held in a third country, established by a treaty between the Council of Europe and Ukraine, and supported by a wider membership in the UN General Assembly. That is the best route to justice. The previous Government's work got us to this point and we sincerely hope the current Government maintain the focus necessary to finish the job.

Turning to my questions, I want to ask first for an update on any discussions held with my friend the prosecutor general of Ukraine, Andriy Kostin. Has the Minister for Europe held discussions with his Ukrainian counterpart on establishing the tribunal? Do the Government support a special international tribunal held in a third country? Can they update us on any progress made by the Council of Europe on agreeing a format? What conversations are the Government having with non-European partners to secure their support for an international tribunal? What form do the Government see as best placed to solve the diplomatic immunity issues regarding Russia's leaders? Finally, will the Minister confirm that strong representations will be made to Mongolia following its failure to arrest President Putin when he was on its soil this week?

The crime of aggression is clearly defined in international law. It includes supporting irregular forces against a state, bombardment, invasion, occupation and annexation. It is the original sin from which all of Russia's other crimes have come and it must now be tried. A special tribunal could determine formally that Russia committed an act of aggression against Ukraine, a peaceful neighbouring state. That would cement truth into history and block Putin's revisionist nonsense from taking root. Truth is fundamental to the future, and atrocity denial is a deliberate attack on victims and survivors. Ukrainians know that more than most, having endured years of the Holodomor denial under the Soviet Union and the continued lies by Russia. Putin understands the power of narrative and deliberately uses a warped past as a weapon to justify present wrongs. The impetus for a special tribunal on Russian aggression is therefore clear but, yes, the legal route is complex.

The Conservatives' work in government, with support across the House and in partnership with our allies, has brought us close to a solution. We now need to see it delivered for every Ukrainian who has suffered, for the victory of right over wrong, and to set a precedent to deter other oppressor states from their own acts of aggression. I again thank the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth for calling this important debate. I genuinely wish the Minister every success in these efforts. These issues are complex and thorny, but we finally have a way ahead, and it seems that there is international consensus.

3.8 pm

**The Minister for Development (Anneliese Dodds):** It is a real pleasure to speak in this important debate with you in the chair, Mr Efford. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) for securing it and for his great interest in this subject over a long period, including in the APPG on Ukraine. As I am sure the hon. Member knows, the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), would have been delighted to take part in the debate—they visited Ukraine together

previously—but my hon. Friend is travelling elsewhere on ministerial duties, so I am here, and I am pleased to be responding on behalf of the Government.

I want to start by re-emphasising the comments made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) about the need for continued cross-party support for Ukraine and our united determination to stand against Putin's aggression. We have seen that determination and commitment from the people of the UK in their hospitality and support for Ukrainians who have come here. That has been incredibly important.

It is always a pleasure to serve opposite the hon. Member for Rutland and Stamford (Alicia Kearns), but I want to set out from the beginning that the new UK Government's support for Ukraine could not be clearer. As I know she is aware, the Prime Minister himself was clear that there would be a commitment from the new UK Government of military support worth £3 billion a year until 2030-31 or for as long as is necessary. That is an unprecedented commitment. Of course, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary all spoke with their opposite numbers in Ukraine within the first hours of the new Government coming into post, and we have prioritised this issue within both NATO and the European Political Community. It really is important that we continue to see that united support and that we do not see this issue being politicised. That would be a terrible shame and would not support Ukraine in its hour of need.

**Alicia Kearns:** I think that the right hon. Lady would recognise, however, that President Zelensky cannot be accused of politicising the situation. If the Conservative party were still in power, and if the right hon. Lady had heard President Zelensky say what he did, I would have heard about it every single moment of every single day. We have been courteous in raising it, and it is right to raise it, because we can never again hear President Zelensky say—as he did no more than six weeks into a Labour Government—that he is deeply concerned. I am relieved and grateful to hear the right hon. Lady's assurances today, and I hope we can move forward in exactly that spirit of seeing the support that Ukraine deserves.

**Anneliese Dodds:** That support and that united approach are incredibly important. I will come back to the reasons in a moment, but Ukraine needs a united, continued front and, above all, for the UK to play a role not just directly in providing military support along with other nations, but in ensuring accountability, which is the subject of this debate. I was talking particularly about taking party political approaches to this issue, which the current Government avoided doing in opposition. It is important that we continue in that way; I know that the hon. Lady will want to ensure that that is the case, and I am grateful for her comments just now. As was mentioned earlier, it is also important that, where we see an increased prevalence of conflict globally—sadly, I am well aware of that as the Minister for Development—we continue to have that unified voice on the UK's position.

Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine is clearly a violation of the UN charter, and it strikes at the very heart of the rules on which our security and prosperity depend. The atrocities in Ukraine are some of the worst we have seen in Europe since world war two. Over six million Ukrainians have been forced to flee the country, over three million

[Anneliese Dodds]

have been internally displaced, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reports that over 11,000 civilians have been killed and at least 23,600 have been injured. The attacks that we saw, disturbingly, on 26 and 27 August represent continued evidence that Russia is intentionally targeting civilian energy infrastructure, without any regard for the safety and livelihood of millions of Ukrainians. Those attacks threaten civil access to power, heating and water supply, and they risk a further humanitarian crisis this winter. My constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), spoke eloquently on that subject in her contribution. We also heard from the hon. Member for Arbroath and Broughty Ferry (Stephen Gethins) about concerning evidence of developments even today regarding additional instances of Putin's aggression towards the people of Ukraine.

Overall, Ukraine's Office of the Prosecutor General has recorded more than 135,000 incidents of alleged war crimes, including murder, rape and the deportation of children. They appal us all. The Russian missile that hit a children's hospital in July is yet further evidence of Putin's callous disregard for human life. Yesterday, in the House—a number of Members here were present—we discussed the recent attacks that impacted on children in a playground in Kharkiv, as well as a children's rehabilitation centre and orphanage.

We really need to see accountability, which Ukraine obviously wants for both those hideous atrocities and the illegal, unprovoked invasion from which these war crimes stem. I appreciated the clarification at the very beginning from the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth: there is the initial illegal, unprovoked invasion and what has followed from it—he was right to separate the two.

The UK is committed to ensuring that Russia is held to account for its actions, and is leading efforts to refer the situation in Ukraine to the International Criminal Court and to ensure that it then takes action as an independent court. I can inform Members that the referral has secured the support of 42 other countries; it is the biggest state referral in the history of the ICC, enabling the prosecutor to proceed straight to investigation without the need for judicial approval. Having led the group referral, the UK is committed to making sure that the ICC has what it needs to continue that work. There has obviously been a financial contribution under the previous Government, for which we are grateful, including £2.3 million in additional contributions to the Court since the start of the war. That funding has increase the ICC's capacity to collect evidence and provide enhanced psychosocial support for witnesses and survivors of the atrocities committed by Russia.

In response to the comments from the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon, I want to be clear that the ICC is an independent judicial institution, and it is for the ICC prosecutor to determine the nature and focus of the Court's investigations. They are now well under way and making progress. In 2023, the ICC issued arrest warrants for President Putin and his children's rights commissioner, Maria Lvova-Belova, for the unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children. When we talk about indictment and the provision of warrants, I want to underline the existence of that warrant for Putin from

the ICC. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Rutland and Stamford, mentioned Putin's visit to Mongolia and we have of course raised our concerns with the Mongolian authorities about their decision to host President Putin in those circumstances. We are absolutely clear that we respect the independence and the role of the ICC.

Following those initial warrants, we have also seen warrants issued in March for top Russian commanders Sergei Kobylash and Viktor Sokolov for directing missile attacks at civilian objects, including Ukrainian electricity infrastructure. In June, arrest warrants were issued for the former Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu and the chief of general staff for the Russian armed forces, Valery Gerasimov. While the list of ICC subjects is growing, it will be in the courts of Ukraine—not The Hague—that the majority of cases will be heard.

In May 2022, under the previous Government—again, we are grateful for this action—the UK established the atrocity crimes advisory group, or ACA, with the European Union and the US to provide advice and support to the office of the prosecutor general of Ukraine and to enhance capacity to investigate and prosecute war crimes through their domestic system. Overall UK funding for this work has come to £6.2 million, and UK experts have provided advice on over 100 atrocity crimes cases at central and regional levels. That work very much continues.

UK support for Ukraine's investigations has been further boosted by the deployment of our former ICC judge, Sir Howard Morrison KC. People in this Chamber will be well aware of his eminence as an adviser to Ukraine's prosecutor general. Let me say in response to comments from Opposition Members that that support continues. He has overseen the delivery of war crimes training to 294 Ukrainian judges, 86 prosecutors, and 19 investigators.

We support Ukraine's calls for accountability for the crime of aggression, as well as for the decision to invade Ukraine illegally and without provocation, from which so many further crimes have followed. As we made clear in our manifesto, the new Government will support work towards establishing a special tribunal on the crime of aggression against Ukraine—those responsible for the hideous atrocities we have seen there must be held to account for their actions.

Agreement on the details of the tribunal will matter if it is to be legally sound and to attract the broad international support that will be crucial to its legitimacy and, ultimately, its impact. If we want this to work, and we do, we need to get it right, so we continue to play an active role in the core group, established and led by Ukraine, to explore options for achieving criminal accountability, including through a special tribunal. As some Members will know, the group brings together many experts.

**David Taylor** (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. How we think through the special tribunal and the difficulties in establishing it have been well covered in the debate. Forty of the greatest legal minds have come together to consider the issue, including Professor Akande, a member of the UN international law commission, in a group convened by former Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Would the Minister consider meeting the group to think through some of the complicated issues that are a part of achieving what we all want to see, which is Putin and others facing accountability for their crimes?



**Anneliese Dodds:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that important point. UK legal expertise is already directly involved in the process through that contribution to the group, but I am sure that the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth, would be keen to speak to those pre-eminent lawyers to understand more about what we can do in that area. The need is clearly urgent, but we are also resolutely focused on ensuring that any tribunal has the broad international support that it needs to ensure its legitimacy.

As well as doing what we can as the UK, bilaterally we are making sure that we are working with international partners, as Members would expect. That process will need to address all the critical issues. The hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth raised the specific issue of Head of State immunity, which is one of those critical issues and one that we, together with partners from more than 40 states and institutions, are discussing in the core group established by Ukraine. We appreciate the necessity of holding all those responsible for this war of aggression to account.

The UK, alongside 40 other states, is also a founding member of the international register of damage for Ukraine, which allows individuals to file claims for loss, injury and damage caused by Russia's illegal invasion. It is an important first step as part of an international compensation mechanism as well as in achieving the required accountability.

Russia must be held responsible for its illegal war in Ukraine. That includes its obligations under international law to pay for the damage that it has caused. Together with our G7 partners, we have agreed to make approximately \$50 billion available to Ukraine by the end of the year by advancing the extraordinary profits generated by immobilised Russian sovereign assets in the European Union.

The critical subject of sanctions was mentioned by the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell), who is no longer in his place. The new Government are absolutely determined to ensure that sanctions are not circumvented and that we have a robust regime. I am sure Members will be pleased to know that, very soon after the election and through the European political community, the UK managed to ensure a call to action against Russia's shadow fleet, which has unfortunately been significant in the avoidance of sanctions. We are taking resolute action in that area.

The hon. Member for Strangford, who I thank for his kind remarks, rightly mentioned sanctions. He is right to detail the dreadful situation in Russia. My constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon, also mentioned it. For two decades, Putin's Kremlin has presided over a significant deterioration of human rights. That has intensified over the past two years, and we stand with those who have been impacted by it. We have been particularly concerned about those detained on political grounds—the very brave individuals who have stood for human rights and human dignity. We continue to raise cases, particularly those of British nationals. We have seen some developments, but we still see the dreadful persecution of those who have raised human rights issues.

I will round off my remarks by thanking all Members for their interventions, which have been incredibly powerful and important. I reiterate that this Government are

determined to hold Russia to account for its illegal and barbaric actions in Ukraine. With Ukraine and our other partners we share the goal of securing accountability for the crimes that have been committed. We are supporting Ukraine to investigate and prosecute those responsible for atrocities, as well as supporting the investigation by the ICC. We will continue to engage in international fora, including the core group looking at the special tribunal proposals, and to actively work on those.

Tomorrow, the Lord Chancellor will be in Vilnius to attend the conference of the Ministers of Justice of the Council of Europe, where we look forward to engaging with our partners on achieving justice for Ukraine. The hon. Member for Rutland and Stamford rightly referred to the significance of action within the Council of Europe in that regard. We are seeking to make progress there, including this week. Together we will ensure that allegations of international crimes are investigated robustly and independently, and we will continue to stand by the brave people of Ukraine for as long as it takes as they defend not only their freedom but our shared security and prosperity.

3.26 pm

**Richard Foord:** I am grateful to all hon. Members who have participated in the debate. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) took us back to first principles when he talked about freedom, liberty and democracy. It is a reminder that while we are talking about arcane legal matters, this is also a matter of the self-determination of the Ukrainian people and their ability to choose their own future. He also gave us the image of David and Goliath, and it is partly through the proposed special tribunal that it is suggested the international community could try to tip the scales in favour of David.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell), who is no longer in the Chamber, talked about the loopholes in sanctions. He was right to do so; I was informed earlier this week that oil services companies are still actively doing business with Russian energy companies. SLB, which has UK offices at Buckingham Gate, is one such company. Essentially, though inadvertently, it is contributing funds to Moscow's war machine.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, reminded us of the important work of the core group of more than 40 states established in 2023. It is encouraging that the UK is part of that group, but we could be a more prominent voice were the Government to choose to go down that route. In addition, my hon. Friend talked about the spectre of a second Trump presidency. We know that Donald Trump regards himself as a dealmaker; he thinks of himself as someone able to broker a deal and get a compromise. When we are dealing with absolutes such as international justice and the crime of aggression, there is no room for that sort of grubby compromise, because on the line are the deaths of the 11,000 civilians that we have heard about this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Rutland and Stamford (Alicia Kearns) talked about the rewriting of history by Putin, which we definitely need to be wary of. He tends to engage in historical revisionism. Even before the full-scale invasion, he was engaged in that in relation to

[Richard Foord]

Ukraine. In December 2019, he talked about how Poland was somehow responsible for the attack by Nazi Germany because it had laid itself open to attack by Hitler's military machine. We need to make sure that the record of history is written correctly in relation to Russia and Putin.

The hon. Member for Rutland and Stamford also talked about UK support for Ukraine. I think that we should be very wary of getting into party political turf wars on that one. I see nobody from the Reform party in the Chamber, but that is the only political party in this Parliament not to buy into the consensus on UK support for Ukraine—long may the solid support between political parties continue. In the last Parliament, Grant Shapps, as Defence Secretary, announced an uplift in military aid for Ukraine from £2.5 billion to £3 billion, and that was welcomed automatically. We should not seek to score political points on this issue.

Finally, I am grateful to the Minister for her comments. I will continue to press the Government on the point about personal immunities that I led on, and I will talk to the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), who I know is very interested in this matter, too.

**Clive Efford (in the Chair):** For future reference, summing up is meant to be brief, but I was generous because we have plenty of time left.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the potential merits of an international special tribunal on crimes of aggression in Ukraine.

3.31 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## SEND Provision: Somerset

4 pm

**Clive Efford (in the Chair):** I will call Sarah Dyke to move the motion and then the Minister to respond. As is the convention for 30-minute debates, there will not be the opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up.

**Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered SEND services in Somerset.

I do apologise for being late, Mr Efford. I am slightly out of breath, but it is an honour to serve under you in the Chair. Before I start, I draw my fellow Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as a sitting Somerset councillor.

The current special educational needs and disabilities system is broken. Those with experience all report that it is far too adversarial, pitting families against councils and schools. The recent Isos Partnership report, produced in partnership with the County Councils Network and the Local Government Association, found that all stakeholders are acting reasonably, but are being failed by the system.

It is important to set out why the system is broken and the challenges that it faces. More children are being identified as having SEND—special educational needs and disabilities—than ever before. In January 2022, 14,000 children in Somerset were identified as having SEND; 4,000 of those children had education, health and care plans and the other 10,000 had some form of SEND support. Somerset is far from unique; SEND numbers have risen nationally. Since reforms to the system under the Children and Families Act 2014, the number of EHCPs has risen by 140%. More children have also had their needs left unmet in mainstream educational settings, a fact that places more emphasis on specialist schools.

Between 2014-15 and 2023-24, there has been a 60% increase in SEND placements in state-funded schools. Somerset Council officials have told me that the linchpin for the system failing has been the inability of mainstream education to cope with the sheer increase in demand within such a short time. The reality is that under the previous Conservative Government, schools and councils faced a huge real-terms cut in funding, which has undoubtedly had a negative impact on the provision that mainstream schools can provide.

The reliance on independent specialist schools has also increased pressure on councils. Somerset Council funding for children with EHCPs in mainstream settings is about £12 million a year and, despite having a quarter as many children in independent schools, the cost is more than double and, in addition, costs the council over £30 million per year. The difference in expenditure between children with EHCPs in independent schools and those in state-funded schools is vast. A typical child assessed as band 3 in a mainstream school will get £13,359 of total funding, whereas an independent school place can cost up to £100,000, plus £50,000 in transport costs. That is more than 10 times what a child with similar needs in a mainstream school is getting.

That brings me on to another element of failure. Even though the Government are investing more than ever in SEND provision, it is still significantly less than the actual spend by local authorities. Government funding

in the high needs block allocation has risen from £4.8 billion in 2014-15 to £9.2 billion in 2024-25, but analysis has shown that the actual figure for high needs spending by local authorities is £890 million more in 2023-24 and could rise to more than £1 billion over the next two years. Somerset Council's high needs forecast was evaluated by Newton Europe, which concluded that by 2027-28 the council would be carrying a formal deficit of £160 million. The statutory override on the debts means that they are kept off the books, but half of council leaders surveyed recently said that they would be insolvent in three years if that was removed.

The funding is also unequal across the country, leading to a postcode lottery in provision. Somerset Council is part of the f40 group, which includes the poorest funded councils in the country. Somerset will receive less than £8,000 gross dedicated grant funding per mainstream pupil in 2024-25—more than £5,000 less than the best-funded local authority in England, illustrating a massive disparity.

Rural areas such as Somerset also face huge costs in home to school transport due to the sheer size of the county. The average cost to Somerset Council of transport for a child with SEND is £10,000 per year, while some individual transport arrangements cost the council over £60,000 a year. Despite that investment and support, the outcomes for children with SEND have failed to improve over the last decade since the reforms in 2014.

I am inundated with casework from desperate parents who are at breaking point over their child's being unable to receive the education they deserve. One parent from Wincanton told me that their bright, intelligent child deserves to be cared for rather than ignored by the system following what was a harrowing experience. Even though their child has gone through the SEND system and has a placement in a specialist school, their needs are still not being met properly. To summarise, there is more demand than ever before and the system is costing more than ever before, but it is failing to deliver for some of the country's most vulnerable children.

I turn my attention now to a consequence of the failure of SEND services in Somerset. About 2,000 children in Somerset receive a home education. Although the council believes some of the children are receiving a home education for an entirely legitimate reason, many are being forced into home schooling as the child could not cope in school. Issues arising from a forced home education are twofold.

When a child moves to receive education at a place other than a school, they are automatically deleted from the school roll, resulting in the council's being unable to receive the dedicated grant funding for that child. Somerset Council estimates that that is costing the education system between £8 million and £10 million a year. It is almost impossible to retrieve that money to create space for the child in the system once they are off-rolled. That then creates a one-way exit from the system unless an EHCP is granted for the child at some point in the future. In any case, it would be a very slow and arduous process, because we know that nearly half of EHCPs take longer than the 20-week statutory period to be granted.

The tribunal system is far too traumatic and stressful for parents. While 98% of tribunal cases find in the parents' favour, that does not change the reality that councils are struggling to provide sufficient and appropriate services.

For parents who do not know how to navigate the tribunal process, it can be even more turbulent for them and their child. Somerset is struggling with the issue more than many other places across the country.

Somerset has the third-highest rate of school exclusions and the second highest rate of suspensions in England for children with SEND. Those exclusions and suspensions are primarily for persistent disruptive behaviour. Even where a child has not been identified with SEND, it has often subsequently been discovered that there is an undiagnosed need. That leaves them excluded from the system and fighting for a diagnosis and an EHCP in order to get back to school, where they should be, and receive the education that they deserve.

It is not surprising to learn that there is also a detrimental impact on parents. There are around 60,000 economically inactive adults in Somerset, and the council has reason to believe that at least some of those people have been forced to give up work because they care for their child at home. We can often forget the important childcare aspect of education. The impact of a breakdown in a child's education can have a wide range of consequences; sadly, in some cases, it can lead to a family breakdown. We need to undertake work on a national level to get to grips with the scale of the problem. I know the Government are proposing a register of children not in school, to understand the issues better, but we still need to create better routes to get children back into school.

Somerset council is supporting efforts to bring in a more flexible education system that would work to support children at home and to rebuild their ability to enter the system, but they need national support.

**Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con):** I thank the hon. Lady for bringing the debate to Westminster Hall. I have only been the Member for Bridgwater for two months and already have many letters from parents concerned about the system in Somerset for SEND. It is clear that the system is too adversarial and not working correctly. I support her plea for Somerset to be more generously funded—not more than others, but brought up to the average of the country.

**Clive Efford (in the Chair):** Is this an intervention on the hon. Member or a speech?

**Sir Ashley Fox:** Does the hon. Lady agree that the most pressing problem is delays in the system, particularly in making decisions, in creating an EHC plan and in assessing what the contents of that plan would be?

**Sarah Dyke:** The hon. Gentleman is correct. We know that, as I have already said, there are significant delays in children receiving their EHCP, so I call on the Government to speed up that process. As I have said, the most important thing is for our children to receive the education they deserve. We need to get them in school, where they should be, to have the best possible education.

Somerset council's flexible approach involves taking more compassionate actions to put children's needs at the forefront and to support them in their journey back into mainstream education. The Liberal Democrats want to support that work by creating a national body for SEND that would fund support for those with the



[Sarah Dyke]

very highest needs. A national body would support services to identify where early interventions are needed. That would lower future costs, since needs are so often exacerbated due to inaction.

We must look at other solutions and reforms that could make the system more efficient. Somerset council is utilising the funding it has and equalising funding between mainstream and specialist schools, but currently mainstream schools get a third less money than specialist schools. Somerset council believes that by spending the money in a smarter way, it can improve mainstream provision and create better opportunities for children. The new Government have pledged to take a community approach to SEND, and I await further details of what that will look like.

Aside from the children's wellbeing Bill, there was little mention of SEND in the King's Speech. The Government pledged to put children at the heart of education and children's services with that Bill, but to make real change we must put early interventions in place and create support within the mainstream system to reduce costs and the demand for specialist schools.

Part of the solution is to give local authorities with responsibility for education the powers and resources to act as strategic education authorities for their area, including responsibility for places planning, exclusions, administering admissions and SEND functions. The importance of those issues cannot be overstated as evidenced by the three debates on SEND happening in this place this week alone.

I have spoken about issues specific to Somerset, but the crisis affects children and families across the country. We simply cannot let it go on any longer. Delays in action and reform will cost those within the SEND system and will increase the cost to the public purse, as the finances needed to fix the system just carry on increasing over time. I would like to hear more details from the Minister on how the Government will resolve the issues embedded in the system and support the nation's children to secure the education that they deserve.

4.15 pm

**The Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell):**

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Efford. I congratulate the hon. Member for Glastonbury and Somerton (Sarah Dyke) on securing a debate on this incredibly important subject. She is right—three such debates are scheduled for this week, which shows how important and pressing the matter is.

The hon. Lady has a keen interest in special educational needs and disabilities, which she has expressed today in her comments, and she demonstrates strong advocacy for the children and families in her constituency. She described the SEND system as broken, and I agree. She made some very thoughtful comments on how we can seek to address some of the current challenges, which I will come on to.

As a Government committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity and giving every child the best start in life, we know that that means ensuring that all children and young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, receive the right support to succeed in their education and lead happy, healthy and productive lives.

There are more than 1.6 million children and young people in England who have special educational needs. For far too long, too many families have been let down by a system that is not working. The previous Secretary of State for Education said the system was “lose, lose, lose” and she was right. For years, the Conservatives knew the system was not working, but they left families to be failed.

Despite high needs funding for children and young people with complex special educational needs and disabilities rising to higher and higher levels, confidence in the SEND system is low. Tribunal rates are rising, as the hon. Lady described, and there are increasingly long waits for support. Far too many children with special educational needs fall behind their peers and do not reach the expected levels in fundamental reading, writing and maths skills. Just one in four special educational needs pupils achieve expected standards at the end of primary school.

Families are struggling to get their children the support they need and, more importantly, deserve. This must change. After years in which parents have been frustrated by empty promises and by reform programmes that have been delayed time and again, this Government will be honest with families.

We are utterly committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools—as the hon. Lady highlighted, that is an important part of solving this issue—as well as ensuring that special schools can cater to those with the most complex needs. We are determined to restore parents' trust that their child will get the support they need to flourish.

We know that effective early identification and intervention can reduce the impact that a special educational need or disability may have in the long term. That is why in July we announced that funded support for 11,100 schools registered to the Nuffield early language intervention programme would continue in the year 2024-25. That will help pupils who need extra support with speech and language development to find their voice.

There are no quick fixes for these deep-rooted issues. After 14 years, I can scarcely see a system that is not broken or in desperate need of reform, and which is so important that we fix. Let me be clear. We have started the work already. Fixing our SEND system will be a priority for this Department, but it will take time. A decade of national renewal is what we must deliver to give every child the best start—one that they deserve. However, the Government cannot do it alone. We will work with the sector as an essential and valued partner, to ensure that our approach is fully planned and delivered with parents, schools and councils, and with the expert staff who go above and beyond to help children.

We are acting as quickly as we can to respond to the cost pressures in the SEND system, which are causing real financial problems in some local authorities, including in Somerset. Before the parliamentary recess, we announced a new core schools budget grant, which will provide special and alternative provision schools with over £140 million of extra funding in this financial year of 2024-25, to help with the extra costs of this year's teachers' pay award and the outcome of the negotiations on an increase for support staff. That is in addition to high-needs funding allocations for children and young

people with complex special educational needs and disabilities, and to the existing teachers' pay and pension grants, which total £10.75 billion this year.

The Department for Education budgets for 2025-26 have not yet been decided, and how much high-needs funding is distributed to local authorities, schools and colleges next year will depend on the outcome of the first stage of the Government's spending review, which is due to be announced at the end of October. That means that next year's allocations of high-needs funding to local authorities have not been published within the normal timescale, but we are working across Government and we will announce next year's funding allocation for Somerset and all other local authorities as soon as we can.

We are acutely aware not only of the financial pressures that local authorities are facing because of the increasing cost of supporting young people and children with complex needs but of the financial pressures that the Government as a whole are facing because of the economic climate that we have inherited. As I have said, resolving these problems will not be quick or easy, but I am keen that we develop long-term solutions and I welcome contributions across the House, such as the one by the hon. Member for Glastonbury and Somerton, on these very important issues.

It is important that there is a fair education funding system that directs funding where it is needed and where it can best provide support. One aspect of that is the national funding formula that is used to allocate high-needs funding to local authorities, so we will take time to consider whether or not to make changes to the formula and the impacts of any such changes on local authorities, including in Somerset.

Every young person with special educational needs or disabilities should have access to high-quality services, and local authorities are critical in ensuring that children and their families can access the support they need. Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission jointly inspect local authorities' SEND provision to ensure that there is joined-up support for children and young people. These inspections enable the Department for Education to intervene in cases of significant concern and to work with local authorities and professional advisers to address areas of weakness.

We therefore welcome the publication of the Big Listen response today. We will work with Ofsted to consider how outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities or in alternative provision are better reflected in the educational inspection framework and the area SEND inspection framework in the future.

I am concerned that a joint local area inspection of Somerset's SEND services, which was undertaken by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission in March 2020, identified nine significant areas of weakness. Following the actions that were taken, the CQC has subsequently confirmed that seven of the nine areas have made sufficient progress and were therefore stepped down. Somerset was required to produce an accelerated progress plan to address the two remaining areas, and progress against the plan is being closely monitored by officials from the Department for Education and NHS England.

The Department has implemented a support programme in Somerset, which included workshops and support focused on the importance of the data in joint commissioning.

Somerset has drawn on the specialist advice of a SEND adviser, whom the Department commissioned earlier this year, and it also receives ongoing support and challenge from the Department and NHS England at six-monthly accelerated progress plan meetings. The combined impact of these interventions has shown improvements over the last three years.

As the hon. Member for Glastonbury and Somerton also expressed, we want a holistic approach to school place planning, which considers how mainstream settings can offer high-quality support to children and young people with SEND, alongside sufficient special school places for those with the most complex needs. Local authorities are able to use their high needs capital funding allocations to deliver new places in mainstream and special schools, as well as other specialist settings. That will also be used to improve the suitability and accessibility of existing buildings.

Somerset council, for example, has been allocated just under £20 million in high needs capital funding between 2022 and 2025. A new special free school, Hillview school, opened this month in Martock, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Glastonbury and Somerton. It joins the eight existing special schools in Somerset. In addition, seven mainstream schools in Somerset have established resource provision that provide access to a mainstream curriculum and classroom, alongside specialist support. Enhanced learning provisions have also been created in five mainstream secondary schools to provide informal support to young people with moderate learning difficulties as they transition from primary education. This Government are committed to working with Somerset council, school leaders, and other sector partners, as well as their national counterparts, to develop and improve inclusive education in mainstream schools.

The hon. Member for Glastonbury and Somerton mentioned the challenges around exclusion, and I appreciate her concerns. Every pupil deserves to learn in a safe, calm classroom and we will always support our dedicated, hard-working teachers to make this happen. Schools can use sanctions as a measure to improve behaviour. In the most serious cases, a suspension or permanent exclusion may be necessary to ensure that pupils are protected from disruption and can benefit from education. Our statutory guidance is very clear in all cases: decisions to exclude a pupil must be lawful, reasonable, and fair. The guidance sets out that headteachers should consider underlying causes, or contributing factors of misbehaviour before issuing an exclusion, including where a pupil has special educational needs. That should ensure appropriate support is put in place when concerns are raised about a pupil's behaviour, rather than waiting for it to trigger action.

The hon. Lady also referenced the letter sent to the Secretary of State for Education by Somerset council. I thank Somerset council for writing directly to the Secretary of State to set out its thoughts on the SEND system. The Government recognise that, for too long, the education and care system has not met the needs of all children, with too many parents struggling to get their children the support they need and deserve. My officials will be pleased to meet representatives from Somerset council, who have set their thoughts out very helpfully, and they will be in touch in due course to organise a meeting.

I want to thank the hon. Member for Glastonbury and Somerton again for bringing this matter forward, and also those who have contributed and attended the

[Catherine McKinnell]

debate. Somerset SEND services, along with SEND outcomes across the country, are issues we all care passionately about. I absolutely recognise that the SEND system needs to improve. I acknowledge the hardship that too many families face when seeking to secure the right support for their children with special educational needs and disabilities. I am determined that this will change.

I also want to acknowledge the hard work taken on by so many working in education, health and care, to support children and young people with special educational needs, both in Somerset and right across the country. I thank them for their commitment and service.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Fly-tipping

4.30 pm

**Deirdre Costigan** (Ealing Southall) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of fly-tipping.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Efford, in the first Westminster Hall debate that I have secured since being elected the MP for Ealing Southall. I have chosen the very important issue of fly-tipping for this first debate.

After 14 years of chaos from the previous Conservative Governments, we have an NHS in crisis, an economy that came close to collapse, communities living in fear of crime and a failure to act on the threat of environmental breakdown. My constituents in Ealing Southall recognise that fixing the NHS, putting police back on our streets, tackling the climate crisis and kick-starting growth in the economy need to be the new Government's first priorities. However, for many of my constituents, it is what is outside their front door that matters most.

Let us imagine walking out of our homes every day to see a big pile of black sacks, broken furniture and kids' toys at the corner of our streets. That is not the first thing we want to see on our way to work. Then, let us imagine we have invited our family or some friends around that evening. It is embarrassing to ask people to pick their way through sacks of rubbish and furniture when they come to visit. As one of my constituents told me,

"It's disheartening to go out of your house."

Another told me:

"I dream of the day I don't have to pick my way through piles of rubbish to get down the street."

**Lizzi Collinge** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): In my constituency of Morecambe and Lunesdale, communities in Morecambe in particular are blighted by fly-tipping. I have noticed the damage that has done to their feelings of community pride. When someone treats people's streets like a rubbish dump, it makes those people feel like rubbish. I thank my hon. Friend for recognising the psychological impact on communities. Does she agree that there is a deeply psychological impact and that this is not merely a matter of street cleansing?

**Deirdre Costigan:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. She is certainly right: that, too, is the experience of my constituents in Ealing Southall, where they have very much said that this is an issue of pride in their community. Much research has also been done on what is called the "broken windows syndrome", in which fly-tipping also encourages crime and antisocial behaviour. My hon. Friend is certainly right in that regard.

My residents in Ealing Southall have identified Beaconsfield Road and Bridge Road, along with George Street in Hanwell, as key hotspots, but there many more. In fact, more than a million cases of fly-tipping are recorded every year in this country. Of course, many will not be recorded at all as communities just give up. One third of all fly-tipping takes place in London and eight London authorities were in the top 10 areas with the highest number of fly-tipping incidents in England, according to the most recent statistics. I am afraid to say that all too often it is the poorest areas of the



country that are most likely to face such issues. That is due to overcrowded housing and a lack of outside space for bins, which are particular issues in London.

There are some great organisations fighting the scourge of fly-tipping. In Ealing, LAGER Can, whose representatives are here today watching the debate, does amazing work in partnership with the council—not just to clear litter, but to clear and report fly-tips. Nationally, Keep Britain Tidy has strenuously campaigned on the issue. The previous Government periodically announced new crackdowns on fly-tipping, but has that made a difference? I do not think my constituents in Ealing Southall noticed any improvements in 14 years of that Government's supposed crackdowns; in fact, it is clear the problem has got worse.

Why did the previous Government fail to get a grip on the issue? First, only about 1% of fly-tips result in a court prosecution. That is because councils lost about two thirds of their funding over 14 years of Tory austerity, so they cannot afford to pay for the detailed and expensive investigations needed to take a fly-tipper to court. Even if they do try to take a fly-tipper to court, the average fine is only about £500, which does not pay the council's costs. It is much quicker and cheaper for the council to just pick up the fly-tip. That solves the immediate problem, but of course people then start to think, "Well, I can dump my mattress or these few bags of rubbish on the corner because the council will pick them up."

**Shaun Davies (Telford) (Lab):** I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. Does she agree that when councils seek to investigate, prosecute and prevent fly-tipping, they should be able to recover the full cost, including when issuing fixed penalty notices to those who are guilty? After all, it is the polluter who should pay.

**Deirdre Costigan:** I certainly agree. I will return later to my hon. Friend's point about making the polluter pay. Currently it is certainly not worth councils' time or money in many instances to take fly-tippers to court because the fines, and indeed the sentencing, do not act as a deterrent. Some people feel it is okay to leave their rubbish at the end of the street because the council will pick it up. This is a vicious cycle and we need to break it.

Secondly, in the small number of cases that do go to court, magistrates do not take the issue seriously enough or understand how fly-tipping blights the life of local communities. The sentencing just is not enough to make people think twice. The criminals who make a pretty penny by offering to take away waste for 20 quid tell the court they are unemployed, so they get away with not having to pay. The waste carrier licensing system is also so lax that it is hard for someone to lose their licence, even if they have broken the rules and been convicted.

Thirdly, there is a problem with housing in London. We know that there is not enough of it and that is why this Government have committed to building 1.5 million new homes. Right now, in Ealing Southall, there are people living in overcrowded accommodation, where there is often not enough space for a bin. I have also been told by many of my constituents that tenants sometimes illegally sub-let a room, but insist that the new tenant does not use the rubbish bins so that the landlord does not find out.

Finally, there is just too much waste in the first place. As a nation, we are drowning in unnecessary packaging, single-use drink containers, and household items that are difficult and expensive to recycle. We have to be honest about fly-tipping. In a Keep Britain Tidy study, one in five people in London admitted that they had fly-tipped themselves—this is often black-sack fly-tipping. It is simply not an excuse that the council is not doing enough because every council in London offers a free kerbside collection for black-sack rubbish. However, people often do not see this as fly-tipping, and it is very difficult to change their behaviour. No amount of education seems to work.

Trying to stop people from fly-tipping is a huge challenge. Keep Britain Tidy has piloted a number of schemes, including in Newham, that have had some success, but the schemes often simply move fly-tipping to the next road. Some councils have tried community skips, including my neighbouring authority of Brent. However, despite the council's hard work, Brent sadly still has the highest fly-tipping rate in London, at 34,000 incidents a year. Although residents like the community skip, it does not stop people from fly-tipping.

The recycling charity WRAP has found that there is no evidence at all to link free bulky waste disposal with a reduction in fly-tipping. Even the Conservative Hampshire County Council acknowledged that fly-tipping did not increase when it started to charge for DIY waste. Just as it is clear that there is not one cause of fly-tipping, so it follows that there is not one answer.

This is a complex problem that needs a number of different approaches. Crucially, it needs to be led by Government, not by cash-strapped councils. We need a national strategy to combat fly-tipping, which will bring together the Environment Agency, councils, Keep Britain Tidy, waste disposal authorities and other stakeholders to crack this problem once and for all.

**Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD):** I thank the hon. Member for securing this important debate. The Environment Agency found that 86% of farmers have been affected by fly-tipping this year. However, many of those incidents are not reported because the reporting process is time-consuming, confusing and frustrating, and it does not stack up for farmers to do it. So they clear the waste themselves. Does the hon. Member agree that a single reporting mechanism needs to be developed to help farmers and land managers? I appreciate that the hon. Member is leading a very urban debate, but I think that the mechanism is important. A single mechanism should be in place so that a fly-tip should have to be reported only once.

**Deirdre Costigan:** I thank the hon. Member for her intervention. As she has said, Ealing Southall is certainly not a rural area of the country. However, my father's family are from Tipperary, and they were farmers; I do appreciate, and am well aware, of the cost of fly-tipping to farmers in particular. As it is on private land, they are, in most cases, liable for the costs of removal themselves. It is a massive issue, and I do hope that we will hear from others today on that issue. Certainly, there is more that we can do on reporting because, as I said earlier, the reports that we currently have are only the tip of the iceberg as a lot of communities just do not report.

[Deirdre Costigan]

Having gone through the problems and realised that the solutions are complex, what solutions do I feel should be included in the national strategy? To combat the organised criminals, we need a national fly-tip investigation team. Why should environmental crime not be taken as seriously as other types of organised crime? We need national financial investigators who can use proceeds of crime laws to go after the assets of these criminals and hit them in their pockets, where it really hurts.

We also need sentencing guidelines to be reviewed so that the courts do not continue to allow fly-tippers to get away with it. We need to reform the waste carrier licensing scheme so that it is worth the paper that it is written on. We need stronger rules for bins when houses are broken up into flats; I am delighted that Ealing council is introducing a new requirement for planning permission for HMOs—houses in multiple occupation. But we need to ensure that waste facilities are rigorously assessed as part of landlord licensing schemes and before permission is given for flat conversions, and that councils have the funding to carry out those inspections.

**Afzal Khan** (Manchester Rusholme) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, and for the progress she is making on such an important topic. Keep Manchester Tidy established a partnership with Manchester city council to encourage residents to actively help make their communities cleaner. As part of that strategy this year, Manchester saw its highest number of volunteers supporting the national Great British Spring Clean, with more than 100 litter-picking events and more than 2,000 litter-pickers. Will my hon. Friend join me in thanking all the volunteers who work extremely hard to make our communities cleaner and greener? Does she agree that they should not have to do this in the first place?

**Deirdre Costigan**: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, and I certainly agree that the work of local volunteers is hugely beneficial in preventing this problem from being even worse than it is at the moment. I know that, in Ealing, we would not survive without the work of our great friends in LAGER Can, and it sounds as if my hon. Friend has similarly civic-minded residents in his constituency too. I congratulate them on the work that they have done.

The most obvious answer to the fly-tipping crisis is to reduce waste in the first place. Let us turn off the tap of all of the waste that we see on our streets. That could be a real game changer. I know that the Minister has already committed to introducing a deposit return scheme for drinks containers by 2027 that would mean that empty cans and bottles could be returned to shops to get a deposit back. As well as cutting down on empty cans and bottles in black-sack fly-tips, research by Eunomia found that a return scheme could save councils in England up to £35 million annually. We could then spend that money on something else.

I hope that the Minister will consider the merits of a scheme that covers all reusable containers, including glass, from the outset, and it would be useful if she laid out a timetable for bringing that forward. Manufacturers should contribute to the costs to councils of clear-up by providing more take-back services so that people can

hand in old furniture and mattresses when they buy new ones. The big prize is to persuade manufacturers to make their goods fully recyclable; the best way to do that is to make them pay for the cost of disposal. That is based on the idea of making the polluter pay. I hope the Minister will also set out a timetable for that approach, known as extended producer responsibility. It will encourage manufacturers to stop producing so much packaging and items that cannot be easily recycled.

Fly-tipping is not a low-level crime. It stops people from feeling proud of where they live, it encourages other crime and antisocial behaviour, and it costs millions of pounds to clean up—money that could be used for vital public services. I look forward to the Minister giving my constituents in Ealing Southall confidence that, after over a decade of inaction by the Conservatives, this new Labour Government will finally take fly-tipping seriously, with a national fly-tipping strategy, stiffer penalties for the culprits, and ways of reducing waste in the first place.

**Clive Efford (in the Chair)**: If a Member intends to catch my eye in the debate, they must be on their feet now. I will impose a time limit of five minutes.

4.46 pm

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Fly-tipping sounds faintly amusing but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) so expertly pointed out, it costs millions and blights lives. A constituent wrote in about how, on a daily basis, he sees stuff—including “gas canisters” and “rotting food”—“blown all over the street after foxes have”

opened bags. He says, “It’s relentless and tiring” and that something needs to be done. Another constituent posts daily Facebook pictures of a dump where there are all sorts of things—dining chairs, a sofa, a divan bed, a TV in bits and decorators’ leftovers. She says it “looks like a flat clearance.”

The most recent figures we have show that, in 2023, fly-tipping cost councils hundreds of millions of pounds and that there were over 1 million incidents. As has been stated, there are a lot of logistical issues. Fran, who volunteers with the aforementioned group LAGER Can, says that the overlapping, different fly-tips in her street have created a sort of illegal, unofficial dump. Even once it is cleared, it reappears because the cycle continues. One email to me says:

“the council should figure out who keeps doing this and should come down hard on them with big fines.”

As was pointed out, fly-tipping is a criminal offence under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. It can result in imprisonment, unlimited fines and even being deprived of rights to the vehicle used to commit the offence. However, as my hon. Friend said, there is a perception that this is low-level stuff, and the likelihood of being caught is low. People are unaware that leaving items in the street, or outside a charity shop, is an offence.

Solutions should combine carrot and stick. The attitude to fly-tipping should be that it is completely socially unacceptable, and we should treat it more seriously as a crime, enforcing penalties and punishment. However, we should also make it as easy as possible for people to dispose of waste. It is not rocket science that since the Acton dump closed, the prevalence of mattresses on street corners in the area has exponentially risen. Alternative sites at Greenford or out of borough on the north

circular are further away, necessitating more emissions. Sites also require pre-booking, with a lot of intrusive personal details—inside leg measurement, hat size. As a small Asian woman with a car, I know that dumps are often not the most user-friendly places, so let's make things easier. People are not allowed to take a neighbour's items, and items cannot be walked in either. That fails to understand that not everyone in a street will possess a car.

**Tessa Munt** (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): When I went to Germany 35 years ago, there was one day a month—towards the end of a month, as it happened—when the rubbish removal people would come around and take away big items. So those who lived in a flat or who did not have a car, or who had any of the problems just described, did not have to think about how to get rid of their mattress. Has the hon. Lady considered that option?

**Dr Huq:** The hon. Lady makes an excellent point, and the idea of the community skip, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall raised in her speech, sounds like a good one. Why not take the solution to the people, rather than expect it from them? We know that all our local authorities are cash-strapped, so I wonder whether the Minister might propose a trial and give that idea a whirl everywhere, because it is free. I now have two boroughs in my constituency—Hammersmith and Ealing—and bulky items collection is at a charge. When I suggested the community skip, I was told, “But it would fill up with builder's waste.” Great! Surely that is better than having it on every street corner. When I put to an officer the idea of CCTV, which I had received from people who email in with solutions, he answered:

“In order to carry out the sort of enforcement your constituent is asking for with cameras, we would need an infrastructure and network the likes of which one finds in novels by George Orwell.”

There is literally a “computer says no” attitude that comes back. Let us be a bit more creative.

**Natasha Irons** (Croydon East) (Lab): Local councils battling this torrent of fly-tipping tend to deploy CCTV, but it then takes people to watch the CCTV to find the culprits. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should give councils the funding to staff that CCTV surveillance but also make use of the footage, such as by creating an online wall of shame, as we did in my previous council? That might put that footage to good use.

**Dr Huq:** It sounds like a panacea, but we do not know who these people are, so there are a lot of issues. But yes, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall pointed out, having more funding from central Government would be great after 14 years of cash-strapped councils. If we get rid of the booking system, the possibility of spontaneously mowing the lawn and taking the waste down to wherever would also be opened up.

I think we are running out of time and there are lots of Members present, but I want to praise LAGER Can and Kathy Swift on tirelessly doing community clean-ups. In terms of the necessity of having such groups, it is a bit like food banks: the fact that we have more food banks than branches of McDonald's in this country is really a sign of state failure. It should not be Kathy who is cleaning up every unofficial dump in a borough of 360,000 people.

This has been a great debate, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall. Let us install some community pride in areas, because well-maintained areas are less likely to become hotspots for dumping. I hope our suggestions do not fall on deaf ears. In a similar way to the Jubilee 2000 debt campaigners, let us make fly-tipping history.

**Clive Efford (in the Chair):** Order. I remind Members that giving way eats into the time of those who want to speak later. I call Jim Shannon, who has four minutes.

4.52 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): That is okay—I will keep to the four minutes and I will not take an intervention either. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) on setting the scene with much information, detail and good ideas. I fully support her idea for a national strategy, which is one of the things I was going to ask for, ever mindful of where we are. It is nice to see the Minister back in her place after a short time away from the House, and I look forward to hearing her contribution at the end.

Very quickly, I want to give a Northern Ireland perspective and to reinforce what the hon. Member for Ealing Southall said—these things are mirrored all across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Fly-tipping has become such a massive issue, including in my constituency of Strangford, where constituents report countless incidents of fly-tipping to my office almost every week. It is time for us to have a debate in Westminster Hall on how we can work together to tackle this issue.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has revealed that, from 2018 to 2020, it cleaned up 306 illegal waste sites across Northern Ireland, with taxpayers paying the half a million-pound bill, which is equivalent to employing 15 nurses. That is what we could do with the money if we did not have to spend it cleaning up afterwards. Fifteen nurses would be a big thing for us in Northern Ireland and a big thing in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ealing Southall as well.

Collective action is required to tackle fly-tipping. It is a serious crime, and that is without mentioning its devastating impacts on our environment. In the past, my council—Ards Borough Council, as it was then—used to have a system of skips that went around all the villages. Whenever a skip was filled up, the council brought a new one. Unfortunately, as the years passed, that seemed to fall by the wayside. New councils were amalgamated and that strategy was lost.

In 2023, the then Prime Minister's antisocial behaviour action plan set out how councils would be supported in taking tougher action against those caught fly-tipping. That included raising the upper limit for on-the-spot fines to £1,000. In 2018, there were 74 cases of fly-tipping in the constituency of Strangford, and many fear that that will increase due to the new recycling centre booking system introduced just recently. There is no doubt that fly-tipping is wrong, and we must have a punitive system in place to ensure that it does not happen. However, we must also ensure that waste centres are accessible to constituents to ensure that fly-tipping does not become more common. If we make it illegal, we have to put something in its place.



[Jim Shannon]

It is important for residents to report fly-tipping, but not to touch it. I want to put out this caution: in many cases, there might be contaminated waste, such as syringes—that is the society we live in—broken glass, asbestos, or toxic chemicals and other hazardous substances that can severely harm individuals, and especially young children, or animals. In addition, it is important not to disturb a site in case there is evidence that could identify the fly-tippers and lead to their prosecution.

To conclude, it is an unfortunate reality that there are numerous incidents of fly-tipping and illegal dumping across the UK on a daily basis. Our local councils are working hard to prevent them, so I ask the Minister to do the very thing the hon. Member for Ealing Southall has referred to: introduce a national strategy covering all the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—because we always do things better if we do them together—and, with that in place, ensure that all councils are given the powers to enforce tougher fines and even prosecute fly-tippers. We can do better, and we will hear shortly from the Minister on how she will do just that.

**Clive Efford (in the Chair):** Order. I will bring in the Front Benchers at 5.8 pm. In order to do that, I have to bring the time limit down to three minutes.

4.56 pm

**Connor Naismith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on an issue that continues to blight our communities. In Crewe and Nantwich, the scale of the problem is staggering. Over the past year, Cheshire East council has recorded a significant increase in fly-tipping, with more than 1,200 reported incidents. That represents a worrying trend, with law-abiding citizens and businesses left to deal with the consequences of the irresponsible and often criminal behaviour of others. However, Crewe and Nantwich is not alone in facing this challenge; as many colleagues have said, the figures in our community highlight the urgent need for a national framework to effectively tackle the issue.

As I know only too well as a former councillor coming to this place, the burden on local authorities is immense. Cheshire East, which oversees the Crewe and Nantwich area, spends nearly £1 million each year just to clean up after fly-tippers—that money could be spent on other vital public services, which is exactly what our residents would expect. Of course, it is about not just the financial costs, but the deeper impact on our communities. Residents have expressed to me their deep frustration and anger at the constant blight of illegally dumped waste, whether on farmland or in residential areas, our parks or our green spaces. Farmers, in particular, are often left to shoulder the burden of clearing up hazardous waste from their land—a task that is both time-consuming and expensive. Of course, there is also the impact on our environment, wildlife and natural habitats.

As we have heard from many other speakers, enforcement remains a significant challenge. Last year, only a handful of fines were dished out in Crewe and Nantwich, with the majority of fly-tippers escaping punishment altogether. That is simply unacceptable. The current system does not serve as a sufficient deterrent to those who think

they can flout the law without consequence. We need a national framework to bring together the relevant agencies to tackle this issue in a co-ordinated way.

In conclusion, I encourage the Government and the Minister to take the necessary steps to create a comprehensive national framework to tackle fly-tipping—one that will empower local authorities such as Cheshire East council to protect our communities and environment. I am confident that together we can make a real difference in the fight against this blight on our communities.

4.59 pm

**Dr Lauren Sullivan** (Gravesham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Efford. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) for securing this important debate on fly-tipping. As we have heard, fly-tipping blights communities and landowners, on both publicly and privately owned land. There is a misconception that fly-tipping is a small-scale crime committed by individuals or unscrupulous small waste removal businesses. The reality is that it is often connected with organised crime.

I give credit to my local authority, Gravesham borough council, for the work it has done on tackling the problem in my constituency. It recognised the impact of fly-tipping and in 2020 set up the environmental enforcement team. The team uses a range of enforcement actions to prevent and tackle the issue, from verbal advice right up to criminal prosecution. Indeed, in the past year the team prosecuted 39 cases, each resulting in successful prosecutions. They work closely with the media team and Kent police to raise awareness and deter other potential offenders. I put on record my thanks to the team and its partners, as well as to the over 500 Gravesham community champions, for helping clear up our streets.

That good work, however, is often not enough, and there are outstanding issues to be addressed, of which I will raise a couple now. Small authorities such as Gravesham do not have access to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency database, so if a person is suspected of committing an offence, small authorities have to follow the DVLA rules. It would help those agencies if they could have access to the database, so that they could do more forensic investigations. The other issue is about justice in the courts system. We know that there is a huge backlog in that system, but it is also about the chasing of unpaid financial penalties that do not necessarily cover the cost of clean-up. Again, it is about the flexibility of the fixed penalty notices.

My final reflection is about the legislative framework. When I reached out to Gravesham borough council, it quoted six main pieces of legislation that it operates under. Simplifying that legislation and putting it all in one place will make it easier for local authorities to use, our courts to prosecute and the general public to understand. I hope that that could be looked at over the course of the Government's term. I look forward to hearing the Minister set out her Department's policies in that area, and to working with Government on the matter. We can all agree that those who blight our beautiful countryside and streets should be the ones to pay to clear it, or, better still, that they should not dump in the first place.

**Clive Efford (in the Chair):** You are all being very good.

5.2 pm

**Paulette Hamilton** (Birmingham Erdington) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) for securing this important debate. As for many colleagues, fly-tipping has been one of the top issues in my mailbag since I became an MP. Constituents contact me most days worried about our local environment, public safety and the pride they want to have in their community.

It is easy to talk about fly-tipping as though it is just about rubbish—and it is—but it is a serious blight on our constituents' lives and health. It can be a serious hazard, such as when it is blocking an emergency exit; in one case I dealt with for a single mother with three children, they had to climb over a fence, a metal barrel and a mattress to get to their home in an emergency. It is a serious public health issue, with massive piles of rubbish attracting rats to my constituents' property. In any case, it is always an eyesore that lets our area down and damages our sense of community.

In 2022-23, Birmingham city council issued over 270 fixed penalty notices and prosecuted 14 individuals and businesses for fly-tipping, with punishments ranging from fines to community orders. But in a city of over 1 million people that is just not enough.

**Ayoub Khan** (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind): I represent the neighbouring constituency, and as the hon. Member knows, fly-tipping in Birmingham is becoming an enormous problem. It is almost contagious, starting in the smaller wards, then the inner-city areas and then the outskirts. Does she agree with me that where we have fly-tipping on privately owned land that has shared owners, the city council should remove the hazardous and dangerous build-up? Does she agree that if the council does not act, the Government should intervene to ensure that local councils do remove it?

**Paulette Hamilton**: I thank the hon. Member. On this occasion, because I was at the top of a local council and I know how expensive it is, I feel that the responsibility should be on the private owner to secure their property and to ensure that it is kept free of fly-tipping. If it is not free of fly-tipping, I, Paulette Hamilton, because I worked on a local council, believe that they should work with the local council to try to remove it, but the cost cannot be borne by the council because they have not got the money. I will carry on—

**Clive Efford (in the Chair)**: Order. You won't. I call James Asser.

5.5 pm

**James Asser** (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) for securing the debate. It is a huge issue for residents, as other contributors have said, but it is also a huge area of pressure for councils, as finances and resources have been squeezed very hard and bin and street cleaning services are already resource-intense, taking up a lot of time for all of our local authorities.

It is worth asking how we define fly-tipping, because often it is presented just as a man in a van dumping white goods by the side of the road. That is an issue, as we have heard, but, in many areas, it is more about low-level rubbish being dumped on streets, often through

ignorance of a system that creates fly-tipping hotspots or a lack of understanding about when one should present waste.

Councils have the dilemma of whether to collect the waste, thereby hiding the problem rather than solving it but clearing the streets, or to leave it for investigation, which creates distress for residents because the streets are a mess. In my borough, we have found that this problem can be tackled through education and awareness. In Newham, we saw success by working with residents and Keep Britain Tidy. We piloted wrapping waste in crime investigation-style tape and painting messages where the fly-tips were removed that both highlighted the cost of the removal and what the council could have spent that money on. We found that had an effect: in the immediate term, there was a 64% drop in fly-tipping; in the long-term, there was a 40% drop.

It is worth saying that it did not work in all areas. It was particularly useful in areas where there were residents rather than in areas with high footfall, but the council has moved on to other measures in high-footfall areas, which have led to a 32% drop in those spaces. This is a key point: one size does not fit all. Different areas—both urban and rural—have different problems and we all need different solutions, even within local districts. We need a range of options.

We also need ways of working with the public. As we have heard, they play a vital role. Local people care. They are the eyes and ears, helping to keep their area safe. So, what is the ask of Government? Money and resources for local councils, yes—we all know the demand, but, to help the Minister, this is not just about cash. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall and others have made the point that we need to share initiatives. We need to share policy ideas and pilot projects. It is difficult for councils to work on their own, and therefore a national strategy and national ways of working are important. In this regard, regional and central Government can do more, bringing together different agencies and bringing together different councils to share those ideas. A national strategy will look at that and at ways we can bring those together and share those good ideas. I hope this is the start of a longer debate that we can make some progress on.

**Clive Efford (in the Chair)**: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, Josh Babarinde.

5.8 pm

**Josh Babarinde** (Eastbourne) (LD): Thank you, Mr Efford, for your chairmanship this afternoon. This is my first Westminster Hall debate, and I am very pleased to be able to use it to congratulate the hon. Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) on securing such an important debate on an issue that blights so many communities, including mine in the sunniest town in the UK, Eastbourne. With a million incidents a year that, according to Keep Britain Tidy, cost local authorities and private landowners more than £200 million a year to clear up, the scale of this waste crime epidemic demands debate in this mother of all Parliaments. I thank the hon. Lady for securing it. Although the debate has been devoted to talking trash about trash itself, the quality of the contributions from hon. and right hon. Members has been more reminiscent of treasure—treasure that makes me proud to be a new Member of this House.

[Josh Babarinde]

Pride has been mentioned a number of times and, fundamentally, it is what the issue of fly-tipping comes down to. Whether the intention is nefarious or not, to fly-tip is to dishonour the pride represented in so many of our communities, such as by Plastic Free Eastbourne or Mucky Mermaids in my patch, who do lots of voluntary work to clean up community spaces. To fly-tip commercially is to dishonour the pride of local waste-collection businesses. We have a number who jump through all the hoops to do things the right way and to earn an honest living, but they are undercut by those cowboy waste-collection companies that are the perpetrators of some of the worst fly-tipping. To fly-tip is also to dishonour the pride of our waste-disposal workers in their jobs, and in keeping our streets clean—people such as Sean Towey, Martin Hobbs, Karen Cavie and Richard Westgate in Eastbourne, whom I met recently. They are proud to keep our streets clean, but their work is blighted by fly-tipping.

To fly-tip is to dishonour pride in our environment, the beauty of which is destroyed by wrongly dumped waste, with wildlife put at risk by often hazardous materials. Only last week, we had a case of asbestos being dumped on Paradise Drive in Eastbourne. To fly-tip is to dishonour the pride of our farmers, who have been mentioned in the debate, and 85% of them report that it is a problem on their land. On average, each removal costs about £1,000. I was pleased that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Connor Naismith) mentioned that in his speech as well.

All those things and more make fly-tipping an inherently antisocial practice, and one that the law is right to sanction. The problem is, however, that at the moment such sanction feels like an offer that is not properly taken up. If we look at the figures from the Office for National Statistics, we find that of the 1 million fly-tipping incidents that happen a year, only 2,000 led to a prosecution last year—that is 0.018%. More than that, last year only about 1,800 fines were issued by courts for fly-tipping incidents, with a total value of £837,000, which equates to just 77p per incident. It is not working, and local council resources have been gutted by the previous Government, which means that their capacity to enforce fixed penalty notices has been gutted as well. That is tantamount to legalising littering, and we need a clear change.

The Liberal Democrats are calling for court fines to be increased substantially and for the proceeds to be pumped into a fly-tipping fighting fund to invest in local authorities' capacity to crack down on waste crime on the ground as part of a national effort to get to grips with it, as the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) and for Gravesham (Dr Sullivan) discussed. From my career tackling youth crime and antisocial behaviour before I entered this place, I can say that enforcement is only part of the story. In the first instance, prevention is just as critical.

We can check out amazing initiatives such as Newham council's social impact stencils, mentioned by the hon. Member for West Ham and Beckton (James Asser). That initiative involves painting short, bold and stark messages to educate people about the social, environmental and financial impact of fly-tipping, spray painted on the very spots where it happens most. In one of the

pilots in Stratford, a 67% reduction was observed. Beautification is an effective tool as well, making areas particularly beautiful. That was done in in Dover, clearing space—but we can do lots more. I thank the hon. Member for Ealing Southall for securing the debate—

**Clive Efford (in the Chair):** Order. I call Robbie Moore.

5.14 pm

**Robbie Moore** (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Efford. I thank the hon. Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) for securing this important debate. I also take the opportunity to welcome the Minister to her place.

Having just defended a majority of slightly more than 2,000, I must say it is fantastic to be re-elected to this place. I am a little relieved that I am still here, even though it is now sitting on the other side of the House as a shadow Minister.

Often, it is here in the Westminster Hall Chamber that we have a real opportunity to focus on issues that matter at a micro local level. It is great specifically to be discussing an important issue that matters to all our constituents. I will start by echoing the comments made so far in this debate: fly-tipping is a blatant attack on our communities, and it damages local habitats and the environment, creates a danger for local wildlife, and places an unfair economic burden and cost on those who are forced to clean it up.

While in government—including in my short time in the Department as a Minister, when I was pleased to see through a number of steps to tackle this issue—we gave tougher powers and grants to tackle fly-tipping hotspots. We increased the maximum penalty that councils can issue for fly-tipping from £400 to £1,000, and we made sure that the money was ringfenced specifically for enforcement and clean-up. We increased the penalty for householders who give waste to fly-tippers from £400 to £600, and we worked with stakeholders to co-design a fly-tipping toolkit to help landowners, councils and businesses to tackle this common issue.

We also increased the scrutiny of how councils were using the powers awarded to them through the publication of a fly-tipping enforcement league table, so that there was more transparency in the system. Since those measures were introduced, statistics show that the tide has begun to turn, with fly-tipping on public land down for the second year in a row. Of course, there is much more to do, and I look forward to working constructively with the new Government to help to build on the substantial action taken in previous years.

The two issues that I will touch on specifically, based on my experience as a constituency MP and in Government, are fly-tipping on private land and the proper use of enforcement. On enforcement, it is paramount that local authorities use the tools and powers that have been awarded to them. As I mentioned, when we were in government we increased the maximum penalty notices for local authorities to utilise, but it is clear that local authorities are not using those powers.

I will not upset the many Members who have mentioned their own councils, so let me begin with statistics from the Labour-run Bradford council that operates in my constituency. In the past year, despite receiving over 15,000 reports of fly-tipping, it has issued only 86 fixed



penalty notices. That ranks Bradford 217th out of all local authorities in the country for fixed penalty notices per incident. To compound the issue, that was on the back of it taking action to close household waste and recycling centres not only in my constituency but elsewhere across Bradford. The council has resisted local opposition and kept those centres closed.

**Anna Dixon** (Shipley) (Lab): Will the hon. Member give way?

**Robbie Moore:** I will carry on because Government Members have had enough time.

Councils have to make use of the powers that are awarded to them. To put the closures into perspective, if my local authority took the same action as the local authority of the hon. Member for Ealing Southall, it would be able to set the precedent in creating a clear deterrent. In other words, those who pollute must feel the consequences. How does the Minister plan to work with councils such as Bradford to ensure that they properly utilise the powers and resources that were awarded to them under the previous Government? What specific steps will the new Government take to support councils and hold them to account if they do not take action? As many Members have rightly indicated, a national strategy is the right approach, but how does the Minister intend to utilise those powers and the additional powers that she wants to award to local authorities to address the issue?

On the issue of fly-tipping on private land, what additional measures will the Government take to hold people to account when it is not necessarily their fault that fly-tipping has taken place on private land? Could they potentially be awarded for clearing up the mess rather than facing the full force of the law? As many Members have said, collective responsibility is vital, so we must work together with local authorities—with proper law enforcement—community members and all stakeholders to address this issue.

**Clive Efford (in the Chair):** I will stop the Minister after 10 minutes so that I can give the mover of the motion time for a short summing-up speech.

5.18 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh):** What a pleasure it is to be back and serving under your esteemed chairmanship, Mr Efford. I thank all honourable colleagues for their kind words on my return to the House after my short enforced sabbatical.

Can I say how thrilled I am to respond to this debate? As an Environment Minister, I know that everyone's environment starts outside their own front door. It is clear from the passion in this room that those on all sides of the House care deeply about the need to educate people on the fact that there is no such place as "away". There is no throwing away. There are only materials that come into our possession, get used and are then disposed of, and the disposal and collection of those materials is essential if we are to create a circular economy.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) for securing this debate and pay tribute to LAGER Can, who are here, and the

many community groups up and down the country, including my local Ball Hill residents' association in Coventry East, that organise litter picks and are stepping in to fill the gap left by 14 years of devastating cuts—two-thirds cuts—to local authority spending power caused by the Conservatives.

**Anna Dixon:** In my constituency of Shipley, which falls within the Bradford district, swingeing cuts to local government budgets under the previous Government have forced the council to make impossible choices, including the closure of two tips, at Sugden End and Ilkley in the shadow Minister's constituency, used extensively by my constituents. Of course, residents fear that there will be an increase in fly-tipping, which is already a problem. Does the Minister agree that cash-strapped councils cannot be expected to solve this problem alone? Let us stop blaming them and look at what support can be given from the national Government.

**Mary Creagh:** I thank my hon. Friend for her contribution and agree that if we are to create a zero-waste economy, which is the stated aim of this Labour Government, we have to start by ensuring that we increase collection and follow the environmental principles that ensure that the polluter pays. It comes back to some of the points about full-cost recovery and the fact that it is not in the interests of councils to enforce prosecution.

The shadow Minister raised the issue of Bradford council, but I can tell him that I intend to write to all 13 councils that reported zero enforcement actions in the past reporting year. They are Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole council, which is Lib Dem and Tory-run; Colchester, which is Tory-run; East Devon, which has no overall control; Exeter, which is Labour; Fylde, which is Tory; Isles of Scilly, which is independent; Lewes, which is Lib Dem and Tory; Sedgemoor, which is not clear; Somerset West and Taunton, which, again, was Conservative; South Hams, which is Lib Dem; South Somerset, which no longer exists—there are a few that have merged; Uttlesford; and West Devon. All those reported zero enforcement actions in the past year. That is not good enough.

Looking at the tally, I see that it is not Labour councils that are doing nothing. The shadow Minister was quick to criticise Bradford council, but 86 fixed penalty notices is actually not a bad record given where some local authorities find themselves. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall, as the former Chair of West London Waste, knows only too well about what happens at the very end of this long pipeline of waste and recycling.

I pay tribute to Members in this debate. Fly-tipping is a crime that blights local communities and, indeed, poses a great difficulty to landowners. We heard some comments about whether we can have a whole-nation policy, but this policy is devolved. As the granddaughter of a Fermanagh farmer, I know all too well about the issues of fly-tipping around Rosslea. It is a devolved matter and responsibility for addressing and managing fly-tipping lies with each devolved Administration. As we have seen through the debate, approaches to tackling fly-tipping change and need to be responsive to local needs, not least because what works in inner-city Newham will not necessarily work in Strangford.

**Shaun Davies:** Does my hon. Friend agree that we need a cross-Government approach to fly-tipping? We need the Home Office to recognise that it is often linked to organised crime, particularly in respect of the bigger fly-tips. There is a role for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and for the Ministry of Justice. Will my hon. Friend work with her counterparts across Government to focus on this work?

**Mary Creagh:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

I want to correct the record on what the shadow Minister said about the waste figures, because the methodology changed in 2019-20. In that year, there were 980,000 incidents of fly-tipping. The numbers to 2022-23 increased by 10.5% to 1.08 million incidents, so the numbers and the trend lines are all going in the wrong direction.

My hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Shaun Davies) made an absolutely valid point. Far too often, when people come to collect stuff from households, we are hiring Messrs Bodgit and Scarper. We need to make sure that the carrier number is printed on the side.

On the point about the DVLA, we all have access to DVLA tax and MOT information on our phones. It cannot be beyond the wit of officials to make sure that the databases are joined up. It does introduce complexity, but we are actively looking at that.

Whether someone lives in the countryside or in a city, they should be able to take pride in their place. The story told by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Erdington (Paulette Hamilton) of people climbing over rubbish to get out of their house in an emergency is simply intolerable in the sixth richest country in the world.

Local authorities have reported over 1 million incidents, and the cost to local authorities was £392 million in 2018-19. That is why our manifesto committed to taking back our streets from the fly-tippers and vandals and forcing them to clear up the mess they have created as part of a crackdown to tackle antisocial behaviour.

The National Fly-Tipping Prevention Group has produced guidance to help councils to present robust cases to court, but where the gain is not worth the candle because the fines are too low or the fly-tippers are allegedly too poor, we need to get a little cannier about what we do and how we get back to the principle of polluter pays. As the shadow Minister said, fixed penalty notices can be issued, as can notices of up to £1,000 or £600 to the householder who passes on their waste to someone without a proper licence, but we need to educate the public about their responsibilities as well.

We recognise the efforts made by the London borough of Ealing to tackle the issue. It is in the top 10% of councils for issuing fixed penalty notices and I hope it will continue to do that good work. There are lessons to

be learned from throughout the country. According to our statistics, the council did not carry out any prosecutions, so we encourage it to use its powers to the full.

**Paulette Hamilton:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mary Creagh:** I really have to make progress because I will run out of time.

On the waste carrier, broker and dealer regime, who gets to carry the licences? We heard of a dead dog called Oscar signing up for a waste permitting licence. Over the last 14 years the scheme has been wide open for criminals and abuse. We need to make reforms and make it easier for regulators to enforce against non-compliant operators—for example, by requiring the permit numbers to be displayed on their advertising.

We want to make waste digital—we want to track waste and to know where it goes—and we will lay legislation next year to provide transparency in the waste system. Whether it is with councils, individuals or businesses, we must continue to work together. In rural areas, we must work with the National Farmers Union and the National Fly-Tipping Prevention Group, using toolkits and helping to spread best practice. Some 80% of farmers in rural areas have said that they have been affected by fly-tipping.

To come back to where my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall finished, we have to reduce waste in the first place. There is no such place as away. We will move to a circular economy. Everything that is not put back into the system through a deposit return scheme—I hope we will see legislation on that very soon—is a waste to our economy. We will convene a taskforce of experts from industry, academia, civil society and beyond to develop a circular economy strategy.

5.29 pm

**Deirdre Costigan:** I thank all those who contributed to the debate. I am delighted that there was so much interest in it; that makes it clear that fly-tipping is extremely important to people across the country and not just to my constituents in Ealing Southall.

I am delighted to hear that the Minister takes fly-tipping seriously. I am particularly happy to hear that she has understood the need to make sure that we stop waste in the first place—that we turn off the tap of waste. I am also delighted that she is taking seriously the need to make sure both that there are stiffer penalties for offenders and that the waste carrier system works better than it does currently. I know that my constituents in Ealing Southall will be happy to hear that fly-tipping will now be a priority for the Minister, and I hope we will move towards the national strategy that we need.

5.30 pm

*Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).*

# Written Statements

*Tuesday 3 September 2024*

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

### Contracts for Difference: Allocation Round 6 Results

**The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband):** The sixth contracts for difference auction results have been published today, unlocking 9.6 GW of renewable electricity projects. Among others, contracts will be going to the two largest offshore wind farms in Europe, the world's largest floating offshore windfarm to date and record numbers of solar projects. These results are over 2.5 times bigger than allocation round 5. These new projects will boost energy independence, secure cheap power for families, and unlock economic growth and jobs for the country.

Following my decision to increase the budget to record levels, just over 130 renewable electricity projects across Great Britain secured contracts—enough to power the equivalent of 11 million homes.

I am delighted to see strong results across a range of renewable electricity technologies. In particular, a record 93 solar PV projects have secured contracts. This is more than the total number of contracts agreed via AR5 across all technologies and represents around a 20% increase in our current installed solar capacity. Solar is one of the cheapest, most readily-deployable energy sources we have at our disposal, and its growth will be vital to meeting our clean power mission.

I am also delighted to confirm we have secured the largest commercial-scale floating offshore wind farm project in the world through AR6—at 400 MW—double the size of current European total installed FLOW capacity. The construction and deployment of this project will deliver valuable lessons that will benefit the wider FLOW industry, and help reinforce Britain's position as a world leader in both fixed-bottom and floating offshore wind technology. Tidal stream, another emerging technology, has secured a further six project contracts (totalling 28 MW), bringing the UK total for tidal stream power procured to over 100 MW.

After a disastrous outcome for offshore wind in AR5, it is very encouraging to see 4.9 GW of capacity come through in AR6. This includes procuring Europe's second largest offshore wind project (considering operational projects and projects under construction). I am confident we can continue to build on this promising outcome in future rounds.

I am delighted that the CfD mechanism has delivered competitive prices across the board, with prices significantly below the ceiling prices (ASPs), protecting consumers. Having more renewables like wind and solar in the system will also ensure Britain is less affected by fluctuations in volatile global gas prices.

The lifting of the onshore wind ban, this very successful allocation round 6, and the creation of Great British Energy, all signal the ramping up of our efforts to deliver clean power by 2030 and net zero, moving towards

energy independence and protecting families from volatile fossil fuel prices. Going forwards, we will continue to work with investors, developers, and the supply chain to accelerate our mission to become a clean energy superpower.

[HCWS65]

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### Care Quality Commission Section 48 Review of Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Wes Streeting):** On 30 January 2024, my predecessor as Secretary of State asked the Care Quality Commission to conduct a special review of mental health services in Nottinghamshire in response to the horrendous killings of Ian Coates, Grace O'Malley-Kumar and Barnaby Webber.

I am grateful to the CQC for the detailed work it has undertaken on this report. My thoughts are with the families and friends of Barnaby, Grace and Ian. This report makes for distressing reading, especially for those living with this unimaginable loss in the knowledge that this tragedy could have been prevented.

The review was composed of three strands. The reports for strands 2 and 3, relating to the safety and quality of services provided by Nottinghamshire healthcare NHS foundation trust and the services provided at Rampton hospital, were published on 26 March 2024.

On 13 August, the CQC published the remaining report for strand 1 of the review into the care and treatment provided to Valdo Calocane by NHFT in the period leading up to the horrific events of June 2023. As part of this review, the CQC was also asked to determine whether its review of Valdo Calocane's care and that of 10 other benchmarking cases indicated wider patient safety concerns or systemic issues with the provision of mental health services in Nottinghamshire.

This report identified serious failings in the care and treatment provided to Valdo Calocane by NHFT that may have contributed to these tragic killings after he was discharged from the trust's mental health services. These failings are consistent with the CQC's findings from strands 2 and 3 of the review, published in March, which identified issues with the safety of services and quality of care at NHFT as a whole.

While there was no single point of failure for Valdo Calocane's care identified in the report, the strand 1 review identified serious shortcomings relating to four areas: risk assessment and record keeping, care planning and engagement, medicines management, and discharge planning.

I have met with NHS England, which has provided me with assurance that it and NHFT are taking action to address the serious failures identified in the report. I have made it clear to NHS England that I expect regular updates on progress against all the recommendations across the three strands of the review.

In advance of the publication of this report, NHFT has taken action to implement the CQC's recommendations, specifically relating to managing patients who may be at risk of harming themselves or others. These actions include:



Changing “did not attend” policies to make sure patients are not discharged for not attending appointments.

Implementing systems to make sure staff more robustly consider risks to patients and the public.

Reviewing the approach to managing beds—there are early positive signs of a reduction in patients being placed in incorrect care settings as a result.

Putting into place a new crisis telephone system so that patients can access crisis services 24/7 without delay.

Reviewing patients waiting to access community support—the waiting list has reduced from 1,500 to 1,092.

Providing increased oversight for patients who are waiting to access care and checking medications for everyone in the community on antipsychotic medication.

I have made it clear that I also expect regular progress reports from NHFT.

I also expect these findings and recommendations to be considered and applied throughout the country. NHS England has accepted all of the CQC’s recommendations and has initiated a series of actions to ensure nationwide improvements are made.

As part of this work, NHS England has tasked every provider in England to review the policies and practices in place to ensure patients who are very unwell and who need help to engage with services do not fall through the cracks. I expect regular updates from NHS England on the progress of this review.

Other measures the NHS has already undertaken include:

Issuing guidance to trusts reiterating instructions not to discharge patients with serious mental health issues if they do not attend appointments.

Commissioning an independent investigation into the incident, which will be published by the end of 2024.

Continuing to improve data on community mental health services including developing metrics around access to psychological therapies for severe mental health problems and outcomes for people accessing community mental health services.

Establishing an expert advisory group to oversee the development of core standards for safe care in community mental health services.

[HCWS66]

## TRANSPORT

### Shadow Great British Railways

#### **The Secretary of State for Transport (Louise Haigh):**

Today I am announcing that I will be instructing the CEO of Network Rail, the director general for rail services in the Department for Transport, and the CEO of DfT OLR Holdings Ltd to establish a shadow Great British Railways. As the main organisations responsible for the operational railway, they will be working in closer collaboration, bringing together track and train to deliver for passengers and freight users, ahead of legislation to create Great British Railways as an arm’s length body.

Our manifesto committed to putting passengers at the heart of the service by reforming the railways and bringing them into public ownership. Great British

Railways will be created to deliver a unified system that focuses on reliable, affordable, high-quality and efficient services, along with ensuring safety and accessibility.

GBR will put passengers back at the heart of the railways and introduce new measures to protect their interests. This will include paving the way for a powerful new passenger watchdog, the Passenger Standards Authority, to independently monitor standards and champion improvement in service performance against a range of measures. Great British Railways will reform the ticketing system, to make it simpler for passengers, drive innovation across the network, replace the current myriad of ticket types and maximise passenger growth.

There will be a statutory duty on GBR to promote the use of rail freight, alongside an overall growth target set by the Secretary of State. The Government will include safeguards to ensure that freight operators continue to receive fair access to the network. Open access operators have a proven track record in driving competition and better passenger outcomes, and where there is a case that open access operators can add value and capacity to the network, they will be able to.

While primary legislation is required to initiate the change to public ownership and establish GBR, this Government will begin delivering improvements for passengers and freight users straight away. That is why I am taking the immediate step of standing up shadow Great British Railways today. The three organisations will work collaboratively, taking a whole-system approach to decision making and driving improvement, whilst retaining their existing accountabilities and duties.

We can achieve change on how organisations work together quickly. But change on the ground, for those who use the railway, will take time. Our railways are fragmented and have been for decades, suffering from a short-sighted investment approach and not providing the services passengers and freight customers need. Delivering change for passengers will rely on building new levels of trust, openness and transparency across the industry, with diverse teams brought together that reflect the customers and communities we serve—setting the tone for reform and enabling us to create a modern and affordable railway for everyone in Britain.

I will expect shadow Great British Railways to be passenger focused and unlock barriers to delivery. I will also expect it to work alongside my team and me with rail stakeholders and partners across Great Britain, including national and regional governments, mayors, the trade unions, train operators, passenger and freight representative groups, the supply chain, the regulator and railway staff to deliver improvements. As part of the plans for reform, this includes the need to speed up training for drivers and collaborate with the sector to build resilience and improve productivity.

I will be writing to the chief executives and the director general to set their initial priorities and how I expect them to work together as shadow Great British Railways.

[HCWS67]

# Written Correction

*Tuesday 3 September 2024*

## Ministerial Correction

### FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

#### Questions to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

*The following extract is from Questions to the Foreign,  
Commonwealth and Development Office on 30 July 2024.*

**Stephen Doughty:** As the Foreign Secretary and I have already outlined, we took robust action against Russia's shadow fleet, alongside allies at the European

Political Community. We will continue to explore further options to strengthen our sanctions, including in the energy sector, and the Foreign Secretary did indeed raise the issue at his meetings in Mangalore.

[*Official Report*, 30 July 2024; Vol. 752, c. 1157.]

*Written correction submitted by the Minister of State,  
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the  
hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen  
Doughty):*

**Stephen Doughty:** As the Foreign Secretary and I have already outlined, we took robust action against Russia's shadow fleet, alongside allies at the European Political Community. We will continue to explore further options to strengthen our sanctions, including in the energy sector, and the Foreign Secretary did indeed raise the issue at his meetings in **India**.







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