

**Tuesday
30 July 2024**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Tuesday 30 July 2024

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Before we begin today's proceedings, I would like to pay tribute to John Tamlyn, the Bar Doorkeeper who retires today after an incredible 36 years. John is a much-loved member of the Doorkeeper team, whose career in the House of Commons began in 1988, first as an attendant to the Sergeant at Arms office and then as Doorkeeper for the last 26 years. In that time, John has led the Speaker's procession into the Chamber hundreds of times. He is hugely respected and has developed a reputation as a font of all knowledge on Chamber procedures and a reliable source of information for Members—some might say too much at times, John.

To the team and those who work with him, John is known for being one of the smartest dressed Doorkeepers who has a fantastic sense of humour. He is an expert on music—especially '70s disco and '80s pop, which he does enjoy—and I am told that he is a mean dancer. He is also a keen photographer. I am sure that the whole House will join me in thanking John for his loyal, lengthy service. I wish him a very happy retirement. Thank you, John, for everything.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

COMMITTEE OF SELECTION

Ordered,

That Stuart Anderson, Wendy Chamberlain, Samantha Dixon, Chris Elmore, Vicky Foxcroft, Rebecca Harris, Jessica Morden, Jeff Smith and Mark Tami be members of the Committee of Selection until the end of the current Parliament.—(*Mark Tami.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

The Deputy Foreign Secretary was asked—

Recognition of Palestine

1. **Paula Barker** (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): If he will set out a timeline for the potential recognition of a Palestinian state. [900135]

3. **Mr Adnan Hussain** (Blackburn) (Ind): If he will support the immediate recognition of the state of Palestine. [900137]

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy): We want a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution: a safe, secure Israel alongside a viable, sovereign Palestinian state. We are committed to recognising a Palestinian state as a contribution to a peace process, at a time that is most conducive to that process.

Paula Barker: May I associate myself with your remarks, Mr Speaker, about John the Doorkeeper? Who knew that we had the same love of '70s disco?

I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. I must press him further on Government recognition of a Palestinian state. That should have been a starting point 30 years ago. I believe that recognition would level the playing field and kick-start the peace process, as has been recognised by so many of our European counterparts. Recognition should not come at the conclusion. What will the Government do if Israel refuses to entertain any moves towards a two-state solution, which it has persistently and vocally rejected?

Mr Lammy: I know that my hon. Friend has pressed these issues, which are of huge importance to her constituents, for many years. No one has a veto on recognition. As I said, we want it to be part of a process; it does not deliver a two-state solution in and of itself. But it is absolutely right that the Palestinians are enabled to have a sovereign state. It is a just cause, and we will work with other partners to bring that about.

Mr Speaker: Order. Can I just say to everybody that Members are meant to speak through the Chair? Please look towards me or the mics might not pick you up.

Mr Hussain: I hear what the Secretary of State said, but does he agree that the immediate recognition of the state of Palestine is vital to the UK's commitment to uphold international law and norms, vital to the processes required to bring about an immediate and just peace, and vital to the notion that diplomatic means and not violence are the way to resolve the conflict? Does he agree that failure to recognise the state of Palestine has had and continues to have catastrophic implications for the people of Palestine, as they face what the International Criminal Court has described as plausible genocide?

Mr Lammy: The hon. Gentleman is right that peace will be achieved through a political solution, not through military means. But I disagree that recognition itself will bring about peace. The Biden plan is on the table at the moment, and we would like Hamas and the Israeli leadership to accept it. That is what will give us a ceasefire and get us to a place where we can achieve that two-state solution.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): May I welcome the Foreign Secretary to his new position, since this is the first time that we have met across the Dispatch Box since we swapped sides? I welcome all his team, especially the hon. Member for Lincoln (Hamish Falconer), who was previously a respected and effective official in both the Ministries in which I served as a Cabinet Minister.

I urge the Foreign Secretary to avoid any suggestion of some sort of international legal-moral equivalence between a terrorist murderer and the elected head of a democratic state. In any question of an arms embargo, I remind him that just a few weeks ago, British arms and military personnel were defending our ally Israel from missiles launched by Iran.

Mr Lammy: Let me begin by welcoming the right hon. Gentleman to his position. It is great to see him where he is, and not on the Government Benches. He will know that these are very serious issues, and that the test under criterion 2c is whether there is a “clear risk”. That is based on very careful assessments of the law. He would expect me to pursue that with all sobriety and integrity, and that is what I intend to do.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): The Secretary of State will get bored of me continuing to press him on the recognition of the state of Palestine. I hope not to test his patience, but I know in my heart that it is what Palestinians need to ignite hope. Two states cannot happen without that hope to unite Palestinians behind a final cause that will stop the killing for good. War has to stop, but that is not peace. Peace is two states. He knows that Netanyahu rejects it, so when he spoke to Netanyahu, did he talk about the two-state solution, and in particular the recognition of Palestine? Does he accept that if the UK followed the other 140 countries that have done this, that would send a powerful message to both the Palestinian people and Netanyahu?

Mr Lammy: Let me reassure the hon. Lady that raising this issue does not test my patience. She is absolutely right. I reject and disagree with those in Israel who say that there can be no two-state solution. If there is no two-state solution, there is either one state or no state at all. I recognise why this is a pressing issue and why she raises it, but as I have said, we will do it at the appropriate moment, hopefully working with other partners as a road to the two states that we desire.

Gaza: Permanent Ceasefire

2. Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help secure a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. [900136]

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy): In my second week in the role I travelled to Israel and to the west bank and called for an immediate ceasefire—something that none of my predecessors had done. In my meetings with both leaders I called for an immediate ceasefire and made the urgent case, as has been described, for a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution.

Debbie Abrahams: I welcome my right hon. Friend and all the team to their place. I thank him for calling for a ceasefire when he visited Israel; that has had a profound impact in my constituency. Does he agree that a permanent ceasefire in Gaza is essential for the future of the people in Gaza, and would help to cool tensions in the middle east, in particular given the attack on the Golan Heights and the escalating tensions between Hezbollah and Israel, and even the Houthis?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is right. The death and destruction in Gaza is intolerable. The war needs to end now. It is also the case that, given the escalation of tensions in the region, if the Biden plan is adopted by both sides, we would see that escalation come down. For life in Gaza and across the region, it is important that that plan is adopted now.

Gaza: Humanitarian Situation

4. Gordon McKee (Glasgow South) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. [900138]

5. Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Ind): What steps he is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. [900139]

6. Deirdre Costigan (Ealing Southall) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. [900140]

10. Laura Kyrke-Smith (Aylesbury) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. [900146]

15. Bambos Charalambous (Southgate and Wood Green) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. [900151]

22. Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. [900159]

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anneliese Dodds): The people of Gaza face a humanitarian catastrophe. Humanitarian aid is a moral necessity. Almost 90% of the population in Gaza have been displaced and the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification's recent assessment found a risk of famine across the whole of Gaza.

Gordon McKee: I thank the Minister for her answer. Last week, I met the Palestinian ambassador to discuss the heartbreaking crisis in Gaza. Since April, the volume of aid cargo entering the Gaza strip has decreased by around 50%, at the same time as hospitals remain damaged or, in many cases, destroyed. That is why I welcome the Foreign Secretary's commitment to resume United Nations Relief and Works Agency funding and his demands for a ceasefire in the region. Having resumed that funding, what steps are the Government taking to allow that vital aid into Gaza and help those so desperately in need?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this issue. We are deeply concerned at a number of the developments he mentions. The UK is providing, and will continue to provide, significant humanitarian support to Gaza. However, we are also clear that Israel must meet its commitment to “flood Gaza with aid”—that is vital.

Richard Burgon: I very much welcome the Foreign Secretary's decisions on the International Criminal Court and on UNRWA funding. This morning I met Oxfam, which told me and other Members that, when Parliament

is in recess this summer, up to 7,000 people in Gaza will be killed or injured—up to a third of them children. Given that, will the Minister outline what urgent steps the Government will take this summer to end this horror, including ending UK arms sales to Israel?

Anneliese Dodds: Too many people have died in Gaza and too little aid is getting in. We are clear that Israel must take concrete steps to protect civilians and aid workers, in accordance with international humanitarian law. This includes deconfliction between military and humanitarian operations, and supporting the minimum operating requirements of the UN agencies, as well, of course, as the other matters my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary laid out, including the need for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

Deirdre Costigan: Last week, I met some of my constituents in Ealing Southall who live in the Hanwell Broadway area. They told me about Hanwell Friends of Sabastiya, a friendship and support network between our corner of west London and a village in the north of the west bank. My constituents have heard at first hand how Palestinians are suffering across the territory. What difference will the decision to restart UNRWA funding make to the lives of ordinary Palestinians, and what discussions has the Minister had with UNRWA's commissioner-general to maximise its impact for the Palestinian people?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this matter, because we are clear that UNRWA is the only humanitarian organisation that is able to operate at the scale required in Gaza. The Foreign Secretary, as hon. Members will be aware, confirmed to the House on 19 July that the UK would resume funding to UNRWA. On the same day, I met UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini to understand more from him about the situation on the ground and the reforms that UNRWA is undertaking. We also talked about this Government's release of £21 million in new funds to UNRWA to support its lifesaving work in Gaza and the provision of basic services in the region.

Laura Kyrke-Smith: My constituents are appalled by the death and destruction in Gaza. They know, as we do, that only an immediate, permanent ceasefire in exchange for the return of the hostages will put an end to this unacceptable and unbearable suffering. In the meantime, despite the Israeli Government's promise to flood Gaza with aid, which the Minister mentioned, the reality is that they are putting in place repeated and deadly obstructions. What conversations have the Government had with Israel to ensure that the Israelis end this denial of lifesaving assistance?

Anneliese Dodds: I know that my hon. Friend has a personal interest in this issue, and, indeed, experience of it following the humanitarian work in which she was involved before coming to this place. When the Foreign Secretary was in Israel he pressed Prime Minister Netanyahu to open all border crossings, including Rafah, to facilitate a significant increase in aid and to allow its safe, effective distribution within Gaza, and we will continue to press for that as a matter of urgency.

Bambos Charalambous: Despite the designation of Al-Mawasi as a humanitarian safe zone, there have been multiple Israeli air strikes which have killed dozens of civilians and wounded many more, and have resulted in the bombing of a compound belonging to the charities Medical Aid for Palestinians and the International Rescue Committee. What discussions has the Minister had with her Israeli counterpart about stopping any further attacks on Al-Mawasi, where displaced Gazans were ordered to go by the Israel Defence Forces for their own safety?

Anneliese Dodds: I know that this issue is of personal concern to my hon. Friend and that he has visited the region many times, for instance when he was the shadow Minister for the middle east. He has asked specifically about the question of civilians in the conflict. We are aware that about 90% of the population in Gaza have now been displaced, some of them more than once. We need civilians to be protected, we need aid workers to be treated in accordance with international humanitarian law, and we need to ensure that there is deconfliction. As I said earlier, those are matters on which we, as the new Government, have been pressing.

Ruth Cadbury: The World Health Organisation has warned that the lack of sanitation and clean water caused by the humanitarian crisis in Gaza poses a real risk of polio spreading undetected among its people. Will the UK Government consider supporting a mass vaccination programme in Gaza?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this matter, which the Foreign Secretary and I discussed directly with Dr Ghebreyesus, the head of the World Health Organisation, yesterday. My hon. Friend is right about the severe concern about polio and the need for a vaccination scheme, and the World Health Organisation is working on such a scheme. When populations are not receiving the food and nutrition that they require, or clean water, the potential for infectious disease obviously increases, but the UK has provided significant food and nutrition support, as well as shelter and other essential materials. We will continue to do that, and, indeed, to work with the World Health Organisation on these important matters.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): While the eyes of the world are rightly on the shocking, dystopian situation in Gaza, we should not forget the humanitarian situation in the west bank, where a largely defenceless population are being ever more persecuted and exposed to violence and are seeing their homes and land stolen. May we please have a comprehensive set of sanctions against violent settlers, the organisations that support them in their activities and those who are complicit, at a state level, in what they are doing?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the right hon. Member for raising this issue. The health and wellbeing of those in the west bank was another of the issues that I discussed with Commissioner-General Lazzarini of UNRWA, because we are concerned about it. As would be expected, we are keeping all sanctions regimes under review, including this one, and we remain concerned about not only the position of the population but the longer-term issues surrounding a two-state solution, which were mentioned earlier.

Dr Al Pinkerton (Surrey Heath) (LD): The Government have announced a strategic defence review, but the challenges faced by the UK in the mid-21st century are military-related, development-related and diplomacy-related. May I have an assurance that the Foreign Office will have a distinct role to play in the strategic defence review—especially in the light of the conversation that we have just had, which has shown the complexities of the UK's global posture in the 21st century?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his point. Of course, all these issues are strongly related. We are absolutely determined to work with colleagues in Defence, as well as across the whole Government, so that we ensure that we are putting our country's interests first and, above all, protecting our security—the first responsibility of any Government.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): In recent months, Hamas have targeted Israel's Kerem Shalom goods crossing with rockets and mortars to prolong the misery of their own people. They are also estimated to have spent \$150 million on constructing their terror networks by misappropriating aid. Does the Minister accept that Hamas will always prioritise conflict with Israel over the wellbeing of their own citizens in Gaza, and that more steps need to be taken to stop the misappropriation of aid by Hamas?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his question. Of course, aid materials must always be provided directly to those in need, particularly in a situation of humanitarian catastrophe, which is currently the case in Gaza. It is incredibly important that food and nutrition, clean water, other forms of sanitation, medicines and shelter are provided directly to those in need; it is absolutely fundamental that they must not be misappropriated. Of course, these are issues that we have discussed with UNRWA and other aid agencies that are involved in the region.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber) (SNP): Key to ending the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is stopping the sale of weapons to those who have shown that they are prepared to use them indiscriminately against civilians. It has been suggested that the Government will continue to sell defensive weapons, but given that Israel defines its entire campaign as "defensive", how do they propose to tell us at the end of the review on international humanitarian law how many of the 40,000 civilians killed were killed with defensive weapons, as opposed to offensive weapons? On what legal basis would such a determination be made?

Anneliese Dodds: The hon. Member will be well aware that this is a legal process and has to be complied with. This Government are absolutely clear that we must act with integrity and ensure that we are following all the legal procedures, as the Foreign Secretary set out last week in the House and has set out this morning.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): As shadow Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State urged David Cameron to publish the FCDO's formal legal advice on whether Israel is breaching international humanitarian law in Gaza. Do the new ministerial team

still think there is a compelling case for publishing the Government's legal advice, and will the Government be publishing it?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his question. The Foreign Secretary has been crystal clear that he will be as transparent as he possibly can. He will ensure that Parliament is fully updated on these matters.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for that response. If we want to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, it is quite clear what the free world has to do: get rid of Hamas, who are murderers and terrorists. They hide in schools and hospitals, and they hide among civilians. They are the people who are bringing death to Palestine. If we want to give Palestinians the humanitarian aid that we should give them, we have to get rid of Hamas.

Anneliese Dodds: Of course, this Government recognise that Hamas have used civilians as human shields. We are deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation, and I set out our response to that a few moments ago. We need to ensure that civilians are protected, and we will continue to press for that as a matter of absolute urgency.

Russian Sanctions Regime

7. **Phil Brickell** (Bolton West) (Lab): Whether he plans to review the sanctions regime against Russia.
[900141]

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Stephen Doughty): I thank my hon. Friend for his question. This Government are determined to increase the pressure on Russia and support Ukraine. We will keep our Russia sanctions regime under close review, and will go further to reduce Russia's capacity to wage war. The Government have already taken further action, including through the European Political Community, by sanctioning an additional 11 ships as part of efforts to disrupt and deter Russia's shadow fleet. In my early meetings, I have raised our Russia sanctions consistently with my counterparts, and I will continue to work with our closest allies in Europe and United States.

Phil Brickell: The UK has sanctioned 2,000 individuals and entities since Russia's unlawful full-scale invasion of Ukraine, yet since 2022 there has been just one instance of UK law enforcement securing sanctioned funds. What discussions is the Minister having with his counterparts across Government to ensure that those who evade sanctions are held to account and that money held unlawfully is secured for the public purse?

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that important question. This Government will not hesitate to take firm action to close loopholes and to strengthen the enforcement of sanctions. He will understand that I will not comment on future designations or enforcement actions. As I have said, we have already taken some early steps on the shadow fleet, but he is right: there is much more to do, whether to improve compliance or to target those who enable sanctioned individuals to evade our sanctions, and I will of course keep the House closely updated.

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his early statement calling on the Russian Government to release the British citizen Vladimir Kara-Murza. Will he look at what further sanctions might be used to put pressure on the Russian Government to release him and other political prisoners, such as the American journalist Evan Gershkovich?

Stephen Doughty: The right hon. Gentleman is right to raise this important question. We call for the release of all those detained in Russia on political grounds, including those imprisoned for their opposition to Russia's illegal war in Ukraine. We have met many of the families of those concerned, and we will continue to take this very seriously.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Dame Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): May I start by congratulating the Minister on his appointment? I know how hard he worked on this brief in opposition. He will know that the longer those Russian sanctions are in place, the more creative Russia becomes at circumventing them. What steps do he and the Foreign Secretary plan to take to end the UK's indirect import of Russian crude oil via the three refineries at Jamnagar, Vadinar and New Mangalore? Did the Foreign Secretary discuss that issue when he travelled to see our Commonwealth friends in India last week?

Stephen Doughty: It is a pleasure to see the hon. Lady in her position and to have worked with her many times on these issues in the past, across these Benches and in other formats. 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.

UK-India Relations

8. **Gregor Poynton** (Livingston) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with his Indian counterpart on strengthening UK-India relations. [900142]

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy): I met my Indian counterpart, Dr Jaishankar, in Delhi on 24 July. We discussed how to unlock the potential of the UK-India relationship for economic growth and to develop a stronger, deeper partnership to reinvigorate that relationship. I was very pleased to launch the tech and security initiative, which brings together businesses across our two countries working in those areas.

Gregor Poynton: I thank my right hon. Friend for his response. I recently met a number of members of the growing Indian population in my constituency of Livingston, and they were very clear with me that if we get our India-UK relations right over the coming four or five years, it will be of huge benefit to both countries. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the signing of the technology and security initiative within just a month of coming into office shows that we are working internationally to drive our economy and secure our country?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that the Trade Secretary announced the Government's intention to continue trade talks with India just yesterday, and I am sure there is more we can do to reduce barriers between our two countries.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman has visited India, and he will know that the previous Government had clearly got a long way towards a free trade agreement but that it was stalled because of the Indian general election and then our general election. There are some sticking points, and I wonder if he could update the House on his discussions on removing those sticking points so that we can unlock the free trade deal that those on both sides of this House want to see.

Mr Lammy: The hon. Gentleman has great experience in these matters, but I disagree with him slightly. He will remember that the previous Government set a timetable and said that we would have a trade agreement by Diwali, but I am afraid the question is which one, because successive Diwalis passed and we did not get one. I am very pleased that the Trade Secretary has set out that we are going to continue negotiations, and of course these issues came up with my counterpart in Delhi.

Mr Speaker: We now come to shadow Minister Alicia Kearns—welcome.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Foreign Secretary rightly visited India to discuss a trade agreement between our countries. The Labour party regularly called for human rights to be part of that UK-India trade deal. Will he therefore update the House on whether he secured said agreement during his visit?

On human rights, we on the Conservative Benches welcome the fact that the Foreign Secretary raised with his counterparts the case of Jagtar Singh Johal, a British national whom the UN has determined to be arbitrarily detained, with reports that he was subject to torture. Will the Foreign Secretary confirm before the House today that he still believes, as he did a month ago, that Jagtar is being arbitrarily detained? Will he today publicly call for Jagtar's release, just as, from this Dispatch Box, he repeatedly urged the last Foreign Secretary to do? Will he meet Jagtar's family, as Lord Cameron did? Finally, having adopted the Foreign Affairs Committee's recommendation of a special envoy for Britain's wrongly detained abroad, when will he announce that somebody has been appointed?

Mr Lammy: The hon. Lady has raised these issues over many years, and this is a very serious case. I remain absolutely committed to pushing for faster progress and to resolving this issue. I of course raised it with the Minister of External Affairs in India last week. We continue to raise our concerns, particularly about allegations of torture and the right to a fair trial. Of course I will meet the family over the coming weeks.

Iran: Alleged Human Rights Violations

9. **Tom Gordon** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (LD): What discussions he has had with his Iranian counterpart on alleged human rights violations in that country. [900143]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Hamish Falconer): Iran's continued repression of women and girls, ethnic and religious minorities, and human rights defenders is unacceptable. We will continue to work with international partners to hold the regime to account, including at the UN Third Committee later this year.

Tom Gordon: The Iranian authorities have been systematically targeting BBC Persian staff and their families in an attempt to intimidate them into stopping their work as journalists. Freedom of the press is a fundamental right for people all over the world, so will the Foreign Secretary and his colleagues commit to working across Government with the Culture Secretary to revisit the previous cuts to BBC Persian, and look to increase funding for the vital work that the service does?

Hamish Falconer: That is a very important question. Iran clearly remains an extremely hostile environment for journalists, who face harassment, arbitrary detention and long prison sentences. We will raise this issue with the new Iranian Government when they are formed—as the hon. Member will know, they are having their inauguration today, so there are no Ministers yet for me or the rest of the Foreign Office team to talk to. The Foreign Office currently provides a quarter of the BBC World Service budget, and we will no doubt look at that as part of the wider budget review.

Dan Tomlinson (Chipping Barnet) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his place. As we were tragically reminded again this weekend, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is a destructive, malign and terrorist force that is operating through proxies in the middle east, including Hamas and Hezbollah. Will the Minister please update the House on the ongoing work to proscribe the IRGC, which the Conservatives sadly failed to do when they were in government? Will he please also reassure the House that the UK continues to stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel against the IRGC's continued aggression?

Hamish Falconer: The Government recognise the threat that the IRGC poses, and we will take the necessary measures to counter it at home and abroad. We will keep the list of proscribed terrorist organisations under careful review, but it would not be appropriate to comment on whether an organisation is under consideration at this time. Iran continues to destabilise the middle east through its support for its proxies and partners, and we will work with international partners to challenge that destabilising activity.

NATO

11. **Alistair Strathern** (Hitchin) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help strengthen NATO. [900147]

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy): One of my predecessors, Ernest Bevin, was instrumental in setting up NATO, and that is why our commitment to NATO is unshakeable. The Washington summit demonstrated that NATO is bigger, stronger and more united than ever. The Prime Minister and the Defence Secretary continue to engage with allies, and we are pleased to make our commitment to 2.5% of GDP for defence spending.

Alistair Strathern: Some of my proudest moments in my admittedly reasonably short time as an MP so far have been joining my communities in Shefford to commemorate the incredible role played not just by British troops but by allied troops based in our local bases in supporting our way of life through the wars. In that spirit, I welcome and celebrate Britain's renewed commitment to NATO under Labour. However, with the previous Government having failed to deliver that crucial 2.5% of GDP spending commitment, will the Secretary of State commit to working with Ministers as soon as the defence review is completed to ensure we have a timeline to deliver on that, as soon as financially possible?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to pay tribute to the work of our armed services and all of our veterans; I thank him for doing that in the House today. We have undertaken a strategic defence review and we will ensure at an appropriate fiscal event in the coming months that we set out a timetable to get to that 2.5% of GDP.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Foreign Secretary share my concern that the dominant strand in the US Republican party is, at the moment, falling into the trap of renewed isolationism? What can we do to try to impress on our American allies that if they turn away from NATO they will only postpone a conflict that could otherwise be avoided completely?

Mr Lammy: I know that the right hon. Gentleman speaks from immense experience on these matters. He will recognise that there are range of opinions on these issues within both political parties in the United States. I was very pleased that Donald Trump spoke recently to President Zelensky and that a supplemental \$61 billion of aid to Ukraine was found recently.

Fred Thomas (Plymouth Moor View) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that Ukraine joining NATO is vital not only to Ukraine's security but to the security of all European countries?

Mr Lammy: It was absolutely right that at the NATO summit we were able to set out that irreversible pathway to membership for Ukraine, and that NATO was able to come together and speak with one voice.

Stuart Anderson (South Shropshire) (Con): I am proud to have served on NATO operations in both Bosnia and Kosovo. The 2.5% of GDP commitment will strengthen our ties within NATO. Will the Foreign Secretary commit to a timeline at the earliest opportunity to ensure that we do not have to cancel any defence projects and that we have the 2.5% of GDP on defence spending as soon as possible?

Mr Lammy: I thank the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth Moor View (Fred Thomas) for their service. I gently remind the hon. Gentleman that the last Government to get to 2.5% of GDP spending on defence was a Labour Government. We intend to get back there and those plans will be announced at a fiscal event in the future.

Israel: Compliance with International Law

12. **Tracy Gilbert** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): What his planned timescale is for completing his review of Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law. [900148]

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy): As soon as I came into office, I commissioned new advice on Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law in the context of war in Gaza. We are obliged to look at that advice under criterion 2C for items exported. That is an ongoing process. I pledge to update the House as soon as I can on this very serious matter.

Tracy Gilbert: I welcome the Government's changing approach to the devastating conflict in Gaza and the fact that the review was ordered soon after the Foreign Secretary's appointment. Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that, if the review were to conclude that Israel was breaching international law, all actions including halting arms sales would be considered as part of the Government's proportional response?

Mr Lammy: Criterion 2C of our strategic export licensing criteria is a clear risk of breach of international humanitarian law. Careful assessments have to be made. There is a then a legal process to enable us to reach a conclusion. Of course, with all sobriety and integrity, I intend to do that and I will update the House as soon as I can.

International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion

13. **Afzal Khan** (Manchester Rusholme) (Lab): Whether he has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion entitled, "Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem", published on 19 July 2024. [900149]

16. **Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Ind): What assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion entitled, "Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem", published on 19 July 2024. [900153]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Hamish Falconer): We have been clear that the Government must uphold both our domestic and international legal obligations. The UK respects the independence of the ICJ. We received the advisory opinion on 19 July and issued a statement that made it clear that we were considering it carefully before responding. My colleagues on the Front Bench have already made it clear that they oppose the violence from settlers on the west bank, but I am happy to expand on that point, if that is what my hon. Friend and the right hon. Gentleman would like.

Afzal Khan: I thank the Foreign Secretary for showing bold leadership and unequivocal support for international law by dropping the previous Government's opposition to the arrest warrant against Netanyahu. The ICJ's

historic advisory opinion earlier this month made it clear that Israel's occupation and annexation of Palestinian territories is unlawful, an issue on which many of us have campaigned. What steps is the Foreign Secretary taking to ensure that Israel ends its unlawful occupation, which includes the recent expansion of Israeli settlements on the west bank and the annexation of East Jerusalem?

Hamish Falconer: I know that my hon. Friend cares deeply about these matters. The Foreign Secretary visited the region within a week of taking office, and he has also raised those precise issues with the Israeli authorities. I reiterate that we are strongly opposed to the expansion of illegal settlements and rising settler violence. More west bank land has been declared state lands by Israel this year than at any time since the Oslo accords. The British Government already have sanctions against eight people and two groups in relation to settlers in the west bank, and we will look at all options when it comes to tougher action on issues related to the west bank.

Jeremy Corbyn: Can the Minister be clear about this? The judgment or opinion given by the ICJ is, quite clearly, that the occupation of Gaza, the west bank and East Jerusalem is illegal. The settlement policy is illegal. Do the Government accept that view, and if they do, what actions will they take to ensure that appropriate sanctions are taken against Israel, including ending arms supplies, to ensure that that judgment is carried out, and that the people of Palestine can live in peace, and not under occupation?

Hamish Falconer: I thank the right hon. Member for his question. This is an extremely complex finding, covering 90 pages. It was issued after considerable deliberation by the ICJ, and there is a variety of views from the judges. As we said at the time, it will take us some time to respond to the full judgment. We will update the House when we are in a position to do so. In the meantime, sanctions will remain under review, as I mentioned in the previous answer.

Bangladesh: Human Rights

14. **Apsana Begum** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Ind): What recent discussions he has had with his Bangladeshi counterpart on the human rights situation in that country. [900150]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Catherine West): Bangladesh is an important Commonwealth friend, but we remain deeply concerned about recent events. I thank the many Members from across this House who have raised the matter with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. I spoke to the Bangladesh high commissioner on 19 and 23 July. On 22 July, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary called for an end to the violence, for democratic reforms, and for the rule of law to be protected.

Apsana Begum: Following the high death toll among student protesters, international human rights bodies are reporting further crackdowns on dissent, from mass arrests and enforced disappearances to torture and unlawful killings. Does the Minister agree that Bangladeshi people must have the right to exercise their fundamental

human rights, including the right to protest, and will she join me in expressing solidarity with Bangladeshi people facing repression, both in Bangladesh and around the world?

Catherine West: My hon. Friend is an excellent champion for her constituents. The UK and our international partners continue to push for progress towards accountability and justice, including through an independent, impartial and transparent investigation into alleged human rights violations.

Support for Ukraine

17. **Dame Caroline Dinenage** (Gosport) (Con): What steps he is taking to support Ukraine. [900154]

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy): I was pleased that at the NATO conference, all nations were able to come together to reaffirm our commitment to Ukraine. We took great heart from Zelensky speaking to the Cabinet for the first time, and we were united in continuing to stand with the people of Ukraine.

Dame Caroline Dinenage: Of course I welcome the Secretary of State's and the Government's commitment to supporting Ukraine, and the provision of military and humanitarian aid is important, but sadly it will not be enough to secure long-term peace. Will he reassure me that if and when the Ukrainians seek peace talks, the UK will stand by them, and support them absolutely in their efforts to bring this wasteful and terrible war to a conclusion?

Mr Lammy: I welcome the Ukrainians' desire to have peace summits, and to see so many nations come together to discuss the issues that are pertinent to getting that peace. The hon. Lady knows that the best way to achieve peace is for Russia to leave, for us to continue to stand with Ukraine, and for this to be a cross-party issue, which is just what we committed to in opposition. I am very grateful to the shadow Foreign Office team for ensuring that this remains a bipartisan issue in the UK Parliament.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State and all Ministers to the Front Bench, and I look forward to working with them. Can the Secretary of State reassure the House that he is working flat out, as were the last Government, on making sure that the roughly £2 billion of funds generated from the sale of Chelsea football club gets distributed urgently, and reaches those in desperate need of humanitarian assistance due to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine? Does he agree that Chelsea FC is effectively now one of the largest charitable organisations in the country, and that the sooner the funds are mobilised, the better?

Mr Lammy: This is an ongoing and complex issue. We endeavour to do the best that we can, at pace, and are unpicking much that happened under the previous Government.

Topical Questions

T1. [900161] **Lloyd Hatton** (South Dorset) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy): The Government are reconnecting Britain with the world in European capitals, in NATO and at Blenheim, and I have been resetting relations with Europe and reinforcing support for Ukraine. I have also deepened partnerships with the global south to tackle the climate crisis and unlock economic growth, and I am taking a balanced approach on the middle east, calling for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages and more aid into Gaza.

Lloyd Hatton: A builder living on Portland, a B&B owner in Weymouth and a shopkeeper on Swanage high street all pay their fair share of tax, yet some individuals take advantage of offshore tax havens such as the British Virgin Islands to avoid paying their fair share. My constituents play by the rules; we ought to know a bit more about those who choose not to. Can the Secretary of State set out what steps his Department is taking to throw open the books in British tax havens and implement public registers of beneficial ownership?

Mr Lammy: I raised this issue in opposition—I think it was the subject of the last speech I gave before the election—and it is an issue that I intend to take up with full vigour. We were concerned that parts of the last Government were turning a blind eye to these issues. I hope to come forward with further proposals in the coming weeks.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): The Foreign Secretary will get full support from the Opposition in imposing open registers of beneficial ownership on the overseas territories.

Can I ask the Foreign Secretary to pay special attention to Sudan, which is suffering the largest displacement crisis in the world? There is clear evidence of ethnic cleansing once again in Darfur, and the human misery that I saw on the border with Chad earlier this year was among the most harrowing that I have ever seen.

Mr Lammy: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I was able to raise the issue of Sudan with G7 Foreign Ministers in my first days in office, and I continue to hold discussions with the United States, which, as he will know, has summoned a gathering in Switzerland to try to achieve peace.

Mr Mitchell: Both main parties committed in their manifestos to restoring the 0.7% international development target. As the Foreign Secretary will have seen, last year we reached nearly 0.6%. Will he discuss with the Treasury returning to 0.7%, not in one bite, but over the next two years? That would secure the best value for money for British taxpayers and also help those most in need.

Mr Lammy: I paid tribute to the right hon. Gentleman earlier, but this is one area that was left in a mess. Frankly, £3.4 billion being spent on refugees in hotels is the lion's share of that amount. That is a lot for me and

my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for development to deal with, but we will do all we can to get back to that 0.7% as soon as possible.

T2. [900162] **Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Ind): Next week marks five years since the illegal revocation of articles 370 and 35A took away what little autonomy the Kashmiris had and paved the way for further persecution of the Kashmiris by the Indian armed forces. Will the Minister make it clear that she is committed to upholding international law? Will she confirm that the UK will uphold UN resolution 47, which demands the birthright of the Kashmiris—the right to a free and fair plebiscite?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Catherine West): I thank the hon. Member for his passionate defence of human rights in Kashmir. He of course understands the UK Government's position that all countries should respect sovereignty, human rights and the rule of law, and we push all parties to work towards upholding United Nations resolutions.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): This weekend, we saw an escalation across the UN blue line when Hezbollah and Israel exchanged rocket fire and 12 Druze children tragically lost their lives. One child dying in war is too many, no matter what nationality they may be, but this region is a tinderbox. What is the Foreign Secretary doing to calm the area now that we have seen an escalation, because surely that could be a disaster for the region?

Mr Lammy: The hon. Lady is right: the situation on the de facto border between Lebanon and Israel is very concerning. We urge all parties to act with caution. The UK condemns the strike in the Golan heights, which has tragically claimed the lives of 12 people. Hezbollah must cease its acts and its destabilising activity. I was pleased to speak to the Prime Minister yesterday, and I will say more on Lebanon in the coming hours.

T3. [900163] **Ian Byrne** (Liverpool West Derby) (Ind): On 19 July, the Foreign Secretary stated that half a million people in Gaza are in phase 5 of acute food insecurity, the classification that indicates starvation and famine. UNICEF reports that 29 children have died from malnutrition. How do the Government plan to change that, as Palestinians face the harrowing reality of death by starvation because of a political choice?

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anneliese Dodds): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the issue, which we have discussed previously in this Question Time. We are deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza; we have reflected that in our policy response, but also in our humanitarian response. For example, in the statement that the Foreign Secretary made on his visit to the region, he committed £5.5 million to UK-Med, which is providing a field hospital on the ground that is desperately needed. We have also ensured that there will

be continued provision of the items of medicine, food and nutrition that are required; we will play our part in that.

T4. [900164] **Ian Roome** (North Devon) (LD): The united support for Ukraine is not shared in the United States; there have been worrying comments by the Republican vice-presidential candidate. The Foreign Secretary knows Mr Vance. What assurances has he had from him regarding financial and military support for Ukraine should Trump win?

Mr Lammy: The US has committed over £135 billion in support for Ukraine, including the supplemental \$61 billion, and we thank it for that. I was very pleased to meet with J. D. Vance at the Munich conference and subsequently in Washington DC, and I continue to have good conversations with him about these very important issues.

T5. [900165] **Paula Barker** (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): The destruction and loss of life in Bangladesh are of grave concern to me and a great number of my constituents. I welcome the conversations that the Minister has already had with Bangladeshi counterparts, urging calm. What measures are being taken to support British nationals in Bangladesh? Will she join me in thanking the Bangladeshi community in my constituency of Liverpool Wavertree, who contribute so much to our city?

Catherine West: I thank my hon. Friend for being so active on this issue, including in the parliamentary engagement on Bangladesh last week. The UK is deeply concerned about the violence by state and state-sponsored actors. We have updated the travel advice; all the information is available on the FCDO website. We are very open to taking personal emails from her, or from any other hon. Members who have constituents with concerns, either in Bangladesh or in the UK.

T6. [900166] **Mr Richard Holden** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): In quick succession, the new Government have renewed unconditional funding for UNRWA, despite the Hamas links, and endorsed the International Criminal Court's controversial case. Following Hezbollah's attacks at the weekend, will the Government reflect on the step-by-step abandonment of one of our closest allies in the middle east, and the potential impact that could have on continuing, rather than curtailing, conflict and delaying the peace settlement that we all want to see in the middle east?

Mr Lammy: There is absolutely no abandonment of our close ties and relationship with Israel, and it was hugely important for me to speak to both the Prime Minister and the President to reiterate that. But in reflecting on the work of Madame Colonna and her report—I urge the right hon. Gentleman to read that report and its recommendations—it was also right that we came forward with the funding, like all the rest of our international allies. We did that with an extra £21 million, and I remind the right hon. Gentleman that £1 million of that funding is to ensure that those recommendations are implemented to ensure the neutrality of UNRWA.

T7. [900167] Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Ind): Following the recent rulings by the International Court of Justice, what steps are the Government taking to ensure that Israel complies with its international legal obligations?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend has taken up these issues time and again in the House. Let me make it clear that the expansion we have seen this year is entirely unacceptable—it is more than the last 20 years combined. We are keeping these issues under review and, of course, I raised them with Prime Minister Netanyahu when I saw him in Israel.

T8. [900168] Manuela Perteghella (Stratford-on-Avon) (LD): Will the Government commit to do whatever they can to urgently secure an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, get the hostages home, and re-establish as soon as possible a dedicated peace process to set us on the path to a two-state solution, as raised by many of my hon. Friends today, including my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran)?

Mr Lammy: I think the hon. Lady speaks for the whole House in the way that she put her comments, and I give her that undertaking.

Kate Osborne (Jarrow and Gateshead East) (Lab): What steps are being taken to support peace and human rights in Colombia? The UK is the UN Security Council penholder for Colombia, so will the Minister say more about what steps the Government can take, or any new initiatives, to support the full implementation of the 2016 Colombian peace agreement?

Catherine West: I thank my hon. Friend for her question; I know she has visited the region and has a keen interest in it. Colombia is one of the 32 countries currently designated by the FCDO as a human rights priority country. We work closely with the Government and communities there, including indigenous communities, to address violence against women and girls, and the UK has committed £80 million to peace, stability and human rights, working together with civil society across the piece.

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): This summer marks the 50th anniversary of Turkey's illegal invasion and occupation of the northern part of the island of Cyprus. Will the Foreign Secretary tell the House what steps and initiatives his Government are going to take to seek to resolve that frozen conflict, for which the British Government have a historical responsibility as a guarantor power?

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Stephen Doughty): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his important question; I am well aware of his interest in this issue over many years. As a Government, we remain committed to a bizonal, bicomunal federation on the basis of political equality and adherence to United Nations Security Council resolutions, and we will continue to engage with the United Nations envoy and the UN process on this important matter.

David Taylor (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab): What assessment have the Government made of the potential implications for asylum accommodation policy of using the overseas development budget to help to fund asylum accommodation?

Anneliese Dodds: As we have mentioned, this Government are committed to restoring overseas development assistance to 0.7% of gross national income as soon as fiscal circumstances allow and, overall, to restoring our development reputation and reconnecting our country to countries in the global south. The delivery of aid by this Government is made more challenging by what took place previously, with the uncontrolled expansion of so-called in-donor refugee costs. In 2023, the UK spent £4.3 billion of overseas development assistance on in-donor refugee costs—that is 27.9% of UK ODA. We are determined to ensure that we do not have the kinds of unplanned reductions that we saw before.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (North Cotswolds) (Con): What steps will the British Government be taking, following the highly disputed result in Venezuela of the election of President Maduro, to work with our American colleagues over the disputed land in Guyana to prevent any incursion there?

Mr Lammy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue. The disputed election in the last few days is of huge concern, and I issued a statement on it yesterday. There are ongoing discussions with our American friends, and indeed with the state of Guyana, given the threats from Maduro in the past.

Ben Coleman (Chelsea and Fulham) (Lab): It has just been revealed that the UK has fallen out of the top 10 manufacturers globally. Does my right hon. Friend agree that strengthening our country's trading relationship with the European Union, in respect of goods as well as services, needs to be an essential part of achieving the Government's ambitions for growing the economy?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that our biggest trading relationship is with the European Union. He knows that the former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, got the paper-thin deal that he did. We do not yet have a new Commission in place. We are absolutely committed to a new veterinary deal and to dealing with the issues of qualifications in particular, but we will take forward discussions with the European Union in good spirit in the coming months, as soon as the Commission is in place.

Sir Gavin Williamson (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): Ethiopia is on the cusp of recognising the Republic of Somaliland. Will the Minister look at where British policy is, to make sure that it reflects the new reality? Might she have time to meet me to discuss how we can strengthen and deepen the relationship between Britain and the Republic of Somaliland?

Anneliese Dodds: The UK has encouraged dialogue between Ethiopia and Somalia on the Ethiopia-Somaliland memorandum of understanding. We have also expressed our full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Somalia. I would of course be happy to meet the right hon. Gentleman to discuss any issue, including that one.

Alex Sobel (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and his team to their places. I have discussed with many of them the chronic human rights situation in West Papua over many years. In 2019, President Widodo

invited the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit West Papua, but that visit has not yet taken place. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that such a visit takes place, with both the Indonesian Government and the United Nations?

Catherine West: I thank my hon. Friend for his interparliamentary work on that important issue. The UK strongly supports the efforts of the authorities and civil society to address the legitimate concerns of the people of Papua, as my hon. Friend has highlighted many times in this House. We continue to monitor the situation in Papua, including the ongoing issue of internal civil displacement caused by clashes between separatists and Indonesian security forces in Papua. The UK remains supportive of a visit by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Has the Foreign Secretary had an opportunity to meet his counterpart in the Irish Republic, given the ministerial statements there in recent months regarding the thousands of people they believe to be there illegally, who they say have come from the United Kingdom? What can be done to try to resolve that matter in a way that will satisfy both nations?

Mr Lammy: I was very pleased, alongside the Prime Minister, to meet the Irish Taoiseach and to discuss that and other issues.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Mr Speaker, you and I are both old enough to remember Tiananmen Square. The use of lethal force on student protesters in Bangladesh has rightly been condemned by our Government. I urge the Government to put pressure on the Bangladeshi investigation, so that it has an international element, because a country that can just turn off all communications with the outside world and that controls all institutions, right down to its stormtrooper-like police, should not be allowed to mark its own homework.

Catherine West: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has been very clear that what has happened in the last couple of weeks in Bangladesh is not acceptable—we have raised it on a number of occasions—including the nature of the judicial review that is currently being undertaken by the Government of Bangladesh.

Adam Dance (Yeovil) (LD): A 25-year-old constituent of mine went missing in Sardinia on the evening of Saturday 13 July. The Italian authorities called off the search on Friday, so will the Foreign Secretary meet me to urge the Italian authorities to help to find my constituent?

Stephen Doughty: I thank the hon. Gentleman for representing the concerns of his constituent's family. I recognise that this is a very distressing time for them. He will know that consular officials are providing support to the family and have remained in regular contact with the authorities in Italy, and the ambassador has raised this case with the Italian authorities. They have ended the active search, but the investigation is ongoing, and I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss it further.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): I thank the Foreign Secretary and his team for the £500,000 committed to the Caribbean after the devastation on Grenada and Carriacou as a result of Hurricane Beryl, but can I press him and the team on the fact that the Caribbean is at the sharp end of the climate crisis? Will he tell the House what plans he has to advocate at COP29 for a replacement of the \$100 billion climate finance deal?

Mr Lammy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for taking up such issues from the Back Benches. He will know that I was dealing with these matters on day one in office. Very sadly, this is the beginning of the hurricane season across the region, so I will keep in close touch with my Caribbean colleagues, and I expect to have further conversations later today. We of course want to take up those issues as we head to COP.

Shokat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): I am sure the House will agree that the situation in Gaza, particularly for children, is absolutely horrific, with reports estimating that up to 50,000 children require health-related treatment—and that is not even including conflict-related injuries. Does the Secretary of State agree that, along with international partners, we must secure a mechanism that allows these children to be treated here in the UK, especially as many hospital facilities in Gaza have been erased?

Anneliese Dodds: The issue of medical treatment in Gaza—including, of course, for children—is one that this Government take very seriously. We have reflected that in our operations since coming into office, in particular by supporting UK-Med, which operates a field hospital that the hon. Member may be aware of. As I mentioned earlier, the Foreign Secretary announced £5.5 million towards its operations, which includes covering support for trauma and other forms of public health in Gaza, and we will of course keep this extreme need under review.

Damien Egan (Bristol North East) (Lab): All of us here want to see an end to the conflict in Gaza and Israel, and that means getting to a lasting peace as soon as possible. There is growing concern that we are seeing rising hostilities in the north of Israel with Hezbollah, with a deadly increase in attacks targeted against civilians. Hezbollah is, of course, an Iranian-funded terror group that has entrenched itself in southern Lebanon. Will the Foreign Secretary reassure us that Britain will play a full part in working with Israel and other allies to counter the threat?

Mr Lammy: Further escalation is in nobody's interests. I reassure my hon. Friend that we understand who sits behind Hezbollah—that is Iran. It has been engaged in a lot of activity to drive forward escalation in the region, so I of course want to give him that reassurance.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): In Gaza, 111 hostages are unaccounted for. Some are foreign nationals, but most are Israeli citizens. Recently, bodies were recovered from under the city of Khan Yunis, demonstrating that Hamas have complete contempt for humanitarian areas. What action is the Foreign Secretary taking to secure the release of the hostages? Will he guarantee that Hamas will play no further part in the governance of a state of Palestine?

Mr Lammy: It was very important for me to meet the hostage families when I was in Israel, and I have spoken to hostage families since returning back to the country. We are of course giving all the assistance we can to the

Israeli authorities to ensure that the hostages get out. I want the hon. Gentleman to understand that we have this as a No. 1 concern. Those hostages need to be returned.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent 1967, that the King has signified his Royal Assent to the following Act:

Supply and Appropriation (Main Estimates) Act 2024.

Post Office Horizon

12.42 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade to make a statement on financial redress for postmasters and outstanding issues relating to the Post Office Horizon scandal.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Justin Madders): As hon. Members will know, convictions across the UK have been quashed through recent legislation, and those affected are now able to apply for financial redress under the Horizon convictions redress scheme. The scheme will be wholly delivered by the Department, not the Post Office. All the forms of redress, including those pursued under the group litigation order, will be delivered by the existing schemes.

Since taking office, this Government have continued to work closely with the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to identify those who have had their convictions overturned. Letters have started to be issued to those eligible that will confirm that their conviction has been quashed and provide further information on how to access financial redress. But I would encourage those who believe that they are eligible not to wait for a letter. Please do come forward now and register for the Horizon conviction redress scheme.

We have put guidance on gov.uk to help people know where they stand: whether their conviction has been overturned and, if eligible, how to apply for redress through the registration and application process. Victims will be able to choose from two options: first, they can either accept a fixed settlement of £600,000; or, secondly, they can choose a full claim assessment if they believe their losses exceed £600,000 and wish to have their application fully examined by the Government.

No matter what route they choose to take, once an applicant's eligibility is confirmed, they will be paid a preliminary payment of £200,000. We are making sure that they can access historical data from both the Post Office and His Majesty's Revenue and Customs to support their decision and the application. We also recognise that, with the best will and support in the world, in a few cases, some information may not be retrievable, but I assure hon. Members that, even in those cases, we will do all we can to ensure that a fair offer is made to sub-postmasters who have suffered this terrible injustice. This House was united in the last Parliament in its wish to see justice for sub-postmasters. In this Parliament, we intend to deliver on that.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Kevin Hollinrake: It is disappointing that I have again had to ask an urgent question to get the Government to come to the Dispatch Box. It is also disappointing that neither the Secretary of State nor the postal affairs Minister—the Minister of State, Department for Business and Trade, the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas)—has responded to either of the urgent questions. This is clearly an important matter that deserves full scrutiny by this House. Despite earlier promises only 12 days ago to give the House a significant update, only a written statement was available.

[Kevin Hollinrake]

One of the final acts of the last Government was to pass legislation that, for the first time in history, overturned hundreds of convictions and set in train a process to provide redress to the victims. We made a clear commitment that the victims would be able to apply for redress before the summer recess. That commitment has not been honoured, although claimants can now register for redress. To do so, they need a reference number that is available only to individuals written to by the Ministry of Justice, which has today confirmed that only 10 of the 700 postmasters have received such a letter.

I ask the Minister: when will the other 690 postmasters be written to? Assuming claimants apply for the most rapid form of redress—a fixed sum award—when will the first £600,000 payments be made? The Secretary of State will acknowledge that we had conversations regarding Court of Appeal convictions and those refused leave to appeal that were not quashed by the legislation. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that those cases are given assistance to overturn their convictions?

The last Government also announced that we would top up claimants in the Horizon shortfall scheme to a minimum payment of £75,000. How many of the thousands of claimants in this scheme have been written to to that effect? Finally, where is the Secretary of State, or where is the hon. Member for Harrow West, who has been appointed post office Minister?

Justin Madders: We promised to update Parliament before the summer recess, and we have done that by way of a written ministerial statement. I note that, when the shadow Minister was the Minister, he came and answered on most occasions for the Government. We certainly did not take that as an indication that the Government were taking this matter any less seriously than they should, and that is not the case now either. I understand the frustration that the shadow Secretary of State has about the number of letters that have gone out, but there have been difficulties in corroborating some of that data. I understand that, when he made that promise as a Minister, he did so in good faith, but it has turned out that additional physical checks have been required. We have had to access court documents—sometimes stretching back decades—which has meant that there have been delays. The Ministry of Justice has put more resource into that to ensure that work carries on at pace.

As the shadow Secretary of State has noted, the website is now up and running and applicants can register on it. I am pleased to report that, as of this morning, 89 people have already done so. We hope that, once verification checks have been completed, payments can be processed within 10 working days. We understand that the question on the Court of Appeal was discussed at length during the passage of the Post Office (Horizon System) Compensation Act 2024. The matter deserves further consideration, and I understand that the Minister for postal services has had conversations on what we can do in that respect.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North) (Lab): I welcome the answer provided by my hon. Friend. He will remember that, when the Select Committee reported just four or five months ago, we noted that 80% of the budget for redress had not been paid out. We suggested to the now shadow Secretary of

State a number of measures to put into the Bill to speed up the process. Those amendments were rejected. Can the Minister now assure us that he has a grip on this and that we will now begin to see cheques in the post much faster?

Mr Speaker: Order. May I just say that Members should speak through the Chair, not to the Minister? As an established Member of this House, I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would not want to start on the wrong foot with me.

Justin Madders: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. We want payments to be processed as quickly as possible. Data is updated monthly on the Government website. We can see that, in terms of the group litigation order, 210 offers have now been made. Under the Horizon shortfall scheme, of 2,730 claimants, altogether 2,417 offers have been accepted. Of the 110 convictions on the overturned convictions scheme, initial payments have now been made to 103 of those people.

Mr Speaker: We come to the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): It has been said many times across this House, but it bears repeating: this was an appalling miscarriage of justice. The shocking dishonesty of Post Office officials found its match only in the bravery of the sub-postmasters who stood up to them. The Liberal Democrats welcomed the legislation in the previous Parliament to finally deliver justice by quashing their convictions, and we likewise welcome measures to ensure that those affected get the compensation they deserve. However, what we have seen with previous compensation and redress schemes for the victims of this scandal is a pattern of delay, complication and inefficiency. Neither the Post Office nor the Department for Business and Trade has earned the necessary trust from the sub-postmasters to administer the schemes. With that in mind, the Business and Trade Committee recommended in 2022 that an independent intermediary body be set up. Does the Minister agree that it is now time to appoint that independent body to ensure that these schemes get delivered fairly, effectively and without delay?

Justin Madders: I thank the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for their contribution. We are concerned that matters are taking too long. We have been working with lawyers who have signed up to a framework for representing claimants, and we are looking at ways we can speed the process up. There are issues in terms of collating enough expert evidence to support the claims, but we are looking at how that can be accelerated. On the independent process, we are looking at an independent mediation step after the initial decisions and offers are made, and ultimately an independent appeal decision will be considered as well.

Ian Lavery (Blyth and Ashington) (Lab): A whole number of individuals out there have been convicted and have paid huge amounts of money—£10,000, £20,000 or £30,000—back to the Post Office, but because they were directly employed not by the Post Office, but perhaps by their sub-postmaster, they cannot get any redress. They are victims of the Horizon scandal equally

as much as anyone else. What advice can the Minister give to people in my constituency of Blyth and Ashington who find themselves in those circumstances?

Justin Madders: My hon. Friend refers to some specific circumstances that I would welcome further information on. If he can contact the Department, the relevant Minister will look through those circumstances to see whether there is anything we can do, because we do not want anyone to be out of pocket as a result of this scandal.

Sir Gavin Williamson (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): Communities across the country were impacted by the Horizon scandal, and one of those was Wheaton Aston. Not only did Wheaton Aston lose a much-loved postmaster, but it lost its post office. Will the Minister look at the specific case of Wheaton Aston not just in terms of that postmaster getting compensation, but to take up the issue with the Post Office to ensure that a post office is returned to the village?

Justin Madders: I will certainly relay that back to the Department, and we will look in some detail at that. It is important that communities have a post office that they can access. They are a vital part of our infrastructure in this country and a vital lifeline for many individuals, and we want to make sure that every community is served as much as possible.

Pamela Nash (Motherwell, Wishaw and Carluke) (Lab): I take a moment to pay tribute to my predecessor, Marion Fellows, for the work she did on this issue throughout her time in this House. I was delighted to hear from the Minister that there have been conversations with the Scottish Government regarding this issue and looking for justice and redress for sub-postmasters. How confident is he that no further obstacles will be put in the way of justice and redress in Scotland by the Scottish Government following those conversations?

Justin Madders: I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to her predecessor, who was tenacious in her pursuit of this matter. We have had a number of conversations with the Scottish Government, and we do not want to see any difference between how this scheme is administered in any part of the country. We are confident that will be the case.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): This is a national scandal, and it is almost impossible to quantify the loss of trust in the Government and the Post Office that has resulted. Can the Minister set out a little more on what the Government intend to do to ensure that the information and support to make the applications to the redress scheme will be there for every single postmaster who has been affected and every single one who had a conviction quashed?

Justin Madders: The hon. Member asks an important question. Disclosure packs are being prepared for every claimant, which will contain what we believe is all the information they need to assess whether they wish to accept the fixed sum, or to proceed to a more detailed assessment of the claim. The pack will include details of their contracts and remuneration with the Post Office, details of whether they were eligible for the Royal Mail

share plan and any other information that the Department can obtain that is requested. We want to work at pace with individuals to ensure they have all the information they need to make an informed decision.

Kate Osborne (Jarrow and Gateshead East) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that I have long campaigned on this issue. He might not yet be aware of a letter I sent to his Department highlighting issues with the current compensation schemes, as well as calling attention to issues with the original 555 sub-postmasters, one of whom is my constituent Chris Head. Chris was one of the thousands of people impacted by the Horizon scandal, and he has still only been offered 17% of his verified claim. Will the Minister agree to meet me and Chris to discuss these issues?

Justin Madders: I am indeed aware of my hon. Friend's letter and all the work she has done over a number of years in support of her constituents and the wider sub-postmaster community. I am sure that the relevant Minister will agree to meet her and her constituent, and I will make sure that request is passed on to him.

Llinos Medi (Ynys Môn) (PC): As the Member for Ynys Môn, I represent Lorraine Williams and the formidable Noel Thomas, who spent his 60th birthday in jail for a crime that never took place. It is clear that sub-postmasters continue to be treated appallingly by the UK Government in the wake of the Horizon scandal and made to feel guilty for the cost of compensation to the public purse. Can the Minister give confidence to Noel that the new Government will compensate for the real human cost of the suffering caused by this awful scandal?

Justin Madders: We do not want sub-postmasters to feel guilty for claiming what is rightfully theirs. What this place has decided is their entitlement. We have taken measures to ensure that they will not have to foot any legal bills for taking advice in respect of their applications and we want to ensure that every potential head of loss is covered and adequately compensated for. We want to make the process as easy and swift as possible for those affected.

Rupert Lowe (Great Yarmouth) (Reform): I am pleased to hear from the Minister that the Government will expedite payments to those people who have been extremely badly treated by a state-owned entity in this national scandal. Will he do anything about those people who arguably knew that the Fujitsu software called Horizon was deficient and yet still brought legal cases against sub-postmasters, many of whom went to prison? There must be some redress and, going right the way back, those who were responsible for bringing cases against innocent people in the knowledge that the software was deficient must suffer some form of penalty.

Justin Madders: The hon. Member makes an important point, which has been raised on a number of previous occasions. We believe that the correct approach is for the inquiry to assess those individuals' particular culpability, and then we will take forward its recommendations. It is important that we see individuals take some responsibility and accountability for their actions.

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): The Horizon IT scandal is without doubt one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in our history. While we cannot change what has happened, we must establish what went wrong. Will the Minister assure the House that he will carefully consider the findings of the Post Office Horizon IT inquiry? Does he agree with the shadow Secretary of State that there should be prosecutions of those deemed responsible?

Justin Madders: We are taking a close interest, as the hon. Member would expect, in the evidence coming forward in the inquiry. Much of it is shocking. The amount of obfuscation and, shall we say, misinformation put out by a number of individuals is concerning. We think it is right to wait and see what the chair of the inquiry recommends in terms of future action, but we are committed to looking at that closely and ensuring that individuals take responsibility for their actions.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): One of my constituents was about to end more than 20 years of service with the Post Office with a comfortable package, but she was persuaded to take on a post office for two months. She did so and then got caught up in the Horizon scandal. She had months of trauma, trying to prove her innocence and arguing with the Post Office, and then she was sacked. She lost the package and incurred a lot of expense. I spoke to the previous Minister about that.

My constituent has applied for compensation, but she has been told that she is not entitled because she did not have a contract, which she says she did. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how we can protect such people and ensure that they get the compensation they are entitled to, and that we do not have this continual excuse-finding for not paying people who deserve compensation?

Justin Madders: I am grateful to the hon. Member for that question. Where there are evidential difficulties, we are looking at other ways of ensuring that those who should be eligible are entitled to claim. I am happy to have further conversations with her in that respect.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister very much for his answers to the questions posed. I make representations for the 26 postmasters from Northern Ireland who have been fighting for years to clear their names. While it is fantastic that movement has been made to undo the wrongs of this scandal—I thank the Minister and the Government very much for that—what steps have been taken to ensure that compensation is issued to all postmasters across the UK in a timely manner to avoid more delays and miscarriages of justice, including for those 26 from Northern Ireland?

Justin Madders: We are working closely with the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that all the information required is verified and corroborated so that those individuals in Northern Ireland who have been caught up in this scandal receive that letter as soon as possible.

Building Homes

1.4 pm

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Angela Rayner): Before I begin my statement, I know that the whole House will join me in sending our deepest condolences and strength in the hours ahead to those affected by yesterday's shocking incident in Southport. As a mother and grandmother, I cannot even begin to imagine the depth of pain and suffering of those involved. I would like to echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Patrick Hurley) in thanking the police and the emergency services for their swift response. Our thoughts and prayers are with those who have already sadly lost loved ones and those who are now fighting for their lives.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I have come to the House to make a statement about the Government's plan to get Britain building. Delivering economic growth is our No. 1 mission—it is how we will raise living standards for everyone, everywhere, and the only way we can fix our public services—so today I am setting out a radical plan not only to get the homes that we desperately need, but to drive growth, create jobs and breathe life back into towns and cities. We are ambitious, and what I say will not be without controversy, but this is urgent. This Labour Government are not afraid to take the tough choices needed to deliver for our country.

We are facing the most acute housing crisis in living memory, with 150,000 children in temporary accommodation, nearly 1.3 million households on social housing waiting lists and under-30s less than half as likely to own their own home compared with the 1990s. Rents are up 8.6% in the last year. Total homelessness is at record levels. There are simply not enough homes.

Those on the Conservative Benches knew that, but what did they do for 14 years? As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said yesterday, they ducked the difficult decisions. They put party before country. They pulled the wool over people's eyes by crowing about getting 1 million new homes built in the last Parliament, but they failed to get anywhere near their target of 300,000 homes a year. In a bid to appease their anti-housing Back Benchers, they made housing targets only advisory. They knew that would tank housing supply, but they still did it. As I stand here today, I can reveal the result: the number of new homes is now likely to drop below 200,000 this year. Unforgivable.

That legacy makes our job all the harder, but it also makes it so much more urgent. So today, I will explain how Labour will deliver the change needed to turbocharge growth and build more homes. I will start with housing targets. Decisions about what to build should reflect local views, but that should be about how, not whether, to deliver new homes. While the previous Government watered down housing targets, caving in to their anti-growth Back Benchers, this Labour Government are taking the tough choices, putting people and country first.

For the first time, we will make local housing targets mandatory, requiring local authorities to use the same method to work out how many homes to build. But that alone is insufficient to meet our ambition, so we are also changing the standard method used to calculate housing need so that it better reflects the urgency of supply for local areas. Rather than relying on outdated data, this new method will require local authorities to plan for

homes proportionate to the size of existing communities, and it will incorporate an uplift where house prices are most out of step with local incomes. The collective total of these local targets will therefore rise from some 300,000 a year to just over 370,000 a year.

Some will find that uncomfortable, and others will try to poke holes, so I will tackle four arguments head on. The first is that we are demanding too much from some places. To that, I say we have a housing crisis and a mandate for real change, and we must all play our part. The second is that some areas may appear to get a surprising target. No method is perfect, and the old one produced all sorts of odd outcomes. Crucially, ours offers extra stability for local authorities.

The third argument is that we are lowering our ambition for London. I am clear that we are doing no such thing. London had a nominal target of almost 100,000 homes a year, based on an arbitrary uplift, which was absolute nonsense. The London plan has a target of around 52,000, and around 35,000 were delivered in London last year. The target we are now setting for London of roughly 80,000 is still a huge ask, but I know it is one that the mayor is determined to rise to, and I met him about this last week. Fourthly, some will say that a total of 370,000 is not enough. To that I say: ambition is critical, but we also need to be realistic.

Let me move on to the green belt. Once we have targets for what we need to build, next we need to ensure that we build in the right places. The first port of call must be brownfield land. We are making some changes today to support that, but they are only part of the answer, which is why we must create a more strategic system for green-belt release, to make it work for the 21st century. Local authorities will have to review their green belt if needed to meet housing targets, but they will also need to prioritise low-quality grey-belt land, for which we are setting out a definition today. Where land in the green belt is developed, new golden rules will require the provision of 50% affordable housing, with a focus on social rent, as well as schools, GP surgeries and transport links that the community needs, and improvements to accessible green space. Let us not forget that the previous Government's haphazard approach to building on the green belt saw so many of the wrong homes built in the wrong places, without the local services that people need. Under Labour, that will change.

Increasing supply is essential to improving affordability, but we must also go further to build genuinely affordable homes. Part of that must come from developers. The Housing Minister will meet major developers later to ensure that they commit to matching our pace of reform. An active, mission-led Government must also play their role, which is why I am calling on local authorities, housing associations and industry to work with me to deliver a council house revolution. This is not just a nice add-on, but vital to getting the 1.5 million homes built, because we know that schemes with a large amount of affordable housing are likely to be completed faster, and injecting confidence and certainty into social housing is how we will get Britain back to building.

The previous Government had to downgrade the number of new homes that their affordable housing programme would deliver. Today, I can reveal that only 110,000 to 130,000 affordable homes are due to be built under that programme, down from their original target of 180,000. In our worst-case scenario, some 70,000 families

in need of a secure home will lose out. How have they let that happen? Once again, this Government will have to pick up the pieces. That is why today I am announcing immediate steps for the biggest boost to social and affordable housing in a generation. We will introduce more flexibilities in the current affordable homes programme, working with Homes England, and will bring forward details of future Government investment at the spending review. I recognise that councils and housing associations need support, too, so my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will set out plans at the next fiscal event to give them the rent stability that they need to borrow and invest.

We must also maintain existing stock, which is why I am announcing important changes to the right to buy. We have already started reviewing the increased right to buy discounts introduced in 2012, and will consult in the autumn on wider reforms. We are immediately increasing flexibilities for councils when using right to buy receipts. In addition, to help councils provide homes for some of the most vulnerable in society, I can confirm today that the £450 million of the local authority housing fund will flow to them to provide 2,000 new homes. This is what Labour does.

These reforms are key to realising our wider growth ambitions. Part of that comes from new homes themselves, releasing the untapped potential of our towns and cities, which for too long have been throttled by insufficient and unaffordable housing. It also flows from making it easier to build the infrastructure on which we rely, so we will make it easier to build laboratories, gigafactories, data centres and electricity grid connections. We must make it simpler and faster to build the clean energy sources needed to achieve zero-carbon energy generation by 2030. We have already ended the de facto ban on onshore wind, but we are also proposing that large onshore wind projects be brought back to the nationally significant infrastructure projects—NSIP—regime. We will change the threshold for solar development to reflect the developments in solar technology, and set a stronger expectation that authorities identify renewable energy sites.

To deliver all that, we need every local authority to have a development plan in place. Up-to-date local plans are essential to ensure that communities have a say in how development happens. Areas with a local plan are less vulnerable to speculative developments through appeals, yet just a third of places have one that is under five years old. This must change. We will fix this by ending the constant changes and disruption to planning policy, setting clear expectations of universal local plan coverage and stepping in directly when local authorities let residents down. Local plans ensure local engagement and are critical to making developments that meet local people's needs.

While demanding more of others, we are also going to demand more of ourselves. Two weeks ago, I said that I will not hesitate to review an application where the potential economic gain warrants it. So today, I can confirm that Ministers and I will mark our homework in public, reporting against the 13-week target for turning around ministerial decisions.

I know that what I have said seems a lot, but this is only the first step. We plan to do so much more. We will introduce a planning and infrastructure Bill that will reform planning committees so that they focus on the

[Angela Rayner]

right applications with the necessary expertise. We will further reform compulsory purchase compensation rules so that what is paid to landowners is fair but not excessive. We will enable local authorities to put their planning departments on sustainable footings, streamline the delivery process for critical infrastructure and provide any legal underpinning that may be needed to ensure that nature recovery and building work hand in hand. We will also take the steps needed for universal coverage of strategic planning within this Parliament, which we will work with local leaders to develop and formalise in legislation. Shortly, we will say more about our plan for the next generation of new towns. Because we know that this crisis cannot be fixed overnight, in the coming months the Government will publish a long-term housing strategy to transform the housing market so that it delivers for working people.

These are the right reforms for the decade of renewal that the country so desperately needs. We will not be deterred by those who seek to stand in the way of our country's future. Opposition Members may say that it cannot be done but, once again, I will prove them wrong. This Government will build 1.5 million high-quality, well-designed and sustainable homes. We will achieve the biggest boost to affordable housing for a generation, and we will get Britain building to spur the growth that we need. I commend this statement to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I call Kemi Badenoch. If you can, shadow Secretary of State, aim for between seven and eight minutes.

1.19 pm

Mrs Kemi Badenoch (North West Essex) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I echo the comments by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) regarding the appalling incident in Southport. We on the Conservative Benches send our deepest condolences to the families of all those who are impacted.

Having listened to the right hon. Lady's statement, I have many questions. I know she will not be able to answer all of them, certainly not in the time we have today, so I hope that, for the questions she does not have the answer to now, she will be able to provide written answers within a month and before the end of the summer recess, so we can pick up quickly when we return for her Department's oral questions.

The Labour party has a mandate to deliver what it promised in its manifesto. As a party which has governed for most of the past 100 years, the Conservatives respect that mandate. It is our job, as His Majesty's loyal Opposition, to scrutinise its plans and ensure that Labour is saying what it means and, more importantly, doing what it says. With that right to deliver its manifesto come many responsibilities. Labour now has the responsibility—unlike in its manifesto—to be crystal clear about what it actually wants to do to avoid prolonged uncertainty. It now has a responsibility to understand and address the concerns of councillors and local residents. It now has a responsibility to explain the economics and allocate the funding that we all know will be needed for

this plan. It now has a responsibility not to be contradictory in what it is setting out. It must not make promises that any impartial observer knows cannot be delivered. Crucially, it must not break its commitments early, yet we are already seeing changes to what it committed itself to.

On 20 June, the Chancellor stated that the Government would update the national planning policy framework within 100 days, so why is Labour now briefing that it will be before the end of the year? That is a lot more than 100 days. They have just started and they are already changing their targets. Will the right hon. Lady confirm that the NPPF will be updated and in effect by mid-October, the deadline they set for themselves? They are proposing an eight-week consultation over the summer holidays for their updates to the NPPF. This is the third set of updates we will have in a year. In the previous consultation on the NPPF in 2023, we had 2,600 responses. How will they have a meaningful consultation, which is what the legislation requires, that respects the input of local planning authorities and others? There will be legal challenges. Are they ready for them?

The Government are proposing multiple changes to planning: the NPPF updates; the new primary legislation that the right hon. Lady just described; the changes to nutrient neutrality, which they have recently converted to; and the NSIP—just to name a few. The right hon. Lady says she wants to end constant changes and disruption to planning policy. That is great, but how will she avoid creating years of uncertainty and making it harder for local authorities and developers to build new housing as all those changes are worked through? As I said to her the last time we sat opposite each other, these things take time and they are not as straightforward as she is making out. The Government will not be able to deliver their ambitions unless they recognise that.

What is most interesting in the statement is that the right hon. Lady confirmed she is reducing the housing need calculation for London. Can she confirm whether that reduction will apply to other urban areas? Can she explain why she is reducing the need for cities like London to build more housing when they have the infrastructure to support it? Why is she forcing suburban and rural areas to take more housing when there are schools in Hackney, such as De Beauvoir primary school and Randal Cremer primary school, that are shutting down because they do not have enough pupils? Why is she doing that?

The Government talk about the grey belt in the planning framework. It is very interesting; I have had quick look through it. They define it, but what does the limited contribution to the five green belt purposes actually mean in planning terms? If they are not clear, planning inspectors will determine that, and we will yet again have more and more local opposition. It is also interesting that the Government are considering changes to restrict the right to buy. The right hon. Lady has told us very proudly how she was able to buy her own council house—[*Interruption.*] At least one, certainly. Can she confirm that, following these changes, young people across England will still be able to exercise the same right to buy that she had in 2007?

There is also a responsibility to address the concerns of councillors and local residents. From my own constituency, I know that the references to Traveller sites will cause some concern. The fact that the right hon. Lady has stood up and said that many of the

housing allocations will be surprising will make it very difficult for local councils and local communities to deal with. Where is the respect for local decision making? We are not saying that they should not be ambitious, but they will have to take local government in hand when they do that. They say they want to impose exacting mandatory housing targets on local authorities. We had the advisory target so that councils could make sure they could do better, not worse, so it is wrong for her to claim that that was us removing mandatory housing targets. Councillors have repeatedly told me they are afraid they will be forced, under a duty to co-operate, to sacrifice their own green spaces to take the housing need that urban leaders, who are her friends, fail to meet. What will she say to reassure leaders in places like Bromsgrove, Wychavon and South Staffordshire? What penalties will she apply to local leaders like Sadiq Khan who fail to meet local housing need requirements? What happens when the mayor fails to meet even these reduced targets that she has set for him?

The right hon. Lady has already let slip that she is ditching the requirement to ensure that beauty is a key part of housing, something I was very proud that the previous Conservative Government put at the heart of our planning reforms. Local people want beautiful housing. Now she is telling us that she will be replacing what they want with a requirement to meet 1.5 million ugly houses instead. Why on earth would they take out something that means so much to local communities? People deserve to live in beautiful homes. The fact that the Labour party does not care about that shows exactly how it will develop its policies.

The Government's responsibility to explain the economics and set out how they will fund their proposals is also key. They say they need to ensure that the NPPF has a new growth-based approach, but that is already in the NPPF. The right hon. Lady would know that if she had read it. I bet she hasn't. The Chancellor effectively killed off some major NSIP schemes on Monday, such as the Arundel bypass. Is all the talk of prioritising energy infrastructure projects just a way of dressing up these cuts to other kinds of infrastructure? Where is the economic analysis that her Department has undertaken on the housing market? Yesterday, we all saw the Chancellor come to the Dispatch Box claiming not to have understood the pressure on public finances and how it was all so difficult. We warned repeatedly during the election that Labour says one thing and does another. It said that it was not going to raise taxes; now we can see what it is planning. The Chancellor said nothing about the impact on housing, so now I am asking the right hon. Lady, on behalf of the British people and local authorities, what it means for them. Is she going to follow the same playbook, pretending she did not know what it cost to build affordable housing, or to change the planning system and impose more costs for builders, homebuyers and renters?

Those are just a few of the questions the Government will need to answer. I am sure colleagues across the House will have many more. The Government are in danger of choosing the worst of all worlds: not addressing the basic economics of housebuilding and centralising decision making. When we look at all that, it looks like the 1.5 million homes will be a distant aspiration rather than a meaningful target.

Angela Rayner: Let me start by welcoming the right hon. Lady to her place. I wish her luck for her leadership campaign, now that she has confirmed that she is running. It was her ambition all along to be Leader of the Opposition, not mine. I must say that she seems to be taking to opposition very naturally. I think she will find herself comfortable for a long, long time on the Opposition Benches. She had a lot to say in her response and I will come to the substance of it in a moment. She has already put in quite a few written questions. I look forward to many more from her once she has had a chance to read and digest her brief after the election.

There were a couple of things that I am not quite sure the right hon. Lady understood. First—this is critical—the British people kicked the Conservatives out of office in a landslide. Secondly, why was that? Let me remind her. The Government in which she served left us to clear up the mess. They crashed the economy and trashed our public services. They bankrupted Britain and they covered it up. They threw the book at the doctors and then they doctored the books. She keeps speaking about the Tories' record on housing, but I remind her again that year after year the Tories failed to meet their housing targets. She speaks about the Mayor of London and the bizarre figures they set for him, but the Conservative Government—talking of promises they can't keep—failed to meet their own target in every single year.

On the right hon. Lady's question about the NPPF consultation, it starts today, for eight weeks. We are asking people to engage. It is an incredibly detailed consultation, because we mean business. It will come as no surprise that the work needed to be done after the disaster of the last Tory Government, which ripped up the NPPF and made a right mess of it. The right hon. Lady talked about the affordable homes grant. The former Tory Secretary of State handed £1.9 billion of vital funds back to the Treasury. This Government will, working with Homes England, make it more flexible to get the homes we need.

Members of the party opposite—

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): You are just reading! You are supposed to be answering the questions, not just reading out what has been written for you to read.

Angela Rayner: These are the answers to the questions. [*Interruption.*] No, they are the bits that I have written, actually, in regard to her questions.

Members of the party opposite are now talking to themselves and not the country. The right hon. Lady mentioned chaos and uncertainty; I really do not know how Opposition Members can say that with a straight face after the chaos and uncertainty that we have seen, with countless Housing Secretaries not knowing what was going on.

In every inner-city area—this is in answer to the question—there are increases in the targets. I remind Members that we inherited the most acute housing crisis in living memory. I say to the right hon. Lady that the green belt definition is in the consultation document, and I suggest that she read it. It also tackles the issue of "beautiful homes". We will build homes at scale and they will be beautiful. We will protect the natural environment, and we will make sure that people have the homes that they deserve and need.

[Angela Rayner]

I was astonished by what the right hon. Lady said about councils and council leaders. The council leaders I have spoken to are overjoyed by the fact that the Tories were kicked out. They say to me that they have been left in a dire situation. I know that Opposition Members like to think that that is just Labour councils, but councils across the political spectrum have been left in a disastrous situation, because the party opposite did not build the homes that people need. We have a homelessness crisis in this country. People under the age of 30 cannot get homes now. It is impossible for people to get on to the housing ladder. That is the failure of the last Conservative Government, and that is what we are going to fix. That is what we are going to get on and do.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I welcome you to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. I also welcome both the ambition and the detail in my right hon. Friend's statement, and the commitments made in it.

I have two questions. First, if the targets are not mandatory—although, in the last Parliament, the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee said that they had to be—many councils will simply choose to ignore them, but if they are to be mandatory, will my right hon. Friend assure me that they will be based on a proper needs assessment of each local authority, and will do away with the nonsensical and arbitrary urban uplifts to which she referred in the context of London?

Secondly, may I ask a question about social housing? I was proud to be brought up in a council house, as my right hon. Friend was. Will she work closely with local authorities and look particularly at land value capture? Will she ensure that when the planning permission for a site uplifts the value of that site, the total increase in value does not go to the landowners alone, but is used to benefit the public purse and reduce the cost of building those homes?

Angela Rayner: I can confirm that we are getting rid of the urban uplift. The new method of establishing housing targets is better than the previous one, which we believed was outdated. The urban uplift figures were plucked from thin air, but we believe that our new method will give councils the stability and certainty that will enable them to plan for the homes and local services that they need. As for land value capture, there is a little bit about it in the consultation document, but there will be more in the forthcoming planning and infrastructure Bill.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): I welcome you to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. I also thank the Deputy Prime Minister for giving me advance sight of her statement, and associate myself and my party with her remarks about the devastating and senseless attacks in Southport. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those affected.

For too long under the Conservatives, we had a planning system that put developer greed above community need—a system that did not deliver the homes that we needed to tackle the crisis, but did destroy swathes of our green belt. However, the statement raises a great many questions, so here we go.

Will local authorities that are at an advanced stage of their draft local plans need to start again with the new standard method, or will they be able to continue? Will authorities that have recently conducted a green belt assessment need to do it again under the new system, or will the current assessment stand? There seems to be a conspicuous absence of a specific target for social homes—not affordable homes, but social homes. Will the Deputy Prime Minister take up the Liberal Democrat target of building 150,000 social homes every single year? We welcome the Government's proposal to review the compulsory purchase compensation, but will she take up the Liberal Democrat plan to put an end to land banking by reforming the Land Compensation Act 1961 so that local authorities can acquire land at fair values? We welcome the review of the right to buy, but will the Government allow local authorities to use that money to replace lost stock?

The Government indicated that they would be reviewing borrowing rules so that local authorities could borrow to invest. Will they allow authorities to borrow to invest on a scale that will allow them to put an end to homelessness, overcrowding and housing register waiting lists? What powers and resources will they give to planning authorities so that they can enforce the requirement to put infrastructure first? Will they scrap the cap on developer planning fees?

Finally, some local authorities in the London metropolitan green-belt area, even when they have accounted for all their brownfield sites and all their grey-belt sites, still have to build thousands of homes on the green belt, land which is supposed to have been designed specifically to stop urban sprawl. Will the Government put anything in the national planning policy framework that will give any protection at all to the concept of the green belt?

Angela Rayner: The answer to the hon. Lady's direct question about local plans is that it depends on how far they have got. There will be a transition, as we explained in the consultation document, because we recognise that some areas are quite far on. As for where that is up to, it depends very much on what the difference is between what the local plan says and what we have asked. We have explained that in the consultation document as well. We have to be fair to those that have already done the work: when the work has been done, it is just a question of updating it and not disregarding those that already have local plans. A third of areas have up-to-date local plans, so I urge all Members to speak to their local authorities to ensure that they have their local plans, because that is how we ensure that people feel engaged and part of the process—which is critical—and how we protect green belt and other areas by ending the speculative developments that we have been seeing.

The hon. Lady asked about the number of social homes. I talked about the flexibility in the affordable homes grant. There is some stuff in the consultation document about the right to buy, which I recognise, and about how councils and housing associations can borrow to bring up their stock. I also recognise the problem we have faced as a result of the homelessness crisis, and I am particularly keen to tackle it. We have talked about compulsory purchase orders as well, and we are consulting on that because we think that it needs to be dealt with. We will deal with some of the other issues in the planning infrastructure Bill.

Planning will be strengthened—we have already announced 300 extra local planners—and we will strengthen section 106. There will be an accelerator taskforce to deal with stalled sites. When grey belt land is released, the golden rules that I outlined will apply, and we will expect a great deal from developers when they are using that land. We are consulting on fees as well. There is a lot in this consultation, which I believe will make a significant difference to engagement with local areas and ensuring that we meet the housing target that we need and the country desperately deserves.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South and South Bedfordshire) (Lab): Too many families are housed in substandard, overcrowded flats created through permitted development rights, such as former office block conversions. Will the Deputy Prime Minister give families in my constituency some hope for the future by confirming Labour's commitment to good-quality, affordable family houses, including council houses, under her proposals?

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend is right: 14 years of the Tories have left social and affordable housing in a crisis. To fix our overall problem with the housing crisis, we must have more social housing for rent. The shadow Secretary of State talked about speaking to councils, but Members here, including new Members, will know how desperate the situation is from their casework—from what is already arriving in their inboxes and their post—and from what their local leaders are saying. This is because of the supply problem, and because we need to fix the problem around social and affordable housing. That is why we have our golden rules, and why we are going to strengthen section 106. We expect developers to do what they say they are going to do, and all our Departments will work to make sure that the infrastructure is there, so that people get the homes they need locally and see the infrastructure that improves nature and their local area.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): New Forest district council has recently had its local plan agreed on the basis of local housing need. When will it be required to reopen that assessment on the basis of the right hon. Lady's new algorithm, and when will the target become mandatory?

Angela Rayner: The short answer is when it next updates. As I said in my answer to the shadow Secretary of State, councils that have an up-to-date local plan will not be made to start again. I commend the right hon. Gentleman's local authority for having an up-to-date plan, because that is the best way to have consultations with a local area and provide the housing that local people need. This Government will work with local leaders and mayors to make sure that we deliver the houses that local people want and deal with the crisis they face.

Paula Barker (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on making a superb statement. She knows that she will have strong support on the Labour Benches for building the homes that we need in Liverpool to tackle homelessness, rising costs and the huge waiting list for social housing, but councils will be reluctant to build if they know that houses will simply end up in the hands of private landlords who exploit the

right to buy. I welcome her review into the higher discounts imposed by the last Government. Can she assure me that it will be a rapid review? Given the mess that she has inherited, there is no time to waste in clearing this up.

Angela Rayner: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. Again, the short answer is yes, it will be a rapid review. We were already speaking about this issue before the election. We want to make sure that people take part in the review, but we are also very clear that the discounts that the last Government applied to the right-to-buy formula in 2012 mean that councils cannot replace the houses that are bought under the right-to-buy scheme. We believe that people should have the right to buy, but it has to be balanced against the discounts given to the public on our social housing stock, so that we can make sure that we replace that stock for those who desperately need it.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): Quite frankly, this announcement will be a disaster for my Hamble Valley constituency. Over the last few years, Liberal Democrat-run Eastleigh borough council has built double the number of houses required by targets and assessments. Can the Secretary of State confirm that she will take into account retrospective building numbers for areas that have already built more than their fair share? Why is she placing even more pressure on local services in the south-east, where house prices are the most expensive, but leaving cities alone and not increasing house numbers there too?

Angela Rayner: I say to the hon. Gentleman that the number of houses in cities will increase. The new method that we will be using is based on the stock and its affordability, so I ask him to look at the consultation. We will be honest: if there is a particular shortage—many areas have a particular shortage—we have to build homes. We stood on an election manifesto to do that. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman's local authority has local plans, but we will engage with it. We do not have the homes that we desperately need. I say to the hon. Gentleman that he should engage with his local authority, get the local plans in place, and work with us to build the houses that his constituents desperately need.

Liz Twist (Blaydon and Consett) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. I particularly welcome the acknowledgment that where there are new developments on green-belt land, it is necessary to have the facilities that go with them. What steps will she take to ensure that local communities can hold developers to account for the protection of our habitat and open spaces when they come forward with plans?

Angela Rayner: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. Labour has a "brownfield first" policy, and there are very strict golden rules on the release of grey-belt land. We will support local authorities to make sure that they get the best from section 106 notices and that the golden rules apply. The proposals that we have put in the NPPF will strengthen the release of land, which has been done in a haphazard way in the past. We will also see the affordable homes that people desperately need in their areas, including homes for social rent.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Could the Secretary of State confirm two things? First, could she confirm that where local residents have complied with her mandatory targets through a neighbourhood plan, rather than a local plan, the neighbourhood plan will reign supreme and will not be trampled over by planning inspectors subsequently? Secondly, could she confirm that protected landscape—what used to be called an areas of outstanding natural beauty, which comprise 80% of my constituency, but is now called national landscape—will still have significant protection within the planning system?

Angela Rayner: Yes, I can confirm that neighbourhood plans and the protections will remain, which is really important. Again, we are saying that the release of grey-belt land has to be for the benefit of local natural spaces. We want to see areas where people are within walking distance of such spaces. Many people do not have access to green-belt areas, but we will protect them, as we have always done. There is no change to areas of natural beauty, parks and so on.

Emily Darlington (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): As the new MP and a former cabinet member for housing for what is arguably Britain's most successful new town—Milton Keynes—I welcome today's statement, which is exactly what we have needed to hear. The struggles and conflicts that we have had in trying to deliver the housing that people in Milton Keynes need have been enormous and a real waste of resource, to be quite frank. We need to build not only new houses, but new communities. Will the Secretary of State meet me and Milton Keynes city council to discuss how we can help to deliver this essential mission so that everyone has a place to call home?

Angela Rayner: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. I have visited Milton Keynes a number of times, and it is a fantastic example of a Labour new town. She has been quick to get a meeting arranged with the Housing Minister, and I look forward to hearing more about how we can learn from Milton Keynes and have the next generation of new towns coming forward.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): I welcome the consultation on the national planning policy framework. One of the documents that has been circulated to colleagues today is the NPPF with tracked changes. Buried on page 55 is a footnote that says the following sentence is proposed for deletion:

“The availability of agricultural land used for food production should be considered...when deciding what sites are most appropriate for development.”

That is in the existing NPPF, but the Government are proposing to take it out. The UK is only 60% self-sufficient in food—down from the mid-1980s, when we were 78% self-sufficient. Are the Government taking enough account of self-sufficiency in food?

Angela Rayner: Yes, and we believe that it is already considered in the NPPF. There is already guidance on agricultural land, particularly high-grade agricultural land, so we believe that the protections on food are already there.

Mark Ferguson (Gateshead Central and Whickham) (Lab): I congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister on her statement. I am slightly disappointed with some of the comments from those on the Conservative Benches, but I hope my right hon. Friend will reject them, just as the British people rejected them on 4 July.

Like the Deputy Prime Minister and most people in England who have a mayor, I am fortunate enough to live under a Labour mayor. Will the Deputy Prime Minister work with me, Labour mayors—including hers and mine—councillors and Members of this place to ensure that we get the right kinds of developments in the right places?

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. What we are trying to achieve today, and with the legislation that was announced in the King's Speech, is about how we strengthen local consultation. I have already said that only a third of local authorities have up-to-date local plans, so this is a wake-up call for them. As part of local planning and having local plans in place, there is an obligation to consult, and to consult again on the final plans. Many people are frustrated by housing that goes up, but that is because of speculative development and because there has been no engagement. We have already met mayors and council leaders, and what we are proposing today is a push that has come not just from local leaders and mayors but from voters. I believe that that is why we won as large a majority as we did at the general election: people want to see that change. We know that that engagement has to continue and that we have to work with local leaders and mayors to make this plan a reality, and we are going to work with them to make sure that we get those homes, that infrastructure and the next generation of social and affordable housing that the people of this country need.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Mark Francois.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and good luck in your new role.

It is possible to have successful development, but from experience it has to be something done with people and not to people. This policy is the latter. These pernicious top-down targets have the practical effect at ground level of setting one town against another, one village against another and one local community against another; and given the Chancellor's statement on public spending yesterday, who will pay for the tens of billions of pounds-worth of infrastructure that would be required to make all this work? All experience shows that, on development and house building, the man or woman in Whitehall really does not know best. Why then, is the Secretary of State going back to the old, failed way of doing it, which will not work?

Angela Rayner: I am shocked to have to tell the right hon. Member that the NPPF was an NPPF before we came into government. National targets have always been there; this is not something that I have dreamt up.

The important thing is that our new method is clearly based upon the housing stock, the affordability and the need in an area. That need has created a housing crisis in this country, and that is why the electorate gave the

Labour Government such a mandate, because we said that we are going to fix the housing crisis that we have inherited. Again, this is about local plans. I implore the right hon. Member to get with his local authority, to get a local plan, to engage with local people and to listen to those who are waiting desperately—probably thousands in his constituency—for a home that they know will never come.

Jo White (Bassetlaw) (Lab): My local authority agreed its local plan during the general election campaign, and it was the first authority in the country to commit section 106 funds to our local hospital. As its deputy leader, I was very proud to lead on that. I see section 106 funding as the most effective method of mitigating the impacts of development and bringing in much-needed funding for infrastructure. How does the Deputy Prime Minister envision section 106 funding being reformed to make it a far more effective method of bringing in infrastructure spending?

Angela Rayner: I congratulate my hon. Friend, not just on getting to this place but on the work she did previously. I also congratulate her local authority on the work it has done on having a local plan and on making sure that it got what it needed out of the section 106 provisions. She is absolutely right to say that that is important, because section 106 plays a very important role in meeting health needs—whether it is GP services, hospitals, schools or whatever the infrastructure—and it needs to be strengthened. We talk about that in this House, and we talk about the golden rules that we will apply if grey belt is released, but our Department will be working to ensure that local authorities are given the resources they need and the expertise from here, so that they can get the best out of section 106 notices.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): Thousands of new homes are planned in King's Lynn in my constituency, but that development requires transport and other infrastructure, so will the Secretary of State work with the Transport Secretary and the Chancellor to unlock the funding for the A10-West Winch housing access road so that that development can proceed?

Angela Rayner: Again, there is a challenge that we have inherited. I hope that the hon. Member's area has a local plan for what is required and can therefore push for that infrastructure as part of its section 106. I will happily engage, through the Minister, on that particular issue, but I am wondering whether the hon. Member was in the Chamber yesterday and realises what a mess his Government left us in.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Sarah Owen.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I welcome you to your new place.

I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for the speed with which she and her fantastic team are tackling the housing crisis. It is welcome news in Luton North, where my surgeries have been consistently full of people struggling in overcrowded housing and facing skyrocketing rents for substandard conditions. We also have daily cases of people being subjected to eviction notices through no fault of their own. Does she agree that the Government's

new plans to build genuinely affordable housing, and for this council house revolution to start, cannot come soon enough for towns such as mine?

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend articulates what many Members across the House, even Opposition Members, will recognise as challenges that we face. This issue has been ducked for 14 years by the Conservatives, and in fact it went backwards because of the changes they made to the NPPF last year. That is why we make absolutely no bones about the fact that we mean to deliver. That is why this consultation is so important and why we have put it out there now. I say to hon. Members that we intend to move at pace. There are people in temporary accommodation and 150,000 children who have nowhere to call their home. I think about that every single night, and there is not a day that we can afford to waste in dealing with that situation for them. I promise those people in my hon. Friend's constituency and in everybody else's that I will do everything I can to make sure that they have a home.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Reform): I welcome the news of a council house revolution, and we all know that the Deputy Prime Minister is a little bit of an expert when it comes to council housing, but can she confirm that priority will be given to British families, veterans and pensioners?

Angela Rayner: We have confirmed that people with a local connection will get priority over those homes. The hon. Gentleman tries to make a quip about the fact that I grew up in a council house, but although people used to talk about my childhood as if I grew up in poverty, there are many kids today who would think they had won the lottery if they got a council house. Those children today cannot have that, so we will build the homes, we will prioritise so that people locally can get them and we will make sure that first-time buyers get first dibs. We are putting in place a number of measures to make sure that the homes that are built are there for the people who need them.

Ben Goldsborough (South Norfolk) (Lab): Residents in Hethersett, Mulbarton and Loddon have sadly had their fingers burnt by the old planning policies that were in place under the previous Government. Can my right hon. Friend give me assurances that section 106 will be strengthened to ensure that public infrastructure will be in place so that our new housing is accessible for everyone and gives them the resources they need to live a very happy life?

Angela Rayner: Parts of this consultation look at how we can strengthen section 106, and we want to do that in conjunction with local authorities. As I mentioned in my statement, we are also bringing forward, at a later date through this Parliament, measures on strategic planning and the planning and infrastructure Bill. This is the start of the process, but we know there is a lot more to do. I look forward to my hon. Friend's engagement with that.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I am no nimby, but what we are seeing today is a lurch back to top-down mandatory targets that will ride roughshod through local communities such as those that I represent

[Wendy Morton]

across Aldridge-Brownhills, and through local decision making. I do agree with the Deputy Prime Minister, though, when she says that the first port of call must be brownfield land, so will she confirm that she will give full financing to brownfield land remediation and reclamation?

Angela Rayner: We think we can use brownfield funding better, but this is not about riding roughshod over local decisions and what local people want; having mandatory housing targets and plans means that people will be able to decide. What we are saying, and what we said at the general election, is that we will build 1.5 million homes; we said that clearly, and we have a mandate to do it. We think that the new method for calculating housing targets works better; we think it will deliver for people, and that includes the affordability test. Therefore, we will deliver the houses that the right hon. Lady's constituency needs, and I would encourage her to engage in the process with her local authority.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I am planning to end the statement at around 20 minutes past 2, so could you please help each other by keeping questions short?

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): This has to be the most important statement I have heard since being in the House. York has really suffered from the proliferation of luxury accommodation, second homes and short-term holiday lets, so I very much welcome this statement. Where developers have plans in the system, what steps can be taken to ensure that we pivot to hit the targets for the affordable and social housing that we desperately need right now?

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree that we desperately need affordable homes. It depends on where my hon. Friend's local authority is in the process, but we will be setting out the targets, which are likely to be increased for her area, so that the local authority can engage in the process. The golden rules will allow more affordability where there is restrictive release of grey belt. We will ensure that we provide support on affordability and that there is no gaming of the system, so that we get the best we can out of section 106.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): I strongly endorse the sentiment and purpose of the Secretary of State's policy statement. She will be aware that, as others have said, the planning system is fuelled by greed, rather than need. Cornwall is not nimby—it is one of the fastest-growing places in the United Kingdom and has almost trebled its housing stock in the last 60 years—yet local people's housing problems have got worse, so my question to the Secretary of State is this. House building targets are a means to an end, so would it not be far better in places such as Cornwall if those targets were set to address the need, rather than simply allowing developers to fill their boots?

Angela Rayner: That is what the new formula does. We are trying to assess the need in areas, taking particular account of their current stock, but also of affordability; I suspect that Cornwall has a particular challenge with

that as well. As part of that process, we hope to strengthen the plans on section 106, and the new homes accelerator task force will help to get sites moving forward where they already have planning permission. By working across Whitehall, we will also deliver the infrastructure that people want, because that is the other big issue that keeps coming back. Where we have speculative sites or the release of green belt, or where there is a large amount of housing in an area, the infrastructure is critical. That is the issue we need to overcome, and we are clear on that as a Government.

Helena Dollimore (Hastings and Rye) (Lab/Co-op): In my constituency, we are at the sharp end of the housing crisis, and we desperately need more affordable homes and more council homes, so I really welcome today's statement. The Conservative party may behave like this is a zero-sum game between building more desperately needed homes and protecting the environment, but Labour Members know that that is not the case. What approach will the new Government take to ensure that we have sustainable development, so that we protect our environment, ensure that we have the necessary infrastructure, including sewage pipes, and prevent flooding, while building the homes that my constituents so desperately need?

Angela Rayner: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. She is absolutely right, and her question builds on one that I answered previously. We have to protect our green belt, and the proposals we are putting forward do that. They also mean that we will have the right type of homes and the infrastructure. As part of this process, there will be nature considerations and rules around that. There will also be the infrastructure that people need, as well as access to the countryside and healthy living. My hon. Friend can look at a number of parts of the consultation that refer to how we are delivering better, greener areas for people. Hopefully, her constituents will be able to get behind that.

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): It is good to see you in that Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am not sure whether the Secretary of State has discussed her proposals with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs or the National Farmers Union, but the answer she gave on food production was risible. What she has announced today is effectively a recipe for disposing of the land that will be needed to feed our children and grandchildren. Just before she goes ahead with that, will she tell the House how many planning consents that have been granted are sitting there unbuilt-out? Should we not use those first?

Angela Rayner: I say to the right hon. Gentleman with absolute respect that he should please read the consultation. We think that we do support our agriculture, which accounts for just over 10% of land—the best and most versatile land. I talked before about protecting the best-value land, and we will do that. The land we are talking about—grey belt, which we define in the NPPF consultation—is not agricultural land; it is disused garages and things of that nature and not, as the right hon. Gentleman wants people to believe, the land we need for food.

Olivia Bailey (Reading West and Mid Berkshire) (Lab): I welcome the twin ambitions the Secretary of State has set out today: to get Britain building in order to provide

the homes we need, and to make sure that we have the infrastructure required to support them, such as schools and GP surgeries. Those ambitions are of equal importance, and we cannot have one without the other. On social and affordable housing, will she confirm that the aim of her package is to go net-positive, so that the number of social rent homes rises rather than falls, and to achieve that in the first year of this Parliament?

Angela Rayner: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. It will be a challenge, but we are desperate to try to meet that challenge as quickly as we can. That is why we are moving at pace with the consultation exercise we have put forward today, which we will do as quickly as we can, so that we can have the affordable and social housing, the green spaces and the infrastructure that people desperately need.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I welcome the Secretary of State to her new role. I appreciate that she will not have time today to wax lyrical about her vision of aesthetics or to expand at length on the relationship between truth and beauty. Nevertheless, given the welcome reference in her announcement to proportionality and to the link between the existing built environment and the scale of development, will she also take into account the character and style of development? She may know that I have served on the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission and in the Office for Place. Will she agree to meet the Office for Place to discuss beauty? She will know that the wealthy can always live in beautiful places and in beautiful homes, but people from council houses—from where she and I originate—deserve their chance to know, to sense and to see beauty.

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree with everything the right hon. Gentleman says. The Minister of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook), will shortly meet all the stakeholders, and I think he has a meeting in the coming days with those the right hon. Gentleman just mentioned. I would love to work with him to make sure that we build the houses that people deserve. Whether it is social, affordable or any other housing, it should be beautiful and should have character and style, and we are determined to make that happen.

Naushabah Khan (Gillingham and Rainham) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement and for the focus she has rightly put on delivering genuinely affordable homes, which will provide much needed housing security to many of my constituents. Recognising some of the immediate homelessness challenges felt by local authorities, will she detail how the plans she has announced today will relieve pressures that lead to homelessness, and on temporary accommodation?

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to talk about homelessness and the pressures that local authorities face. This issue feels particularly personal because the number of stories that I have heard, not just when I was the shadow Minister but in the role that I am fortunate enough and humbled to have now, show that we cannot continue with the homelessness crisis. Behind every single one of the figures is a human being.

Like poverty, housing has a significant impact on people's lives and opportunities. That is why, in my role as Deputy Prime Minister, I will bring leaders together at a local, regional and parliamentary level to ensure that we tackle homelessness. We need to do something about the figures. We have inherited a really poor state of affairs, but I am determined to ensure that we do something about that.

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): Many residents in my constituency of Waveney Valley find themselves priced out of living in their community, as is the case in so much of the country, because the homes that are being built are not affordable for local people. I welcome the Deputy Prime Minister's statement on affordable housing, but how many of the 1.5 million homes that she has pledged to build does she expect to be affordable? In particular, how many does she expect to be council homes? What action will be taken to address the fact that we have a million empty homes in this country?

Angela Rayner: It is difficult to set out the detail at a local level because those types of development are subject to section 106 agreements. That is why local plans are really important, and we support that process. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the consultation document on the release of grey belt, which talks about a minimum of 50% of housing being affordable. Again, that figure will depend on local need. We have to try to get the balance right. If local areas say, "We need x", but I say, "Well, you are going to have y," then that is a challenge. We have said that 50% of housing built on the grey belt must be affordable. Local areas can then use that figure and say that they want a particular amount of homes for social rent. The methodology and the affordability test we are using make things much better, because they give a figure that reflects the reality for people in an area.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Alistair Strathern.

Alistair Strathern (Hitchin) (Lab): I welcome you to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Deputy Prime Minister will be all too aware of the extent to which the planning system is failing communities like mine. It is not building the affordable homes that people are crying out for, not delivering the infrastructure my growing communities need, and not even protecting some of the nature-rich parts of our countryside. Opposition Members might not like to hear this, but under the last Government, green-belt approvals, often haphazard, increased tenfold, while brownfield approvals halved. Will the Deputy Prime Minister reassure my constituents that her golden rules will ensure that brownfield and greyfield sites are truly prioritised, and that infrastructure and affordability will be prioritised too, so that we finally deliver growth that works for communities like mine?

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend is right to mention the haphazard way in which the green belt has been built upon under the last Government, although some of the responses that I have had from Opposition Members give the impression that that never happened. I am clear that brownfield should always be the first port of call, which is why we have been making brownfield development easier under the NPPF. We will also take

[Angela Rayner]

firm action to limit the scope to game the system, and consult on how to stop developers who have paid over the odds for land using that as an excuse for negotiating down their section 106 contributions. A number of measures, including our golden rules, will ensure that we push towards brownfield. The release of grey belt has to be within our golden rules.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): Yesterday, the Secretary of State made the decision to approve the appeal by Envar Composting in relation to a proposed medical waste incinerator on the edge of St Ives, despite the initial application being rejected by Conservative and Labour members of Cambridgeshire county council. Residents in St Ives, as well as the impacted rural villages of Somersham, Bluntisham, Colne, Pidley, Woodhurst, Old Hurst and Needingworth, are hugely concerned that their opposition and concerns have not been heard by the Secretary of State. Given that NHS England's 2023 clinical waste strategy states that there is a need to

"reduce the use of incineration",

and details a strategic priority that

"requires in-house waste processing capability"

to be developed, why has the Secretary of State approved a medical waste incinerator against local wishes? Will she meet local residents to hear their concerns?

Angela Rayner: I thank the hon. Member for his contribution. I have not personally dealt with that specific case, but when we make such decisions, we weigh up the advice and planning expertise that we have, and decisions will be made based on the evidence we have. It is an objective way of making a decision.

Noah Law (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): I welcome the Deputy Prime Minister's plan to put building homes at the heart of our mission to raise living standards, and to ensure that what we build reflects local views. Will she give an update on plans to give councils greater powers to tackle the scourge of second homes, which put a drag on our communities and economies, particularly in Cornwall, so that we can unlock supplies through that channel?

Angela Rayner: I said in my statement, this is the first step but we know there is so much more that we need to do. We have a significant amount of legislation coming forward, about which the housing Minister will be able to update the House. The NPPF is about making sure that we get the housing targets in place, but I understand the point my hon. Friend makes. We need to address many more issues that we face in housing, which is why a significant number of measures were announced in the King's Speech.

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): An additional 3,000 homes are currently being built in Maldon and Heybridge in my constituency, and Liberal Democrat-controlled Chelmsford city council wants to build another 3,000 at Hammonds Farm in my constituency, yet the

local roads and health and education services are all under intolerable pressure, so what will the Secretary of State do to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is put in place before the developments take place?

Angela Rayner: The right hon. Gentleman's Government was in power for 14 years and could have resolved this issue. One reason why we are consulting on the revised NPPF is because we recognise that infrastructure is critical, as I have said to many hon. Members today. People often reject housing proposals because they do not see infrastructure. That is why we have the golden rules, why I have asked all the Departments to look at what we can do to ensure that infrastructure is there, and why we will support the strengthening of section 106 to ensure that developers do not try to squeeze out of what they promised as part of the development.

Emma Foody (Cramlington and Killingworth) (Lab/Co-op): As my right hon. Friend has said, this has got to be about building communities, not just about building homes. On too many occasions, residents in my constituency have been left for too long on incomplete and unadopted estates. Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that both the social and physical infrastructure must be delivered at the earliest opportunity in development, and that developers must be held to account for their delivery?

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree. That goes back to the point that far too often people object to development because they do not see the infrastructure, and people see that in some cases developers try to wriggle out of their obligations. As I set out in the consultation document we are putting forward today, we believe this will strengthen the hand of local authorities and we will be able to ensure that we get the infrastructure we desperately need alongside the houses.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Deputy Prime Minister has outlined the dire need for house building across this great United Kingdom and set out a system to try to achieve that. However, there is the important issue of people trying to get mortgages. In the mainland, those who earn £75,000 a year are having difficulty getting a mortgage, but back home in Northern Ireland, those who are earning much less—say, £40,000 to £45,000—have no chance of getting a mortgage. What can be done to help people to get mortgages and thereby enable them to buy a home and move forward?

Angela Rayner: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we have to fix the situation not just on the affordability of houses, and in the general election campaign we talked about our proposals for a mortgage guarantee scheme. The new deal for working people, which is coming forward with legislation in October time, will ensure that we make work pay. The Chancellor announced a pay rise for public sector workers, and we recently wrote to the Low Pay Commission to expand its remit so that we will make sure that over a million people get a pay rise, because jobs that pay will also mean people can then afford to have their own home.

Lebanon

2.19 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall make a statement on the situation in Lebanon.

On 27 July, Hezbollah launched a series of rockets into northern Israel and the occupied Golan Heights. Tragically, in Majdal Shams, one strike killed at least 12 civilians—young people, one just 10-years-old, who were playing football. I extend my deepest sympathies to their families and to the Jewish community as they grieve for their loved ones. The Government are unequivocal in condemning this horrific attack and calling on Hezbollah to cease its rocket strikes. This atrocity is a consequence of indiscriminate firing and paying no heed at all to civilian life. This attack is part of an intensifying pattern of fighting around the Israeli-Lebanese border. For months now, we have been teetering on the brink. The risk of further escalation and regional destabilisation is now more acute than ever.

At the end of my first week in office I spoke to Lebanese Prime Minister Mikati, and yesterday I called him again to express my concern at this latest incident. I have also visited Israel and discussed the situation with Prime Minister Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Katz. I shall visit Lebanon as soon as the security circumstances allow. We support Israel's right to defend itself in line with international humanitarian law. As I have said before, it is in a tough neighbourhood, threatened by those who want to see its annihilation. More than 40 people, including 24 civilians, have now been killed by Hezbollah strikes in northern Israel and the Golan Heights, and tens of thousands of Israelis have been displaced from the area, while in Lebanon more than 100 civilians have died and almost 100,000 are displaced.

A widening of the conflict is in nobody's interest. Indeed, the consequences could be catastrophic. That is why we continue to press for a diplomatic solution based on UN Security Council resolution 1701, which called for a long-term solution based on the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, no foreign forces in Lebanon without its Government's consent, and no armed forces, other than the UN and the Lebanese Government troops, deployed south of the Litani river, near the border with Israel. It is why, even in the face of serious provocation, our counsel is restraint.

We welcome the Lebanese Government's statement condemning violence against civilians and urging the cessation of all violence. We continue to support the Lebanese armed forces, and the UK has provided more training and equipment to four of Lebanon's land border regiments. We are working intensively with the United Nations and our partners, including the United States and France, to encourage de-escalation.

With our partners we will do all we can to prevent the outbreak of full-scale conflict, but the risk is rising. I therefore want to underline the Government's advice to British nationals. We advise against all travel to the north of Israel and the north of the Golan Heights, and against all travel to Lebanon. There are frequent artillery exchanges and airstrikes. Tensions are high and the situation could deteriorate rapidly.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister chaired a Cobra meeting this morning, and I am working with Foreign Office consular teams to make sure that we are prepared for all scenarios. However, if the conflict escalates, the Government cannot guarantee that we will be able to evacuate everybody immediately. People may be forced to shelter in place. History teaches us that in a crisis such as this one, it is far safer to leave while commercial flights are still running, rather than run the risk of becoming trapped in a war zone. My message to British nationals in Lebanon is quite simple: leave.

The tensions on the Israeli-Lebanese border are one aspect of a wider crisis in the middle east. Across the region we see evidence of malign Iranian activity—in their support for Hezbollah, Hamas, Houthis and other groups whose actions destabilise the region, and who show scant regard for the death and destruction that this causes. This Government are committed to working alongside our partners to counter Iranian threats.

Meanwhile, in Gaza, fighting continues. The scenes at the Khadija schools—civilians killed and shocking images of injured children—underline the desperate conditions endured by civilians. The reports of the humanitarian situation remain sobering, with the threat of disease and famine looming ever larger. This Government continue to do all they can to provide relief to Palestinian civilians. I recently announced new funding for field hospitals run by UK-Med, which has treated more than 60,000 Gazans since the conflict began. We have restored funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, providing £21 million in new funds to the agency that is able to deliver aid at the scale needed.

What is urgently needed is an immediate ceasefire. All the hostages must be freed. The fighting must end, and much, much more aid must get into Gaza. A ceasefire would not only alleviate the suffering in Gaza and secure the hostages' release but reduce tensions across the region, helping to prevent an escalatory cycle in Lebanon, and it would offer hope of renewed peace processes between Israel and Palestinians.

As I said in my first appearance at this Dispatch Box as Foreign Secretary, we are committed to playing a full diplomatic role in efforts to secure a just and lasting peace. Our overarching goal is clear: a viable sovereign Palestinian state alongside a safe and secure Israel. We do not want to see more civilians killed or more innocent lives cut short, but the risks are clear. We are urging the de-escalation of the current crisis while ensuring that we are prepared if diplomatic efforts do not succeed, with a clear call today for all British nationals in Lebanon to leave immediately. I commend this statement to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

2.27 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of his statement.

This is indeed a matter of profound concern and gravity for us all. The tragic and senseless attack in the Golan Heights over the weekend must be met with full, unequivocal condemnation. Children and young people innocently playing football, with bright futures and the rich tapestry of life ahead of them, had their lives cruelly snatched away. My thoughts, and I am sure the

[Mr Andrew Mitchell]

thoughts of the whole House, are with their parents, siblings and friends, and all those affected by this monstrous act.

The risk of further escalation across the blue line is real and the Government are right to take it seriously. We do not want to see a widening of this painful conflict, and the opening of a new front would be in nobody's interest. If we are to avoid it, all involved need to show restraint. We should be crystal clear that that includes Hezbollah. Let nobody forget that this is a proscribed terrorist organisation that has no regard for human life, human dignity or human rights. Nobody should be in any doubt about Hezbollah's intention towards the world's only Jewish state. And Hezbollah supports Hamas, another proscribed terrorist organisation, which has also inflicted appalling suffering, with the worst atrocity committed against Jewish people since the Holocaust and the second world war.

Hezbollah must cease its attacks right now. That message must be aimed at Tehran, too. The Government must use the communication channels that we have with Iran to be extremely firm with the regime. Iran must use its influence to rein in its proxies and stop destabilising the middle east. Beyond stern words, we must use all the tools at our disposal, including tough sanctions, to disrupt malign behaviour by Iran and its proxies such as Hezbollah, and to crack down on finance sources and flows of weapons. Sanctions must also demonstrate that terror group leaders cannot escape the consequences of their actions. The Government must rally the international community to collectively reaffirm its commitment to the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1701, which is critical for a long-term peace.

If I may press the Foreign Secretary on three specific points, what steps is he taking to amplify the advice that he has already and rightly given so clearly that British nationals in Lebanon should leave now? What is he doing in-country to get the message across and to make information on how to leave quickly easily accessible? What steps is he taking to look after the interests of the Foreign Office staff and other dependants in Lebanon? Secondly, does he have an estimate of how many Brits are actually in Lebanon? Thirdly, what discussions has he had with key partners in the region who, like us, wish to see a destabilising escalation averted?

I conclude with a broader point. We are clearly at a critical point in this conflict. We could see Hamas accept the deal on the table, which would see a pause in the fighting, the return of the hostages, a flood of aid and the space created to bring about the conditions for a sustainable peace, or we could see the suffering in Gaza grind on and a dangerous escalation along the blue line. This is the time to be putting maximum pressure on Hamas, as we have been discussing today, and on Hezbollah.

This is also the time to remain in close dialogue with Israel and maintain our position as a trusted partner. That is critical whether for getting more aid into Gaza, or for urging restraint by Israel. The Foreign Secretary will have heard concerns in recent days about what many of us perceive as a shift in the Government's approach to our close ally Israel, including in relation to the International Criminal Court. He gave me an answer on that point at oral questions earlier today.

We should make it clear that, while recognition of Palestine is important and does not need to come at the end of the process, it equally cannot come at the start of the process, where it could be seen as a reward for violence and for terror. I hope that the Government will not only continue to work to avoid an escalation along the blue line, but maintain that close relationship with Israel. The trust and friendship that exist between the UK and Israel matter, because they allow us candidly to discuss all aspects of the current conflict with Israeli counterparts at the very highest levels, in addition to using our influence as a member of the United Nations Security Council.

Mr Lammy: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for the tone and cross-party nature of his remarks. He knows better than many in this House how serious it is to be dealing with any crisis that might escalate at this time. He is absolutely right to draw out the relationship between Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthis and Iran. Of course we keep our sanctions regime under review, but he is right to press the case about the axis and he is absolutely right that of course we keep open all the channels that we have with Iran. He will be pleased to know I spoke to Prime Minister Mikati and we talked about the blue line. He will also recall that I was in Lebanon a few months before the election was called and I indicated at oral questions earlier that it is my hope to get to the region once more, while taking all the advice that he would expect me to take.

I reassure the right hon. Gentleman that it has of course been important to communicate our advice to leave Lebanon, and for people who are in the UK at this time not to travel to Lebanon, and to convey that advice across all channels. That has been taking place since last night and it will be taking place over the coming days to communicate that very loudly in-country as well. He will also note we have begun the registration scheme that allows UK nationals to register their presence in Lebanon so that we know where they are. Of course we keep the safety of our consular staff under close review, particularly with the dangers that exist with missiles being fired in this way on both sides.

Our estimation is that about 16,000 UK nationals are in the region, but asking people to register enables us to know who is there. We urge people to leave on the many commercial flights that are currently available from Lebanon and to make their way to Europe and back home. Of course we are working with our international partners; the right hon. Gentleman will know that the US, Germany and Canada are all upping their travel advice along the lines that we first began yesterday.

Derek Twigg (Widnes and Halewood) (Lab): I welcome the statement by the Foreign Secretary. He referred to countering the Iranian threats; in his short time in office, has he made any assessment yet about how successful they have been?

Mr Lammy: We are clear-eyed about the fact that Iran continues to destabilise the middle east through its military, financial and political support for its proxies and partners, including Iranian-aligned militia groups in Iraq and Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. We continue to work with international partners to encourage de-escalation and long-term peace and security in the middle east.

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

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): I welcome the Foreign Secretary's statement and his advice to British nationals, which seems like a very wise precaution and could prevent our having to evacuate British citizens in the future. I join him in condemning the Hezbollah strike in the Golan Heights, which killed 12 Druze children. Our thoughts go out to their families.

However, now we find the region on the precipice that many of us have feared since 7 October last year: the escalation of this dire conflict to another front, with Israel's Minister Smotrich warning of an all-out war with Hezbollah. The UN special co-ordinator for the middle east peace process has urged "maximum restraint" and the immediate cessation of rocket fire across the blue line. We welcome that call and urge the UK Government to work closely with regional powers to do whatever we can to de-escalate the situation. My question to the Foreign Secretary is this: has he, and have his colleagues, engaged with the UN special co-ordinator? If not, will they do so, given the special co-ordinator's vital role in moments such as this?

The Liberal Democrats welcome the Foreign Secretary's call for an immediate bilateral ceasefire to end the humanitarian devastation in Gaza, to get the hostages home and to open the door to a two-state solution. This is a deeply insecure region and that insecurity is felt by everybody who lives there: Israelis, Palestinians and others. A two-state solution will deliver the dignity and security they need, and I am reassured to hear that he will be making those calls on regional powers when he next visits the region.

Mr Lammy: I am very grateful to the Lib Dem spokesman for the tone and manner of his remarks. I can reassure him that I have been in touch with the UN special envoy, Amos Hochstein. I have spoken to him several times and I intend to speak to him again over the coming days. As I have indicated, it is my hope to get to the region if the security situation allows.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that an immediate ceasefire is what we need. We need those hostages out and we need the aid in. If we get that immediate ceasefire, if the Biden plan is adopted, it will allow de-escalation across the region. That is why we need to see that plan adopted by both sides as soon as possible.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call David Pinto-Duschinsky.

David Pinto-Duschinsky (Hendon) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I take this opportunity to welcome you to the Chair?

I welcome the Foreign Secretary's statement on Hezbollah's horrific attack and his condemnation of the awful strike in Majdal Shams. What steps will he take to put maximum pressure on Hezbollah to cease its rocket attacks for good?

Mr Lammy: We have a long-standing no-contact policy with Hezbollah. However, we of course continue to speak to the Government in Lebanon, as fragile as that Government is. We condemn Hezbollah's destabilising

activity. We do, obviously, co-ordinate very closely with regional partners, some of whom are in contact with Hezbollah.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his place; he is not technically a right hon. Friend, but he has been a personal friend of mine since my original attempt to stop him being elected in Tottenham many years ago. I thank him for his statement today.

The right hon. Gentleman knows well that there are many moderate and measured voices in Lebanon and in the Lebanese diaspora. I am glad that he has emphasised the close relationship between our Government and armed forces and the Lebanese army. Will he agree to meet a small group of people associated with the all-party parliamentary group for Lebanon, which I have chaired? The all-party groups are re-forming as we speak, but a group of parliamentarians have been part of that one, and it would be very useful for us to meet the right hon. Gentleman to discuss what more can be done across the House to support the efforts that he has described today.

Mr Lammy: Over my 24 years in this place, the strangest of friendships have been struck up across party lines. Of course I will meet the right hon. Gentleman and the group, because this is a very serious cross-party issue and I know that all Members of this House want to see de-escalation.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. We must deplore the loss of civilian life, particularly of children, on either side of the divide, so I welcome his calls for de-escalation in Lebanon and repeated calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

Looking ahead to long-term peace and to a two-state solution, how does my right hon. Friend deal with the comments of the Israeli Prime Minister, who said the other day that Samaria and Judea are an integral part of Israel and that they are not occupying the west bank? In that situation, have the Government not got to get on with recognising a Palestinian state, rather than waiting for the Israelis to come round to the view that it is acceptable to them?

Mr Lammy: I am grateful to my very good friend, who has been championing these issues for many, many years. This last period has, of course, been of huge concern to him and his constituents. I was horrified by the degree of expansion that I saw in the west bank a few weeks ago: there has been more in the past year than we have seen in 20 years. The violence is unacceptable, and the tone, rhetoric and statements from some members of the Government are very alarming indeed. As my hon. Friend would expect, I pressed these issues with both the Israeli Prime Minister and the Israeli President, and we keep the situation in the west bank under close review.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for prior sight of his statement and share his deep concern about where the region currently finds itself. He will not need reminding that, in the immediate aftermath of the Hamas atrocity on 7 October, the international community allowed Israel to blur the vital lines between legitimate self-defence

[Brendan O'Hara]

and a lust for revenge. As a result, Israel has acted with impunity, 40,000 civilians are dead and Gaza has been reduced to rubble. What discussions has he had with Israel and our international partners to ensure that—heaven forbid—should this conflict escalate further, all those involved know, understand and accept that revenge and legitimate self-defence are not the same thing under international law, so that we avoid having another 40,000 civilian casualties in nine months' time?

Mr Lammy: It was very important for me to visit the occupied territories and Israel within the first week in office. We said this in opposition and we say it again in government: of course, given the hostages who are still in Gaza, Israel has a right to defend itself, but it is a qualified right—it has always been, within international humanitarian law. The scale of civilian loss of life—the children and the women who have lost their lives, the aid workers who have lost their lives—against a backdrop in which journalists are not allowed into the country has been a matter of deep concern and worry across the international community, so of course I have raised these issues. It was also important to meet hostage families and to be absolutely clear that we want to see those hostages returned.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Kim Johnson.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and congratulations on your appointment.

I am sure my right hon. Friend agrees that the escalation of violence can be reduced if we look at ending the suffering in Gaza. At a briefing that I attended today with Oxfam and Medical Aid for Palestinians, they talked about how Israel was using water as a weapon of war. People have 4.7 litres of water per day to wash, clean and cook. That is less than a toilet flush. I welcome the position that we have taken—we have moved greatly—but does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to go much further and much faster?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue of water. We have waterborne disease—we now have polio setting in—and of course we have had the famine. The lack of desalination is a very serious issue. That is why it was important to take the decision, in our first days in office, to restore aid to UNRWA, to increase the funds available to UK-Med and to do more to open up field medical sites across Gaza. We will continue to press the aid issue in Gaza. I think it is also important that the Rafah crossing be opened, which would alleviate a lot of suffering.

Mike Tapp (Dover and Deal) (Lab): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his calls for de-escalation and a ceasefire, which of course should include the release of all hostages, to ensure that we get more humanitarian aid in and a two-state solution, but we also need to look at the flow of arms, training and finances from the Iranian regime to the terror proxies of Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthis, who are working tirelessly to ensure that there is not peace in the region. Does he agree that we should be helping Israel as much as we can to defend itself from these groups and their attacks?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is right. When we look at the scale of rocket fire and missiles and the damage that they are doing, and when we think about these poor people away from their homes in northern Israel, who have been boarded up in hotels for months and months, it is important to have in clear view who is supporting these proxies and the arms and weaponry that is driving a lot of conflict in the region—including by Hamas, by the way. For all those reasons, we keep sanctions under review.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement. Obviously yet more deaths is a tragedy—every mother and every father grieves for lost children, as do all relatives—but there is an issue here: unless the Government and Israel and others accept the International Court of Justice's opinions and judgments about the illegal nature of the occupation of the west bank and Gaza, and of course the illegal nature of the occupation of the Golan heights, we are in danger of the conflict getting much worse. The UN Secretary-General has called for restraint. Will the British Government join him in doing so? Will they also join him in trying to convene some sort of regional peace initiative in order to prevent this whole thing from escalating completely out of control? Finally, do the Government reject the Israeli occupation of the Golan heights?

Mr Lammy: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who I know has taken up these issues over many years in this Parliament. Let me be clear: what I saw and what I continue to see in the occupied territories is unacceptable. He will know that the community who experience this violence in the Golan heights are Druze in background, and that this is occupation of the Golan heights—I do recognise that. I want to see de-escalation across the board and a solution along the lines of Oslo and 1967. A two-state solution is what we all want to get to, and we will achieve that if we have an immediate ceasefire and get back to political dialogue and conversation.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call James Asser.

James Asser (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): I was not down to ask a question, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I call Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I always have a question. [Laughter.] Sorry, humour is not what this is about. I apologise for that—I should not have said that.

I thank the Secretary of State very much for his calm and measured statement, which encapsulated the temperament and concern of all of us in this Chamber, on both sides. The attack at the football pitch in Majdal Shams was deadly and full of complete evil: 12 children and young adults were slaughtered. Will he outline what steps are being taken to find the perpetrators and hold them accountable, and to ensure the message is sent that these attacks will not bring peace, but instead further division? What steps will be taken to assist Israel, whose very existence is under threat from Hezbollah? Hezbollah are terrorist murderers of innocents, and must be neutralised.

Mr Lammy: The hon. Gentleman knows a lot about the issue of terrorism, and for that reason he has always used his position on the Back Benches to raise these issues. He is absolutely right: there will be many people in our Jewish diaspora in this country looking with real fear at the prospect of escalation and worrying about their loved ones. We have updated the travel advice in relation to Israel, particularly northern Israel, and of course we continue to work in partnership with our close ally at what is a very challenging moment.

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): Illegal Israeli settlements are imperilling the future viability of a Palestinian state. They undermine the two-state solution. Will the Secretary of State consider issuing a statement saying that if Israel continues to expand illegal settlements, the UK will immediately recognise the Palestinian state?

Mr Lammy: I recognise the huge concern in this House and across the world about the nature of both the expansion and the violence. I have also said that recognition is important as a pathway to peace, and no country has a veto on when and how we do that, working with partners. However, I do not think that bringing those two things into proximity is the right way to go about things diplomatically, and I suspect that if we did, we would struggle to find partners that would support us.

Point of Order

2.53 pm

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I seek your guidance? I wish to place on record my severe concerns about the Government's failure to come formally before the House on their decision to impose VAT on independent schools. Not only have they imposed this policy through a written ministerial statement, but they have now said that they will charge VAT on any fees that are paid in advance. A WMS is insufficient and purposely prevents the House from debating a policy that affects rural economies—I have 10 independent schools in my constituency—but also military and special educational needs families and both comprehensive and independent schools. Madam Deputy Speaker, how can you help us to resolve this issue, which is incredibly important for so many in the House?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): The hon. Lady has placed her concerns on the record, and I am sure Members on the Treasury Bench will have heard them.

Budget Responsibility Bill

Second Reading

2.54 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Darren Jones): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I congratulate you and welcome you to your place in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a privilege to open this debate in my first appearance at the Dispatch Box as a Minister in this new Labour Government.

At the general election, the British people voted for change, and this new Labour Government began work immediately to deliver on that mandate. Sustained growth is the only route to the improved prosperity that this country needs and to improve the living standards of the British people. After 14 years of Conservative failure, this work is urgent—it is now our national mission. To deliver on that mission, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor set out days after taking office, we must fix the foundations of the economy and restore economic stability. She emphasised that commitment to delivering economic stability by meeting with the Office for Budget Responsibility soon after becoming Chancellor.

Under the legal framework we inherited from the Conservative party, there is no requirement on the Treasury to subject fiscally significant announcements to independent OBR scrutiny. We all experienced what happens when huge unfunded fiscal commitments are made without proper scrutiny and key economic institutions such as the OBR are sidelined. The country cannot afford a repeat of the calamitous mini-Budget of September 2022, when Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng's reckless plans unleashed economic turmoil that has loaded hundreds of pounds on to people's mortgages and rents. Conservative Ministers put ideology before sound public money and party before country.

This Labour Government are turning the page: we will always put the country first and party second. Our commitment to fiscal discipline and sound money will never waver. That is why we are firmly committed to the independence of the OBR, and to the important principle that in normal times, the announcement of a fiscally significant measure should always be accompanied by an independent assessment of its economic and fiscal implications, in order to support transparency and accountability. That is why we made a commitment in our manifesto to strengthen the role of the OBR, and it is why we have acted quickly to deliver on that commitment today.

This action will reinforce credibility and trust by preventing large-scale unfunded commitments that are not subject to an independent fiscal assessment. As Richard Hughes, the chair of the OBR, reiterated in his recent letter to the Chancellor,

“it is a good principle of fiscal policymaking that major fiscal decisions should be based upon, and presented alongside, an up-to-date view of the economic and fiscal outlook”.

In line with this, the Chancellor yesterday commissioned a full forecast to accompany our Budget on 30 October, following the important principle that significant fiscal policy decisions should be made at a fiscal event and accompanied by an independent OBR assessment. That fiscal lock is an essential part of our mission to deliver economic stability. It is one of our first steps towards

fixing the foundations of the economy, and it is our guarantee to the British people that this Labour Government are a responsible Government who will never play fast and loose with public and family finances, as the Conservative party has done before.

The Bill sets the legal framework for the operation of the fiscal lock. It builds on the Budget Responsibility and National Audit Act 2011, which established the OBR. In line with that, the technical detail underpinning the fiscal lock will be set out via an upcoming update to the charter for budget responsibility. The charter sets out the Government's fiscal framework, including guidance on how the OBR performs its duties within that framework. To support scrutiny of the Bill during its passage through Parliament, the Treasury has published a draft of the relevant charter text, which will make clear exactly how the Government plan to implement the fiscal lock. A full update to the charter will be published in due course, and Members will vote on it in the usual way.

The Bill itself does five things to ensure that proper scrutiny of fiscal plans will take place. First, it requires the Treasury, before the Government make any fiscally significant announcement in Parliament, to request that the OBR presents an assessment taking the announcement into account. This builds on the usual process whereby the Chancellor commissions the OBR for an economic and fiscal forecast to accompany a fiscal event. It guarantees in law that, from now on, every fiscally significant change to tax and spending will be subject to scrutiny by the independent OBR.

Secondly, the Bill gives the OBR new powers to independently decide to produce an assessment if they judge that the fiscal lock has been triggered. If a fiscally significant announcement is made without the Treasury having previously requested a forecast from the OBR, the OBR is required to inform the Treasury Committee of its opinion and then prepare an assessment as soon as is practicable. That means that, come what may, the OBR, through Parliament, will be able to hold the Government to account.

Thirdly, the Bill defines a measure, or combination of measures, as “fiscally significant” if they exceed a specified percentage of GDP, with the charter then setting the precise threshold itself. Setting the threshold in this way provides clarity for both the OBR and external stakeholders about what constitutes a “fiscally significant announcement”—that is, when the fiscal lock has been triggered—and it ensures that the Government can set it at the right level going forward, recognising economic conditions. The threshold level will be set at announcements of at least 1% of nominal GDP in the latest OBR forecast. As an example, this year the 1% threshold would be £28 billion. This will ensure that we properly capture any announcements that resemble the growth plan of former Members Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng in 2022, with the broader risks to macroeconomic stability that this entailed.

Fourthly, the Bill ensures that the fiscal lock does not apply to Governments responding to emergencies, such as the covid-19 pandemic. The Bill does so by not applying in respect of measures that are intended to have a temporary effect and which are in response to an emergency. The charter will define “temporary” as any measure that is intended to end within two years. This recognises that it is sometimes reasonable—for example during a pandemic—for the Government to act quickly

and decisively without an OBR assessment, if that is needed in response to a shock. Of course, in emergencies it may be appropriate for the Chancellor to commission a forecast from the OBR to follow measures that needed to be announced or implemented rapidly, and that would happen in the usual way. Alongside any such announcement, the Treasury will be required to make it clear why it considers the situation to be an emergency. As set out in the updated charter, the OBR will have the discretion to trigger the fiscal lock and prepare a report if it reasonably disagrees.

Fifthly and finally, the Bill requires the Government to publish any updates to the detail of the fiscal lock—such as the threshold level at which it is triggered—in draft form at least 28 days before the updated charter is laid before Parliament. This is an essential safeguard in the Bill, preventing any future Government from choosing to ignore the fiscal lock by updating the charter without the consent of Parliament.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Minister is setting out the stark realities of where we are financially, which it is important that we all understand. Given that the financial positions of all of us within the United Kingdom could be fairly dramatically changed, regionally, it will be important that discussions with the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament take place early enough for the impacts of what might happen to be better understood.

Darren Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. As I am sure he knows, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is traditionally the lead Minister in Government for relationships with the Finance Ministers in the devolved Governments. I have already met a number of times with counterparts in the Northern Ireland Executive, as well as those in Scotland and Wales. I look forward to meeting them in person in Northern Ireland, I hope in September, for further such discussions.

To conclude, people across the country are still suffering the consequences of the Conservative party's economic experiment in 2022. Conservative Ministers took the most reckless decisions without any thought for their real-life impact on the British economy and on family finances. Astonishingly, they have still made no apology.

With this Labour Government, our commitment to fiscal discipline and sound money is the bedrock of our plans. The Budget Responsibility Bill guarantees in law that, from now on, every fiscally significant change to tax and spending will be subject to scrutiny by the independent OBR. The Bill will reinforce credibility and trust by preventing large-scale unfunded commitments that are not subject to the scrutiny of an OBR fiscal assessment. This delivers on a key manifesto commitment to provide economic stability and sound public finances by strengthening the role of the independent OBR. This is a crucial first step to fix the foundations in our economy, so that we can achieve sustained economic growth and make every part of the country better off.

For those reasons, I commend the Bill to the House.

3.4 pm

Gareth Davies (Grantham and Bourne) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker, congratulations on your election. Let me take my first opportunity to congratulate the right hon. and hon. Members in the new Treasury ministerial

team, who have taken up some of the best jobs in government. I loved every minute of my time in the Treasury, even when I had to come to this place to face my shadows. I will always be grateful to the officials who so ably supported me and the team.

As the Member of Parliament for Grantham, the home of our country's first female Prime Minister, I congratulate our country's first female Chancellor. It is right that we highlight that. While the two are not politically aligned, we can all recognise when a ceiling has been shattered and no matter who is breaking it, we certainly recognise that on this side of the House.

The Bill before us seeks to amend the Budget Responsibility and National Audit Act 2011—a Bill, introduced by a Conservative Chancellor, that created the Office for Budget Responsibility. The Bill should be understood in that context, building on a previous Bill that replaced the system where His Majesty's Treasury would produce its own forecasts and the Chancellor of the Exchequer would essentially mark their own homework. Back then, that was an essential piece of legislation, given what had gone on before. Between 2000 and 2010 the then Labour Government's so-called forecasts for growth in the economy were out by an average of £13 billion and their forecasts for the budget deficit three years ahead were out by an average of £40 billion. Their forecasts therefore lacked any credibility at all.

It was not just their forecasts that led to the creation of the OBR; it was their management of the economy. Much has already been said by the shadow Chancellor about the higher inflation, higher deficit and higher unemployment that the Conservatives inherited from Labour in 2010. What is, however, sometimes forgotten is that total public spending accounted for almost half the national income when Labour last left office. Welfare spending ballooned by a staggering 45%, and that runaway spending meant that we inherited the largest budget deficit of any economy in Europe with the sole exception of Ireland. The idea that Labour has an unblemished record when it comes to the public finances is, therefore, plain wrong. We Conservatives created the OBR, in Parliament, to guard against Labour's fiscal unaccountability and recklessness with the public finances. We continue to support the role of the OBR in providing open, fully transparent, independent forecasts for all to see, no matter who is in government.

It was genuinely good to hear that the Chancellor recognised the importance of the OBR when she said that because of the OBR, in her words,

"You don't need to win an election to find out the state of public finances."

She was absolutely right about that. That is why yesterday's supposed revelations simply won't wash. In fact, if she is so supportive of the OBR, I ask a simple question: why was yesterday's statement based on internal Treasury analysis, not OBR analysis? Surely if they are very supportive of the OBR they would have asked the OBR to conduct the analysis. The OBR has always said that it would be ready to produce analysis at any time, on short notice.

That was yesterday, and today we are here to talk about the Bill before us. While we are supportive of the OBR, we think it is right that the House should consider a number of concerns that we have, on which we will seek clarification. First, the Bill will require the Treasury

[Gareth Davies]

to request, and the OBR to produce, a report on fiscally significant measures announced by the Government, with the exception of temporary, emergency measures. The definitions of these terms—"fiscally significant", "temporary" and "emergency"—will be set out in a charter for budget responsibility as the Chief Secretary outlined. The draft charter text, published alongside the Bill, deems measures to be fiscally significant if they cost the equivalent of 1% of GDP in any financial year. It defines as temporary any measure intended to end within two years, and the draft charter text gives the OBR discretion to reasonably disagree with the Treasury's interpretation of what constitutes emergency.

Despite some of the rhetoric, we note that nowhere in the Bill or the surrounding documents is the OBR empowered to prevent a Government from taking fiscally significant action of any kind. The effect of this Bill is to ensure that an OBR costing accompanies any fiscally significant action the Government take—nothing more, nothing less. The way in which the Chancellor described this Bill as a so-called lock to prevent certain activity is—to be generous on my first outing—overly ambitious. The Bill is described as introducing a fiscal lock, which the Chancellor promises will prevent large-scale unfunded commitments, but that is not what it does. There is no fiscal lock, and if anything, it is a forecast lock. The potential impact of the Bill is so limited and specific as to lead some to wonder whether, for all the animated hyperbole of the Chancellor yesterday, this is the prioritisation of gimmicks over governing, despite what the Prime Minister said on the King's Speech.

Secondly, and I say this genuinely constructively, the Government need to be better prepared to clarify what is meant by "emergency". The draft charter gives the OBR the power to reasonably disagree with the Government's interpretation of what is an emergency, but this raises questions about whether the OBR is equipped to make such a decision in the first place. What counts as an emergency should mostly be clear-cut, but what about instances that are less obvious, or when unforeseen circumstances come down the track? The OBR would then be straying into political decision making, which would rightly raise constitutional issues. Even if it is ultimately for Ministers to decide on such matters, any resulting disagreement between the Government and the OBR about whether the circumstances amount to an emergency could undermine the credibility of the Government, the OBR or both.

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I am genuinely perplexed whether the hon. Gentleman is with the former Member for South West Norfolk, who wanted to see the OBR abolished and not part of any decision making, or feels that the Bill does not go far enough. Either way, does he recognise and accept, as thousands of mortgage payers in this country now do, the disaster of the previous Conservative Prime Minister's Budget, the impact it has had and the need never to go back to those days?

Gareth Davies: We support the OBR. I have been clear on that. We created the OBR, so to suggest that we do not support it is incorrect. I would just pull the hon. Member up on some economic facts. The reason interest

rates were so high and mortgages went up is that we faced a global challenge, which this Government will now experience. In office, the Government have to deal with events, and what caused inflation around the world was two things: the war in Ukraine, which pushed up wholesale gas prices to record highs; and the fallout from a once-in-a-century pandemic that the Labour party seems to have forgotten about. Those two factors resulted in 11% inflation, which resulted in the Chancellor and Prime Minister at the time prioritising bringing down inflation, which we did, to 2%. We have now handed this Government 2% inflation, half the deficit we inherited in 2010, half the unemployment and the fastest growth in the G7, so it is a little bit rich to suggest that we take lessons from the Labour party on economic performance.

Our third and final concern—we have others, but I am in keeping this short on Second Reading—is that, in the event that the lock is triggered, the OBR does not need to produce one of its standard reports, even though the Treasury, under the Bill, is required to request such a report to avoid breaking the lock. The Bill creates, therefore, the possibility of an entirely new OBR report, which is not envisaged by the original Act. I would be grateful if the Exchequer Secretary explained that and what it means in practice when he sums up. Although standard OBR reports must be published, it is not clear whether that applies to other reports that the OBR may prepare. If this requirement does not apply, are the Government happy to give the OBR the power to decide whether its costings are published? That is potentially very concerning for transparency.

The official Opposition look forward to more detailed scrutiny of the Bill and its practical implications. Be in no doubt: we support the OBR, which we created to bring in much-needed transparency to our fiscal framework after years of fiscal folly and false promises by the Labour party. At the same time, let us not pretend that the OBR should be the ultimate judge of good policy, that nothing bad can happen under its watchful eye and that nothing good can happen beyond its gaze. Labour Members know this: it is precisely what they argued 15 years ago when we first debated the Bill that led to the OBR's creation. The OBR should not become too political. It should be a referee, not a player, in the fight for fiscal accountability. In the end, we stand by the principle that the British people, through their elected representatives, should always have the deciding say on public policy. We look forward to debating this further in the months ahead. We will not be voting against this Bill on Second Reading. I look forward to the debate.

3.15 pm

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I feel as though I am almost in Alice in Wonderland world when I listen to the Opposition response to this legislation. I certainly feel concerned that they, with the Cheshire Cat and possibly following the Queen of Hearts, might have been trying to pretend that their previous Conservative Prime Minister did not exist, or indeed that the former Member for Spelthorne was never ever the Chancellor. Those of us paying for a mortgage—and I declare a direct interest—know all too well that they were in charge and about the damage that they did with their disastrous mini-Budget, which is why this legislation is so important.

I would wager that that what their constituents would tell them if they suggested that the economic harm the previous Government did to this country, for which we will all be paying for generations to come, was solely to do with Ukraine or the pandemic. That mini-Budget was a political choice, but worse than that, it was a politically uninformed choice. The Government at the time consciously and purposefully made the decision on ideological grounds to press ahead with a Budget that cost 1% of our GDP, and to hell with the consequences, as we have all seen. That is why this legislation is so important.

I will always welcome a sinner who repenteth, so I am pleased that the shadow Minister recognises the value of independent scrutiny and, indeed, urges us all to go further. We will always welcome such an approach, because it is right and because our constituents deserve better, because we can see how bad things are and how broken this country is. What this Bill has at its heart are the funds to repair the damage done by the previous Administration. That is why the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is here today with this Bill to be clear with us about why it matters, why we put things on the books and why sound money is at the heart of it.

The markets did not react by accident and put up all our mortgages; they saw with terror the damage that bad leadership in the Treasury can do and have accordingly asked us to meet that challenge. Frankly, there is nothing progressive about crashing the economy, and that is exactly what the previous Government did. By putting on the record the need to report independently on fiscally significant measures, we are starting with a clean sheet and saying that we will not take such a reckless approach with other people's money. At the end of the day, that is what this is: the tax revenues that are generated are the moneys of our constituents, and it is therefore right that we are careful about how we administer them.

However, I recognise that there are challenges in this legislation. I am speaking today because I hope to hear from the Ministers on the Front Bench further clarity about the concept of "fiscally significant". As somebody who has always liked to be hawkish about public money, I think it is important that we are clear where we are investing, and I very much urge the Treasury to think about investing to save. I see in our broken society the damage that is done by poverty, poor public services and the higher costs that come with that, so I want us to be clear about the funding we have, where it is coming from and why every penny matters.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): As the hon. Lady knows, the new Government have intimated that they may decide to mirror much new EU legislation, which could well have budgetary consequences. She and I have not quite always seen eye to eye on Europe, but does she agree, in that context, that it is actually a bad mistake to do what the Government want to do tonight and abolish the European Scrutiny Committee?

Ms Creasy: The right hon. Member pre-empted many of my concerns. There is a very strong story to tell about good fiscal discipline, but it is not possible to do that independently in a modern, global economy, so the scrutiny that we can provide in this place of a whole

range of regulations does matter. Those include financial regulations—I think particularly about the City and issues around a financial transaction tax, for example. I have not yet convinced him of the merits of working more closely with Europe, but I am confident that one day we can do so. I agree with him, however, that this House should be fully part of that, just as I believe in the principles behind the Bill—that disinfectant comes from transparency and our ability to see what is going on. That is why the Government are so right to bring this legislation forward.

Let me move on to some areas where it is right to ask what we mean by fiscally significant. The right hon. Member and I might disagree about the deal we do in resetting our relationship with Europe, but there can be no doubt that that will have a clear economic impact on this country. I think of the hauliers who are considering whether they will give up bringing goods to the UK because of the Brexit border tax. The previous Government admitted that that measure was inflationary and could have a significant impact not just on our food security, but on our economy, pushing up the cost of living. Many of our constituents know that there is still too much month at the end of their money, and we should challenge any measure that makes that harder. That will also deflect our tax take.

The point I am getting to is that if we are talking about measures that are so fiscally significant that they count for 1% of GDP, a trade deal would easily meet that criterion. We need to be clear in the Bill what we ask of the Office for Budget Responsibility—which, after all, has provided evidence on the impact, for example, of leaving the European Union—and whether we consider its role in such matters. If we are going to put everything on the books, let us make sure that the public understand fully the decisions that we make and where the information comes from.

Another area in which we as a House need to act is our outgoings, especially when we are being asked to make very difficult choices about some of the most vulnerable in our communities, such as people who rely on welfare, or pensioners who rely on the winter fuel payment. We have to be honest: this country is pretty much bankrupt as a result of the previous Administration. If somebody in that dire financial position came into one of our surgeries, we would sit with them and talk about a debt relief order. We would look at their costs and particularly at consolidating the debts that they may have.

Many colleagues here will know that for many years I have been concerned about legal loan sharking. That is not just in people's private lives, but in the public sector, and I consider the private finance initiative to be the legal loan sharking of the public sector. If we are talking about fiscally significant measures—measures that meet the test of £28 billion—we should consider that we have £151 billion of outgoings committed to private finance companies in this country, against £57 billion-worth of assets. Most people can see that those figures do not add up.

Local authorities spend around £18 billion every two to five years on PFI repayments, of which about £4 billion is interest costs. That would suggest an average interest rate of around 35%. If somebody came into a surgery with a loan at a 35% interest rate, we would encourage them to go to a debt relief order. Our country is no

[Ms Creasy]

different, and this matters because, individually, local authorities might not meet that fiscally significant threshold, but collectively, they will for us. We are not going to let hospitals and schools go bust and go out of business. Parklands high school in Liverpool was built under PFI. It was closed because there was not a demand for the places, but Liverpool city council is still playing £12,000 a day for that closed school. It has repayments of £42 million left and the company that owns it is making a profit of around £340,000 a year from the scheme.

Private finance companies are on our books, and they should be on our books nationally. They should be considered fiscally significant. We can do things to consolidate those loans and to reduce the outgoings that will come. My contribution to the Bill and the amendments that I might table, depending on what Ministers say, will relate to the fact that I think we need to be clear that everything that is fiscally significant—decisions that we might not proceed with and ones that we do—should be subject to that level of scrutiny.

The National Audit Office has given us plenty of information about the poor value for money of private finance initiatives. Many Members who have these schools and hospitals in their constituencies will have seen this at first hand. There is evidence from the Department of Health and Social Care about what could be done to consolidate loans that probably would generate savings that would be fiscally significant, when we talk about the sums involved. It would be fantastic to see the Office for Budget Responsibility pick this matter up as part of our knowing how much we have to pay out as a country; how much of a contribution we need to make. This money is going to private companies that, on the whole, are not paying tax in this country, so it is not generating revenue that can go back into paying for the repairs that need to come.

The previous Government started to look at these issues and then walked away. I know that this Government, with their commitment to fiscal discipline and fiscal transparency, will want to be open about the benefits, costs and fiscal significance both of the trade deals that we might make and of private finance initiatives. I look forward to hearing from Ministers about that. This is a very different world—[*Interruption.*] The shadow Minister is smiling. I am sure that he misses his colleague from Spelthorne, but I know he will not miss the opportunity to say sorry to all our constituents for the mess we have been left in and the reason why we need this legislation on the discipline of the OBR, and for the failure to tackle the long-term problems that have left legal loan sharks and poor trading opportunities for our constituents, because they are going to pick up the pieces for generations to come.

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

3.26 pm

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker; congratulations on your election.

The Liberal Democrats understand the importance of a stable economy to the wellbeing of our nation, and we will support the Bill as it makes its way through

Parliament. We have seen the effects of the chaos and uncertainty wrought by the previous Conservative Government in their horrendous mismanagement of the economy, and we know that future prosperity can be built only on a firm foundation.

The former Member for South West Norfolk may have intervened to prevent officials from using the phrase “disastrous” mini-Budget in the King’s Speech document, but this was a disaster for which many millions across the country continue to pay the price. Liberal Democrat MPs have been returned to this House in greater numbers than ever before, because we understand how much our constituents have suffered from the increase in mortgage payments, higher fuel bills and escalating food prices that resulted from the disastrous mini-Budget. We will do all we can to tackle the cost of living crisis being felt by so many, and we welcome the new Government’s commitment to building a strong platform for economic growth. We welcome the Bill as a symbol of strengthened fiscal responsibility and transparency, which we hope will prevent a repeat of the Conservatives’ disastrous mini-Budget under Liz Truss from ever happening again. After the turmoil of the outgoing Conservative Government, we welcome the seriousness of intent from this Government as they rebuild trust with the financial markets and the business and financial sector as a whole.

The financial irresponsibility and unfunded tax cuts in the mini-Budget sent mortgage rates soaring and continued a pattern of low growth, falling living standards and business uncertainty under the Conservatives. Millions of people across the country continue to see the devastating impact of their disastrous governance in their food and energy bills and to feel its heavy burden in their personal finances.

A recent report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows that 320,000 people have been pushed into poverty because of mortgage interest rate rises caused by the incompetence of the previous Conservative Government. It has been devastating to hear the stories of so many households dragged into poverty, and to know that so many families are struggling under the worst cost of living crisis in a generation. It is painful to reflect on the thousands of people who were hoping to make progress in their life and improve the circumstances of their family, but find themselves pulled backwards by the weight of the costs now piled upon them. The IFS report tells us that the number of adults unable to keep their home warm enough increased from 1.8 million in 2020 to 4.6 million in 2023. The IFS attributes that increase to the rise in mortgage interest rates during that period. The statistic lays bare in shaming detail the enormous and ongoing impact that the Conservatives’ disastrous mini-Budget had on all our lives.

The positive responses that this Bill has evoked from the broader business and finance sector are indicative of the desire for industry stability. We welcome the engagement from economists and industry experts, who advise of the Bill’s beneficial impact on confidence in public finances. Even the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Jeremy Hunt), has acknowledged that he is minded to support the Bill. We will carefully scrutinise its details to ensure that it will achieve its intended aims. In particular, we will look closely at the threshold for fiscally significant measures, set out in the legislation as measures worth at least

1% of GDP or approximately £30 billion, and will consider whether that provision could be circumvented by Government announcing major changes just below that threshold.

The proposed terms set a substantial threshold that would have to be reached before the OBR could insist on intervening. That raises questions about how easy it would be for a Government to skirt the rules and avoid scrutiny from the watchdog. We understand that the bar has been set relatively high to prevent a large-scale irresponsible fiscal event, such as the disastrous mini-Budget, but we are aware of the limitations that places on the Bill. In particular, an announcement could have a largely indirect fiscal effect—it could have an impact on the economy, but come at a small up-front cost to the Government—and therefore not trigger the fiscal lock. We therefore ask the Chancellor: can a GDP measure alone adequately capture the impact of a spending or taxation measure on the economy? Should the Government examine the possibility of using additional criteria in establishing the threshold?

We must consider the wider context in which the Conservatives' damaging mini-Budget came about to determine whether the measure that we are debating would be sufficient to prevent such a disaster ever happening again. The Conservatives' period in government, and the last two Parliaments in particular, were characterised by a distaste for the institutions that provide checks and balances on power, and efforts to actively undermine them. Throughout the past few years, we have seen attacks on the judiciary, the civil service, the BBC, the Bank of England, the EU and any British citizen who dared express the view that the Government's botched Brexit deal was doing enormous damage to our economy. We have seen the provisions of international treaties airily discarded. Conservative Ministers even illegally prorogued Parliament. Even now, in the Conservative party leadership contest, it seems that the one thing all candidates agree on is a promise that the UK will leave the European Court of Human Rights.

The disastrous mini-Budget emerged from the philosophy that the power of central Government, exercised by successive Conservative Prime Ministers, can trump that of other vital independent institutions, and it is precisely that philosophy that we must never again see from Government. The ongoing failure of the former Member of Parliament for South West Norfolk to apologise for the disastrous mini-Budget underlines the fact that she thinks she was both entitled and correct to unleash it on an unsuspecting country that voted for neither it nor her.

Truly addressing the causes of the systemic failure that led to the disastrous mini-Budget will take a great deal more than this Bill. It requires the Government to work alongside institutions that exist to support and challenge their decision making. It requires the Government to submit their proposed measures to parliamentary scrutiny. The Liberal Democrats think that reforms devolving power to local bodies to decentralise decision making would also strengthen our ability to take long-term decisions in the national interest. This Bill and other measures are encouraging signs of this new Government's intention to ensure that those in power act with more integrity and transparency, but ultimately, unless all Governments are committed to upholding the principles

of fiscal responsibility, transparency and sound governance, the risk of future disasters such as the mini-Budget will remain.

In our general election manifesto, we set out the need for every fiscal event to be accompanied by an independent forecast from the OBR. More broadly, we wish to see the Government foster stability, certainty and confidence by managing the public finances responsibly, getting national debt falling as a share of the economy and ensuring that day-to-day spending does not exceed the amount raised in taxes. We must make the tax system fairer by asking some of the wealthiest companies in the world to pay their fair share—the big banks, the oil and gas producers and the tech giants—instead of adding even more to the burden on hard-working families. To improve stability and growth, we need to fix our broken trading relationship with Europe and set up an industrial strategy, helping to make Britain one of the most attractive places in the world for businesses to invest. We must work in partnership with responsible, sustainable businesses to tackle the climate emergency, and spur the growth that is needed for investment in health, social care, education and other essential public services.

Responsibly managed public finances are essential if we are to have the stability, certainty and confidence that drive economic growth, and they are vital in getting mortgage rates under control, too. Under the outgoing Conservative Government, we found out just how much pain and damage can come from fiscal irresponsibility. The Liberal Democrats want a thriving British economy that provides jobs and opportunities and is attractive to businesses and investors. We welcome this Bill as a useful step in that direction that will help to improve long-term stability and responsible economic management.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): Does the point of order relate to the business being discussed right now?

Richard Tice: It relates to the business of the day.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Just for reference—I know that this can be tricky for new MPs—points of order must be relevant to the business under way, or be made during the transition between items of business. However, I know that that is not easy for new MPs, and I am grateful to the Member for giving notice of the point of order, so he may proceed.

Richard Tice: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are hearing a lot about transparency, accountability and scrutiny, but the business of the day, proposed by the Leader of the House, includes a plan to abolish the European Scrutiny Committee. When this country voted to leave the European Union, we voted to take back control. How can we scrutinise the Government's activities and negotiations with the European Union if the Government abolish the European Scrutiny Committee? Surely that is completely in contrast to what the Government proposed in their manifesto, and to these discussions about scrutiny.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Once again, I am grateful to the Member for giving us notice of his point of order. It is for the Government to decide what motions should be tabled and whether there should be consultation.

[*Madam Deputy Speaker*]

Any Select Committee can scrutinise matters within its remit, which may include matters relating to the European Union. The remit of the European Scrutiny Committee, as defined in Standing Order No. 143, is to examine European Union documents—broadly speaking, proposals for European Union legislation or policy. It is for the House, not for the Speaker, to decide whether the Committee still fulfils a useful function, now that the UK is no longer a member of the EU.

I call Martin Rhodes.

3.35 pm

Martin Rhodes (Glasgow North) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech during this debate.

I moved to Glasgow in 1992, expecting to stay for three years. Now, over three decades later, I am pleased to say that I made it my home. For more than 30 years, I have lived in the north of the city, so it is a great privilege and a great responsibility to have been elected to serve the constituency of Glasgow North. It is a constituency of huge variety and diversity. At its northern boundary, there is farmland north of Summerston, and at its southern boundary, at the River Clyde, there is the Scottish Event Campus, the Hydro venue and the city centre. There is the West of Scotland science park at its western boundary and the Glasgow Tigers speedway track towards the eastern boundary. Of course, there is a lot more in between, including Firhill, the home of Partick Thistle; the Kelvingrove art gallery; Possil marsh, a site of special scientific interest; Glasgow Caledonian University; the University of Glasgow; the Glasgow School of Art; the Royal Conservatoire; the Queen's Cross church of Charles Rennie Mackintosh; the Forth and Clyde canal; the River Kelvin; Ruchill, Maryhill and Dawsholm parks; Kelvingrove park; and the botanic gardens.

Most of all, and far more important than those key landmarks, there are the communities that make up Glasgow North, many of which have faced and still face significant challenges, and have sought to do what they can to support each other in the face of those challenges. Resilience is a thread that runs through the diverse communities of Glasgow North. It is an area that I am pleased to call home and am now privileged to represent in this place.

I wish to recognise the work of my predecessor, Patrick Grady. In his time here, he was chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Malawi. He has a long interest in development issues, which I am sure he will continue to pursue outside this place.

The boundaries of the constituency are different from what they were in previous Parliaments; the constituency now includes parts of the city that were previously in Glasgow North East and Glasgow Central. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Maureen Burke) will want to recognise the former Member for Glasgow North East, Anne McLaughlin, in her first speech, so with no disrespect to her, I will keep my comments to the former Member for Glasgow Central, Alison Thewliss. As Glasgow Central no longer exists, I want to ensure that we as a House do not miss the opportunity to recognise her commitment and work. In her time in this place, and

before that, when she was a city councillor in Glasgow, she showed her commitment to serving those she represented.

There is one other former Member for Glasgow North to whom I would like to pay tribute today. Ann McKechnie served in this place from 2001 to 2015. She has been a friend and a giver of wise advice for many years. In and outside this place, she has shown her continuing commitment to public service.

All of us here want to ensure that we represent the people we are elected to represent. We recognise across the Chamber all Members' aspiration to serve, but we need to ensure that this mutual recognition does not blind us to the challenges of politics and public service. A number of events not too long ago have added to and encouraged distrust not just of politicians but of politics itself. The turnout at the general election in my constituency was just over 50%, and across the country it was only around 60%. There are many reasons for that. Certainly, in constituencies such as mine, the large amount of student accommodation lying empty because of the summer break counted towards lower turnout. The fact that the election was held at the start of the Scottish school holidays may have reduced turnout across Scotland, too. However, we should not let those contributory factors hide the clear opinion of many that politics is a self-serving occupation—and people demonstrate their indifference, distrust or disdain for it by not using their vote.

For too long, government and politics have often allowed themselves to be characterised by posturing and positioning, rather than the serious work of analysing problems, assessing solutions and delivering change. The empty charade of superficial posturing can initially seem to excite and engage, but the lack of substance, delivery and integrity can so easily tip the balance from excitement to disillusionment and a sense of betrayal. Thorough analysis, serious discussion and honest decision making must be the basis of politics if we are to rebuild trust. Financial responsibility and transparency are a key part of that.

It is our challenge across this Chamber over the course of this Parliament to rebuild trust in political institutions and processes. We need to show to people out there that politics is acting in their service, and that it can make real and positive changes to their lives and communities. That is the challenge for all of us, and one that I hope that I can meet during my time in this place.

3.41 pm

Dave Doogan (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): I am very pleased to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Martin Rhodes), who just delivered a textbook maiden speech, and negotiated his way around the fairly awkward changes to the Glasgow constituencies. Judging by the unanimous reactions in the Chamber, the two former servants of his constituency that he saluted were hard-working representatives in this Chamber. I would like to reciprocate. He mentioned the former Labour Minister in the Scotland Office Ann McKechnie, who invited me to her constituency office in Glasgow when I was a mature student around 2010-11. She gave me a good hour of her time, which I then thought was fairly generous. As an MP, I now realise just how generous that was to someone who was not her constituent

and who, within two or three minutes, clearly demonstrated signs of a particularly different political outlook. I congratulate the hon. Member.

I welcome the Bill and commend the Government on introducing it. I am not certain that it is what they say; I will develop that point in a wee moment. Who among us could forget the aftermath of the Truss-Kwarteng debacle, which plunged businesses and households across these islands into chaos? The pair of them then disappeared off into the sunset, leaving us here to pick up the pieces of their arrogant and economically illiterate fiscal experiment while in government. If anyone has forgotten, it is not mortgage payers up and down these islands, who are still paying the price of that Tory Government misadventure. Mortgage rates spiked at 6% after the mini-Budget. Figures out last week from Moneyfacts show that the average rate for a two-year fixed deal is still 5.79%.

We in the SNP warned at the time that the mini-Budget would lead to economic chaos, so we can only support the measures in the Bill to help ensure that there is never a repeat of that ridiculous performance.

An independent assessment by the OBR for major and permanent fiscal interventions is welcome. It is responsible and the SNP supports it, but to be clear it is no silver bullet. It will not fix the economy, and nor will it prevent fiscal incompetence from the current or future Chancellors, their officials or junior Ministers. It will not fix the credibility of Chancellors who, for example, on taking office say they did not know about the £20 billion black hole in the previous Government's fiscal plan that they were adopting, even though they were warned about it repeatedly and in public by the SNP, the Institute for Fiscal Studies and others.

The SNP welcomes efforts at increasing economic transparency, but the truth is that Labour has also been substantially short of honest with the public in this area. The new Government are seeking to create a counter-narrative or counter-reality to uphold the belief that the cuts and tax hikes that Labour will soon visit upon businesses and communities across these islands have been done to Labour by the Tories, rather than done to the people by Labour. That is the truth of the matter. If Labour is serious about restoring faith in, and the growth of, the economy, much more action is needed from the Government. No economy ever cut its way to growth; rather, growth is a function of investment.

In closing, I greatly fear that the new Labour Government are getting a bit carried away with their own success and are sailing off from reality at some knots. I cite the nauseating “Government of service” hyperbole, the Potemkin energy company that is GB Energy, which is abject nonsense, and now the “fiscal lock” set out in the Bill. An assessment by the OBR is not a lock on anything. It does not enable or prevent anything. It does not confine, nor does it decide anything. Parliament will never allow it to be used as a shield for the Chancellor. From its beginning to its end, it is simply an impartial assessment leaving the hands of the Chancellor of the day free to prosecute whatever plan they wish, consistent with the OBR's assessment or not. And so it should be, because Parliament is here to hold the Government to account—as are the people across these islands, which we have seen recently.

To be clear, this provision is certainly no replacement for the rigorous parliamentary scrutiny of fiscal policy. That is a core function of this House, which I am sure

that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, agree with. In the interests of consensus, will the Minister concede this minor point of detail—that “fiscal report” is far more realistic in terms of what it actually means than “fiscal lock”, for this nevertheless welcome measure?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call Blair McDougall to make his maiden speech.

3.47 pm

Blair McDougall (East Renfrewshire) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I am being welcomed to my place, I welcome you to your place and congratulate you. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Martin Rhodes). He spoke about the lack of trust in politics; his eloquent speech and the service he will give to his community will go a long way to help to repair that. Can I say how wonderful it is to see him as one of many Labour MPs from that great city?

I do not wish to nauseate the hon. Member for Angus and Perthshire Glens (Dave Doogan), but my speech is going to be about public duty. Apologies for that. Yesterday evening, after the Chancellor's statement and the discussion afterwards about responsibility, duty and the legacy that people leave in this Chamber, I was standing on the banks of the river, watching the river go by as it has done for countless generations. I thought of everyone who had stood on those banks before—about the choices and decisions they had made, and how those choices had impacted on the lives of everyone who followed them.

The first and most important duty, and the duty the Bill seeks to enshrine, is to take responsible decisions that will ensure a richer life for those who follow us—for our children and our grandchildren. The failure of our age is that we departed from that purpose. In doing so, we have left people trapped in short-term lives—lives without the opportunity to learn for the future; lives without a permanent home; lives of short-term, precarious work. Falling life expectancy, a poisoned environment and a legacy of debt have been handed down to a generation.

Time and generations flow, and can change for the better or for the worse. That change happens as a result of political decisions and also as a result of personal decisions—I will talk about that aspect a little later in my speech—but the hard decisions that we make today are what create a better tomorrow. For me the Bill is about us, as political leaders, making the kind of decisions that my constituents make every single day. Passing this Bill will be a promissory note, saying that this new Parliament will do better and that this new Labour Government will reclaim the legacy and the future of an abandoned generation.

The story of intergenerational opportunity is the story of my constituency of East Renfrewshire. I am going to be very brave and not claim that mine is the most beautiful constituency, partly because, having listened to the speeches of other hon. Members over the last couple of weeks, I am quite happy for that title to rest until the next maiden speakers stand up. You certainly can find natural beauty in East Renfrewshire if you walk through Greenbank Garden, stroll through Rouken Glen or take a hike to the top of Neilston Pad, but the extraordinary thing about my constituency is not the place but the people.

[Blair McDougall]

Generation after generation has moved to East Renfrewshire because it offers hope for the next generation and a better life for their children. First they came for the mills, the works and the quarries—to Neilston, to Busby, to Giffnock and to Thornliebank. In Barrhead they came in great numbers for jobs at the old Shanks works, making toilets for the Titanic, for royalty and, indeed, for this place. I must admit that I feel some jealousy when I hear other hon. Members talk about the pride they feel when Mr Speaker has chosen the whisky that Members sip on, or the shortbread for the canteen that Members snack on. My hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West (Martin McCluskey) has told us that the seats we sit on come from his constituency. I do not want to think about what hon. Members do on my constituency's most significant product, but I hope the relief it provides enhances the quality of debate in the Chamber.

Those industrial workers were followed south out of Glasgow by the Irish and Jewish communities, then by Muslim families, and in turn by Hindus and Sikhs. More recently we have been joined by Ukrainians and Hongkongers, who are looking not just for opportunity but for liberty. Because East Renfrewshire is somewhere people aspire to live. Parents sacrifice and strive to make the dream of living there real, driven on by the love of their families, because in East Renfrewshire we have extraordinary schools—the best schools in Scotland—with remarkable teachers who open wide the future for our children. I want to make special mention of the very remarkable Isobel Mair school, where every child with additional special needs is valued and celebrated.

Sacrificing and striving for the next generation does not stop at the school gates in my constituency; it goes far beyond that. Volunteers at NellyBoxes, the Include Me 2 Club and Back to SchoolBank work to ensure that disadvantage and disability are no barriers to a childhood of opportunity, discovery and fun. St Cadoc's football team is typical of the sports clubs that offer our kids the confidence and comradeship that comes with competition—started in 1987 by the school janny, it now has thousands of kids playing football—but I could just as easily have told the story of Giffnock Soccer Centre, Barrhead Youth football club, Neilston Wasps, GHA and Whitecraigs rugby clubs, or our East Renfrewshire cricket club. I could go on, and as this is my maiden speech I will: Harlequin Youth Theatre gives kids the thrill of performance, and our flourishing girl guides, scouts and boys' and girls' brigades, and our Maccabi, offer young people adventure and a taste of leadership.

East Renfrewshire is, to borrow a phrase from someone else, a constituency of joiners. That is a wonderful thing—unless you happen to be their Member of Parliament. I know from speaking to my predecessors that East Renfrewshire is not always the easiest place in the world to represent. Three different hon. Members from three different parties have won and lost my constituency in the last decade. My immediate predecessor, Kirsten Oswald, deserves enormous praise for the service she gave to the constituency, which is typified by the fact that when she lost at one general election, she came back, fought again and won. I hope that is not something that is repeated, but it is typical of how much she loves

the constituency. Both she and Paul Masterton, my Conservative predecessor, have been a source of constant support and advice, and I thank them for that.

I pay special tribute to my former hon. Friend—he is now just my friend—Jim Murphy, who served the constituency for 18 years. I know from my time knocking doors in the election how fondly he is remembered in the constituency, and it has been wonderful to talk to more long-standing hon. Members and find out that he is still as fondly remembered in this place.

Prior to the election, I spent most of the last decade working with democrats and against dictators around the world, but not all of my predecessors had such a frosty relationship with authoritarians. In 1941, Rudolph Hess bailed out of his Messerschmitt over the fields outside Eaglesham in my constituency, and parachuted to the ground. The Deputy Führer of the Nazi party was seeking to negotiate with Douglas Douglas-Hamilton, a former Member of Parliament for East Renfrewshire, who Hess believed—perhaps unfairly—to be a Nazi sympathiser. Hess was swiftly captured by a local farmer at pitchfork, and then taken to Busby scout hall, apparently by an inebriated member of the national guard at pistol point. He was then taken to the Tower of London, which sits alongside the river that flows outside here. Time may have passed, but I can tell you that my constituents, informed by events in Ukraine and elsewhere, still have as little tolerance for dictators as they did back in the 1940s.

My argument today is that we should think more long term in this House, but I make it in the knowledge that my own place here will only ever be temporary. I will close by saying why I feel that so acutely. My roots are in East Renfrewshire, where I was born and brought up, but my ancestors hail from much closer to this Chamber. My grandfather was born across the river, in Lambeth. He was one of seven children scattered to different orphanages and foster homes when his parents died. He went to his grave believing that his mother had been taken by consumption and then his father had succumbed to old wounds from the great war.

But that story was a lie. It was a lie told to a boy to protect him from a horrible truth that was discovered when we researched our family tree. The truth was that my great-grandfather, overwhelmed by grief and overcome by poverty, decided that his children would have a better future without him—that their life would be better if he ended his. So he walked to Lambeth pier and threw himself into the freezing water that runs past this Parliament.

As the once famous Newton Mearns poet Robert Pollock wrote:

“Sorrows remembered sweeten present joy.”

Today, if you stand at the place where my great-grandfather's story ended, you can look across the river to where his great-grandson just gave his maiden speech as a Member of Parliament—watched from the Gallery by his own children. However long I serve on the banks of this river, I will always have an eye on the water flying by and my mind on the responsibility we have to our children and grandchildren.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will do his family very proud—but for me, comfort breaks will never be the same. I call Bobby Dean to make his maiden speech.

3.59 pm

Bobby Dean (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Blair McDougall) on that heartfelt speech. It was gracious of him to say that his was not the most beautiful of constituencies, but I think he is at least in the top 600 and possibly even higher after one or two whiskies. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Martin Rhodes) on his maiden speech. The points he made about engaging with the public and making sure that we restore trust in this place are really important.

I am not going to speak about Scotland in my maiden speech. I am going to start by talking about where I came from. My parents are in the Gallery and I promised to stay grounded, so this is the place I want to start. I grew up on a council estate as the eldest of three boys. My dad worked long hours as a scaffolder and my mum worked two jobs, one in Burton's by day and one as a cleaner at night. Things were not always easy, and times got so tough at one point that, as a young teenager, I moved into the care of my grandparents. I have found out in recent years that this is called kinship care. It is a pretty formal-sounding name, but it is basically where family agree to take on family. I am very grateful to my Nan and Pops for helping me back on to the right path, and I know that they would have been very proud of me if they had got to see this day.

Of course, it was not just family that got me here. I have had encouraging teachers, supportive friends, guiding therapists, a campaigning wife and a totally unreasonable bunch of people called activists who volunteer a silly amount of time to the cause. To all those that have been involved in my messy pathway to now, and especially to the people of Carshalton and Wallington who have put their faith in me: thank you. I am utterly humbled to be here and I do not take this responsibility lightly.

I had planned on describing my constituency of Carshalton and Wallington as a hidden gem, but since I started in this place a few weeks ago, I have kept bumping into staff that live there, so it is clearly a popular place. For those that do not know, Carshalton and Wallington is on the south London border with Surrey—or in Surrey, depending on who you speak to. I describe it as hidden because, despite being a London borough, you will not find us on the tube map. There are no London underground or London overground services in our borough, and this is an issue that I will return to at a later date. But my constituency is a gem. I am not going to say it is the most beautiful, but it is pretty beautiful. It has beautiful ponds and many award-winning parks, and we have the historic River Wandle and so many good pubs that it is really difficult to avoid them at the weekends.

I would like to take this moment to recognise my predecessor, Elliot Colburn. This House will remember when he bravely spoke out about his own struggles with mental health. I have great respect for his willingness and openness to share his story, and I am certain that his bravery will give courage to others to speak up and seek help, too. I would also like to put on record my recognition of another predecessor, Tom Brake, who served my community of Carshalton and Wallington for over 22 years. He is a true local champion, and he is still spoken about fondly on the doorstep. The House

will probably be aware of his tireless campaigning for St Helier hospital, and I plan to take up that issue at a later date, too.

There is much more I would like to share about my constituency over time but, unlike the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire, I will not take up that time now because I am keen to get involved in today's debate as well. I want to start by joining my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) in welcoming the thrust of the Government's proposals to give more powers to the Office for Budget Responsibility to scrutinise major fiscal announcements. The inappropriately named mini-Budget sent shockwaves across the country, with mortgages soaring, pensions on the brink of collapse and market confidence damaged so badly that I feel we will be dealing with the trust issues caused by that disruption for quite some time.

Yet the state of our country's finances is not just down to one fiscal event. The populism that infected everything that the last Government did was laid bare by the Chancellor yesterday, and I am so angry about the mess that has been left behind. It is always the most vulnerable that suffer the most when the Government gets things so drastically wrong, and we must never let such reckless gambles be taken with our country's finances ever again.

While I am optimistic that the fiscal lock will provide the public and markets with some reassurance on this, I do hope that the Government do not feel locked into one particular model of fiscal management. The key lesson to take from the disastrous mini-Budget should be not that there is only one way to run the economy, but that, whatever choices the Government make, they should be informed by good information and stand up to rigorous analysis. It will be my intention from these Benches to encourage the Government to take seriously the calls from many respected economists to ensure that fiscal responsibility goes hand in hand with maximising the growth potential of the country over the long term. This is particularly relevant to major capital investments such as the rebuilding of St Helier hospital in my constituency. Our local NHS trust faces huge costs every year trying to maintain an unfit building. We must not forget that there is a cost to not investing, too.

When talking about growth, let us remember that it has not only a rate but a direction, and that necessarily involves political choices and cannot be left to expert analysis alone. While the OBR can rightly describe what actions will increase growth and by how much, we in this House still have a crucial role to play in selecting what actions will meet all of society's goals. A purpose-driven industrial strategy, as proposed by the Liberal Democrats, will ensure that we deliver the right sort of growth, not least in relation to green industries.

The Chancellor is right to reiterate that the Government should not commit to any unfunded spending pledges, but there are many ways to fund the investment we so desperately need in our public services, and we do not have to increase tax on ordinary workers to do so. If the Chancellor is stuck for ideas, I would invite her to have a read of the Liberal Democrat manifesto, which includes ideas such as raising capital gains tax and reversing the Tories' cuts for banks. There are fairer ways of raising the revenue we need, and we should look at them seriously.

[Bobby Dean]

It is at this point that I look back up to the Gallery, and I have some regret that my maiden speech was on the intricacies of fiscal responsibility. If Members would indulge me for a moment, before I close, I would like to make a brief translation by putting my points into footballing terms—Dad, this is mainly for you. The former manager played six up front and got hammered, but that does not mean that the new manager has to revert to a defensive five at the back. There are many different styles of play out there, and I think some will have bigger rewards. So let us get the balance right and get our country winning again.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): No doubt your mum and dad enjoyed that up in the Gallery. We now have another maiden speech—I call David Burton-Sampson.

4.6 pm

David Burton-Sampson (Southend West and Leigh) (Lab): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for granting me the opportunity to give my maiden speech today, and especially during the first few weeks of this new Labour Government. I welcome you to your new place, and I thank the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Bobby Dean) for his maiden speech—well done—and my hon. Friends for their maiden speeches.

It is truly the honour of my life to stand here today as the first ever Labour MP for Southend West and Leigh. I am excited to take on the challenges ahead, and I am delighted to represent such a wonderful constituency. I would like to start by giving my recognition and thanks to Anna Firth, my predecessor. Anna was a good constituency MP and should be recognised for her work in standing up for her residents, for championing the fight against knife crime and, of course, for her private Member's Bill on pet abduction, which she was so passionate about and which gained royal assent just before the Dissolution of the last Parliament—it is a Bill that I wholeheartedly support.

Of course, it would be remiss of me to stand here today and not recognise Anna Firth's predecessor, Sir David Amess. For however long my constituents choose to keep me in this place, I will always be drawn to the shield behind me remembering Sir David. His murder sent shockwaves not only through this place but through the whole country. Sir David and I, while not agreeing politically, shared many common traits—none more so than our passion for community and the people we serve.

I look across this Chamber and see the shield dedicated to Jo Cox—another wonderful MP whose life was cut short too soon. I was honoured to work closely with Jo's sister, now my hon. Friend the Member for Spen Valley (Kim Leadbeater), as she established the Jo Cox Foundation in Jo's memory. Jo's words about having "more in common than that which divides us"—[*Official Report*, 3 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 675.]

always hold true for me. It is time for much more civility in politics, and the driver of that civility starts here, with all of us.

Southend West and Leigh has a wonderful, diverse community spirit, from Eastwood to St Laurence, Prittlewell to Westborough, and Belfairs to Blenheim and St Luke's

residents, who have just been welcomed into our constituency. So many residents care deeply about their community, but, like many others across the country, opportunity and life chances depend on their circumstances.

My constituency is home to some of the most beautiful seaside properties—it is a beautiful place—but there are still 12.1% of children living in poverty. Grassroots organisations, such as the One Love Project, Trust Links and the now famous Music Man Project, which recently performed at the Royal Albert Hall with Michael Ball and the Bands of His Majesty's Royal Marines, do amazing work to help bridge the gap. I am pleased that, with this new Labour Government in the service of our country, we will start the work of bridging the gap of opportunity for all.

My constituency has some of the most impressive coastlines. On a sunny day, a bit like today, if you stand overlooking the estuary in Leigh-on-Sea, Chalkwell or Westcliff, your imagination could take you away to some exotic clime. And we are blessed to be the seventh sunniest place in the UK, according to recent data, with 1,884 hours of sunshine a year. There is nothing more tranquil than finding a quiet spot to sit, reflect and watch the world go by while gazing out to sea. From Leigh-on-Sea right up to Shoebury, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend East and Rochford (Mr Alaba), we are incredibly fortunate to have the most amazing places and vistas.

We also have a buoyant fishing industry, with many businesses basing themselves in our historic fishing town of Old Leigh, with cockling being particularly popular. Many visitors and residents alike enjoy the delights of some freshly caught seafood from one of our local fisheries. I am looking forward to working with the Thames Estuary Fishermen's Association, which is part of the Leigh Port Partnership, to ensure that this industry continues to grow and thrive.

We are fortunate to have a growing international airport. Many remark on what a wonderful experience it is to fly to and from Southend airport, and you can often find yourself moving from the plane, bags collected and into your car or on the train home less than 15 minutes after landing—try it sometime.

Of course, being by the sea, Southend has a popular tourist industry. With connections from London spread over two separate train lines, we are often seen as a seaside magnet for day trippers. We have several groups and individuals who enjoy cold water swimming, such as the Blue Tits Chill Swimmers, who are determined to get me out for an early morning swim. I just hope that rubber rings and arm bands are acceptable. I am delighted that our Government are bringing forward the water special measures Bill, as I know many of my constituents care greatly about the quality of the water in which they bathe.

Football clubs are a focal point of any community and in Southend we are fortunate enough to have Southend United, known locally as the Shrimpers. For some, their football club is a lifeline, giving them the one opportunity to get out of the house at the weekend for the home game. Our club is a community asset, but over recent years it has been sadly under threat. This insecurity has created much worry in the community. However, just over a week ago, we got the news everyone had been waiting for: the club has been saved by a consortium of new owners. I congratulate Councillor

Daniel Cowan, the leader of Southend city council, his council officers and the Custodians of Southend United consortium for working with the previous owner to get this complex deal over the line. And, of course, thanks go to the dedicated Shrimpers Trust for standing up for the fans. The situation with Southend United, as we have also sadly seen with other clubs around the country, highlights the need for the football governance Bill, which I was pleased to see included in the recent King's Speech.

I have been told many times in my life that I would never achieve my dreams. I was the boy from a single-parent family, brought up in social housing. I was the boy who looked different from all the other kids in school and was often harshly reminded of that fact. Often, it felt like I was on an uphill struggle. I felt like I was fighting so much harder than those around me to achieve my goals: from being the first person in my family to go to university through building my professional career and more recently, of course, my political career. I want to thank those mentors I had in my life who believed in me and helped me smash through that elusive glass ceiling. They all know who they are. I hope that I can now be an example and a mentor to others, and that they will see that anything is possible, no matter who you are.

I want to finish by paying tribute to my close family and friends, who have always had faith in me. I especially thank my husband, Mark, who is here today, for his unwavering support for me over the years. He continues to stand alongside me as we enter this new phase in our lives.

I am immensely proud to represent the 103,000 residents in my constituency, and I look forward to giving them the support they need to live a happier, healthier and fairer life, driven by our mission-led Government focused on economic growth—a Government who have learned from the mistakes of the past and will ensure that they never happen again. I welcome the Budget Responsibility Bill, which will bring greater fiscal accountability and economic stability. My constituents, like so many others, will benefit directly from this Government's exciting programme of change, as laid out in the recent King's Speech, and I look forward to playing my part in it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): Sir David Amess was a mentor of mine, so thank you for mentioning him. He is very sorely missed.

I call Jess Brown-Fuller to make her maiden speech.

4.16 pm

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is wonderful to see you take your place in the Chair.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southend West and Leigh (David Burton-Sampson), who spoke passionately about his constituency and about embracing all that we have in common rather than that which divides us. It was interesting to hear that he lives in the seventh sunniest place. I look forward to coming back to that point later in my speech.

It is an honour to address the Chamber as the newly elected Member of Parliament for the beautiful Chichester constituency. The constituency underwent some boundary changes for this general election, so I would like to start by thanking the two predecessors who represented the residents I now serve.

Gillian Keegan was the MP for Chichester from 2017, and was the first female MP to represent the constituency. She served as Secretary of State for Education and proudly championed apprenticeships, and the opportunity that her own apprenticeship afforded her, after growing up in Knowsley in Liverpool and leaving school at 16. She was well liked by the Conservative party and across the House, and, although our politics are different, I wish her well in her future endeavours.

I also wish to pay tribute to Nick Gibb, the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton from 1997. Both Bersted and Pagham residents mentioned to me on the doorstep during the last few months that he was a popular MP who had served his constituents well, which no doubt added to their frustration when they realised that they were moving to be part of the Chichester constituency, when their hearts belonged with Bognor Regis. I would like to take this opportunity to reassure those residents that my love for the area in which I have grown up knows no bounds. I say to residents from Bersted to Bosham, Selsey to Southbourne, Westbourne to the Witterings, Fishbourne to Funtington, and all the other areas that did not fit within my poor attempt at alliteration: I will champion you all.

Madam Deputy Speaker, today is the final day in the Chamber before recess. I have no doubt that MPs will be rushing back to their constituencies to spend every possible moment there, but if they do manage to steal away for a long weekend, then I relish the opportunity to be a tour guide for a brief moment and tell them why a weekend in Chichester is a weekend well spent. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde) has already laid claim to the glory of representing the sunniest town in the UK, Chichester boasts the high accolade of being the sunniest city, with just under 2,000 hours of sunshine per year—and that is not the only way in which this glorious city punches above its weight.

Hon. Members will not be short of things to do, with beautiful coastline, sailing opportunities at Bosham, Dell Quay, Itchenor and Birdham and the sandy beach of West Wittering, as well as a plethora of cultural offerings, from the internationally renowned Chichester Festival theatre to the Pallant House and Oxmarket galleries, the Novium museum and Fishbourne Roman palace, and even a spot of racing—both cars and horses—at the Goodwood racecourse. They could easily spend an afternoon soaking up the history of the city surrounded by Roman walls, immersed in nature at Pagham harbour or Medmerry reserve, or following the River Lavant, a precious chalk stream.

I would not be forgiven, especially by the head of department, if I did not mention the excellent University of Chichester, where I had the pleasure of obtaining my degree. We are also the birthplace of notable figures such as the astronaut Tim Peake and the singer-songwriter Tom Odell, and we are home to Kate Winslet and authors Greg and Kate Mosse.

You can understand, Madam Deputy Speaker, why my very special constituency is a desirable location for those looking to relocate. It is an area with so much to offer. However, with the majority of the district sitting within the South Downs national park, 100% of the housing allocation is built on only 20% of the land, with a lack of infrastructure surrounding those

[*Jess Brown-Fuller*]

developments and residents reporting a real struggle to get a doctor's appointment, sign up with an NHS dentist, find school places that can meet their children's needs or simply travel from A to B through the traffic on the A27.

As we are a low-lying coastal plain, many communities are also subjected to relentless flooding following developments on floodplains and a lack of maintenance on the rife. I am sure that those in the Chamber will appreciate how important water quality is to many industries, including tourism, fishing, water sports and sailing. It therefore pains me to say that some of the most active storm overflows are in my constituency and that Chichester harbour, which is a site of special scientific interest, has been downgraded to an unfavourable declining condition.

The River Lavant has warning signs along its bed, encouraging residents to wash their hands if they come into contact with the water, and those who enjoy cold water swimming in our water are weighing up its health benefits against how regularly they become ill from doing so. Trust in our water companies and the regulator is at an all-time low. The Liberal Democrats have called for measures to address an issue that is a blight on constituencies such as mine.

The average house price in Chichester is an eye-watering £455,000, and residents regularly express dismay at their increasing rents and mortgages after the disastrous mini-Budget. They are trying to make progress in their lives, but are being pulled back under the immense strain of increasing cost pressures. I welcome the Budget Responsibility Bill, which commits to responsible economic governance to go towards ensuring that what we saw in the last Parliament never happens again.

Finally, I pay tribute to those who supported me to be here, standing in this Chamber addressing my colleagues. I thank my wonderful husband Dean, my son Oliver and my daughter Bethany for their understanding and support, which has spanned far longer than this campaign. They are my inspiration, and I am fighting for their future as well as that of every child in this country. I also thank my mum, who joins us in the Gallery—I am not going to look at her; I have just realised I cannot. She had been so looking forward to retiring in May this year, only to be thrust days later into a general election campaign, knocking on doors with me, delivering leaflets and being my childcare. She was fully behind me in trying to achieve the unachievable, because Chichester had had a Conservative MP since 1868, except for a brief spell in 1923 when it flirted with Liberalism for just 12 months.

On 4 July, residents went to the polling stations and voted for change, whether they were traditional Conservative voters or Labour and Green voters lending me their support. We made political history that night. I recognise the weight of responsibility on my shoulders to do every single one of those people proud and to represent the area in which I had the pleasure of growing up. It is a privilege and an honour. I will fight for my special patch of our great country every day.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call Andrew Pakes to make his maiden speech.

4.25 pm

Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab): It is a privilege to make my maiden speech while you are in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to follow such wonderful maiden speeches, particularly that of the hon. Member for Chichester (Jess Brown-Fuller); I pay tribute to her and to her mother. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West and Leigh (David Burton-Sampson), the first ever Labour Member for his constituency. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Blair McDougall) for bowing out of the competition with Peterborough over which constituency is the most beautiful.

I can think of no more important debate in which to make my maiden speech than one about securing our economic stability for my city and this country to flourish. As the gateway to the fens, the home of food and farming, Peterborough is willing to play its part in rebuilding our country. I am the fifth MP for Peterborough in seven years—we had three in 2019 alone—so I hope to bring to my tenure as a local MP the much-heralded stability that my party's Front Benchers talk about.

I pay tribute to my predecessors, who all cared deeply about our city and worked hard to be a voice for our needs on the national stage. It turns out that I have some illustrious predecessors. I feel I may be letting my constituents down: it is fitting, during the Olympics, to pay tribute to David Cecil, who entered Parliament having already won a gold medal at the 1928 Olympics. I look forward to talking about my egg-and-spoon race at school. I would also like to thank my immediate predecessor Paul Bristow and his staff for their incredible hard work looking after residents in need in our city.

I am proud to be part of the largest intake of Co-operative MPs in Parliament's history. Co-operative and community values run deep in Peterborough. I am the second Labour and Co-operative MP to serve our city; the first was Stanley Tiffany, who was elected in another significant change election in 1945. I note that Tiffany's first question in the House, in August 1945, was to the then Minister of Health, Nye Bevan, on affordable and rural housing. The answer was that housing was a priority for the incoming Labour Government of 1945. Almost 80 years later, that challenge remains. I am pleased to see that affordable housing will be one of the priorities of the Labour Government coming into power in 2024.

Tiffany's roots were in the Peterborough and District Co-operative Society. I am incredibly proud to have been elected alongside Labour colleagues on a pledge to double the size of the co-operative economy—a pledge that Tiffany could be proud of. Just a few weeks ago, I met staff at the Co-op store in Eye in Peterborough to hear about the rise in shoplifting and the abuse that too many of them face. Abuse should never be part of the job. I put on record my thanks to the retail workers in Peterborough and around the country who serve us every day. I pledge to work tirelessly with my good friends in the co-operative movement, the trade unions and this House to give retail workers the dignity and protection at work that they need.

We are also home to the wonderful English Mustard Growers co-operative, which was formed in 2009 to keep mustard production alive in the UK after the disastrous harvest of 2007. Many people here will know

our crop as Colman's mustard. Today, there are over 40 growing members, including our very own Michael Sly, who is based at Park Farm in Thorney. In Peterborough, we really do cut the mustard.

Peterborough has welcomed people from across the country and the world for generations as a city, and even more so when we became a new town. I am one of those people who have chosen to make Peterborough my home. The new town promise of a decent home, a good job and a great place to live remains as important today as ever, but it is a promise that has frayed over the past 14 years.

Peterborough is a working city with a rich history; we work hard, care for our community and love our country. We are deeply rooted in an industrial heritage of food, farming and engineering. We are home to a breathtaking cathedral, majestic mosques, and urban landscapes surrounded by the fens and poet John Clare's country. We exemplify Clare's words:

"I found the poems in the fields and only wrote them down".

We are at the heart of sugar beet country and the home of British Sugar. We show how urban and rural can live successfully side by side. We have a rich history and a bright future for food and farming, and I thank the farming community and my good friends in the National Farmers Union for their advice and friendship. In my time in this House, I will always be a champion for food security and for growing more food in this country.

We draw on our engineering heritage of Perkins Engines, Caterpillar and Peter Brotherhood, and can use that heritage to create new, high-skilled jobs and apprenticeships for the future. We are home to a new and growing university campus in the form of Anglia Ruskin University Peterborough, and to a new centre for green technology at Peterborough college, working to transition blue-collar opportunities to green-collar ones in hydrogen, electric vehicles and sustainable construction. We are also home to a rich diversity of communities, languages and traditions, from the Italians who arrived after the second world war to eastern Europeans and a large Kashmiri and Pakistani community. Visiting Azad Kashmir last year with friends from Peterborough remains a highlight of my life. The beauty of that land and of its people impress upon me the need to speak up on Kashmir in this House.

However, we also face challenges. Nearly half the children in my constituency are growing up in poverty, and in some areas, that figure is even higher. For working-class parents such as mine, the promise was that by working hard, their children could get on. The greatest nobility I have known is working-class pride: the pride in good work, seeing your children succeed, and the ability to get on in life. That social contract has been broken, and we are all the poorer for it. I put on record my love and gratitude to my parents for instilling that pride in me and for pushing me to do more. I believe they are watching me on telly today, unless I am up against Tom Daley in the diving.

I also thank the trade union movement I have grown up in and been part of for my whole life for giving me the skills, opportunities and confidence to stand for election, and now to stand in this House making this speech. Over the past few years, I have had the immense privilege to serve as deputy general secretary of Prospect and Bectu, and to serve internationally as one of the

trade union delegates to the OECD's AI expert panel, adding my voice on international issues. The trade union movement makes Britain a better place: every day, the contributions of thousands of workplace volunteers keep people safe at work, help people get on at work, and add to our economic wealth. I am proud to be union made.

I will finish with this point: one of the things that drove me to stand for election this time was the sad passing of my brother in 2016. Richard's sudden passing from an accident followed by sepsis was tragic, but it also brought home to me that my family were only able to get through it with the help and care of NHS staff, who looked after my brother and my family. Sepsis is something this House has learned more about recently due to the bravery of the former Member for South Thanet, who I pay tribute to. The NHS and our public servants are the best of us, and I give this commitment in the House today: that I will use whatever time I have in this place to champion the NHS, but also to champion awareness of the dangers and terrors of sepsis and what it does to people and their families.

Peterborough stands ready to play our part in rebuilding our country. We have drive, dedication and purpose, and with a Government on our side, we look forward to driving opportunities in Peterborough and around the country.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I look forward to seeing the hon. Gentleman's campaigns on behalf of his brother Richard. We now have another maiden speech, from Joshua Reynolds.

4.34 pm

Mr Joshua Reynolds (Maidenhead) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is an honour to be called to make my maiden speech as Member of Parliament for Maidenhead, a place I have always been proud to call home. I recognise the fantastic maiden speech made by the hon. Member for Peterborough (Andrew Pakes): his passion for his constituency is clear from his speech, and I know he will be a fantastic representative of his constituents. Next time I am putting mustard on one of my ham sandwiches, I will be thinking of him and his constituency, although maybe not of the pun he made.

As a new MP, I was sent a very early email by the fantastic team at the House of Commons Library with maiden speeches from my predecessors, to get an idea about what I might like to say. But considering that since its inception in 1997 my constituency, Maidenhead, has only had one prior MP, there was not a lot to go on. I must start, therefore, by paying tribute to that predecessor, Theresa May, who represented the Maidenhead constituency for 27 years. During her time on the Front Benches and in No. 10 she made sure that she put Maidenhead first. Once, famously, having spent a week of late nights in negotiations in the EU, she got off the plane in London and headed straight for a school carol concert in the town centre. Although I disagree with her on many things, her dedication to the people of Maidenhead is something that I admire and hope to emulate. Hers are big—often very much reported on by the media—shoes to fill.

Unlike my namesake, Sir Joshua Reynolds, I cannot paint to save my life; but fortunately for me and my constituents, the village of Cookham in my constituency has given us Stanley Spencer, whose work is memorialised

[Mr Joshua Reynolds]

in the Stanley Spencer Gallery on the high street. We are lucky to still have a thriving arts scene around Maidenhead and all our villages.

Maidenhead is a special place; it has a rich history. It is where Charles I met his children for the last time, in the Greyhound inn, now home to the NatWest bank, before his execution in 1649. Fortunately, visitors to Maidenhead today would discover a fantastic array of places to eat. The village of Bray has no less than seven Michelin stars to its name, but to find fantastic food in Maidenhead you need not go to a restaurant approved by the Michelin man. You can go to Bakedd, ToMo, Sauce and Flour, The Borough or Seasonality—just some of the fantastic places to eat that Maidenhead has to offer. Any time you fancy a trip down the Elizabeth line, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will be more than happy to take you to any of them.

Part of Maidenhead's history has always been the bridges over the Thames. Soon after the first bridge was put up, in 1280, the town started to build. The current incarnation of Maidenhead bridge has been standing since the mid-1700s. The toll on Maidenhead bridge was removed on the night of 31 October 1903, in a move that, had it been done today, probably would not have been worthy of attention from the Office for Budget Responsibility. However, it was so significant to residents of Maidenhead that they gathered by the bridge and, as the clock struck midnight, took apart the toll gates and threw them into the river.

Another part of our history—famous for bridges—is the Brunel-designed Maidenhead railway bridge, otherwise known as the “sounding arch”, which opened in 1839, attracting significant attention for its innovative low-rise arch design. Sceptical bosses at the Great Western Railway insisted that he leave the scaffolding in place because they did not believe it to be safe. Rumour has it, though, that Brunel complied with their request. Knowing that it was not necessary, he decided not to attach the scaffolding to the bridge. Sure enough, the wooden structure was soon blown away by a storm, and Brunel's bridge has stood the test of time ever since.

Maidenhead was also home to the late Sir Nicholas Winton, who is remembered in the Nicholas Winton memorial gardens in Oaken Grove park and in a statue on platform 3 of Maidenhead station. Sir Nicholas, dubbed by the press the “British Schindler”, helped to save the lives of 669 children who were evacuated from Czechoslovakia to Britain as part of the Kindertransport in 1939. Sir Nicholas left us in 2015, having reached the grand age of 106; but his life and legacy as one of the great humanitarians is remembered in the town.

It is fair to say that the Palace of Westminster is slightly larger than Maidenhead town hall, where I was recently a cabinet member for communities and leisure. However, what the town hall lacks in grandeur, statues and stained-glass windows, it makes up for in its television claim to fame. I am of course talking about the fact that it was used as the location for “Carry on Doctor”. When I was working in the town hall, I often saw an excited fan run up to the building to take photos, only to look slightly disappointed, knowing that they had travelled so far to see a 1960s office block. Last but not least on today's Maidenhead history tour, I cannot fail to mention that the Spice Girls once famously shared a

house in Maidenhead before they burst on to the music scene in 1996. I say that even if it was three years before I was born!

Maidenhead is so much more than just the town. I have already mentioned Cookham, which has been part of the constituency since it was established in 1997, and I have mentioned Bray, which moved into Maidenhead from the Windsor constituency, bringing those Michelin stars along with it. It is, however, also home to Binfield, Warfield and Winkfield, which moved into the constituency at this election. They may be the newest parts of the constituency, but they are just as important as the rest of it, and I look forward to spending time in each of them over the next few weeks as we head into recess.

I must pay tribute to Maidenhead's fantastic primary and secondary schools. They work to give pupils from all walks of life and all abilities the best start that they can have. I am hugely grateful to my teachers at Alwyn, Courthouse and Furze Platts Senior schools for the work and the help they gave me. Without it, I would not be speaking in the House today.

It would be remiss of me, however, not to talk about the challenges that we face locally. A significant numbers of residents in my community live in poverty, and homelessness is on the rise along with reliance on food banks. Our local baby bank, founded by local residents Rebecca and Councillor Amy Tisi, is seeing increased demand for its services. We must take action on fuel poverty, extending free school meals and restoring the basic standard of living that vulnerable residents need the most.

Health services are patchy in Maidenhead, with GP surgeries under phenomenal pressure and the nearest general hospital being in Slough. I am determined to see the walk-in centre reopened at St Mark's hospital after it was closed down as a temporary measure at the beginning of covid lockdown. I want to see the site expanded to cope with all the new homes and developments that are being built and proposed for the area. My promise to residents is that I will not let up in my efforts to close the health gap in Maidenhead.

Maidenhead is a beautiful constituency, but if we are not careful its waterways, from Binfield cut in the south to the Thames in the north, will become open sewers. I have pledged to residents in Cookham, Hurley, the Walthams, Bray, Binfield, Warfield, Winkfield and North Ascot that I will fight tirelessly to clean up their rivers. I look forward to working with every single one of my colleagues in this House over the next few years to help make that happen.

Madam Deputy Speaker: To make his maiden speech, I call James Asser.

4.42 pm

James Asser (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech, and may I congratulate you on your election? I also congratulate all those who have spoken for the first time today and over the last two weeks. The speeches we have heard have been an incredible guide to the UK, and should make us all proud of the country we collectively represent. I offer my congratulations to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mr Reynolds) on his contribution, and wish him well in his time in the

House. May I say, as an MP at the other end of the Elizabeth line and a “Carry On” fan, that I accept his invitation to dinner?

May I first pay tribute to my two immediate predecessors? First, there is my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms), now representing a smaller version of that seat. He marks 30 years as an MP this year, and I know he is well respected in this House. He is a well-known figure to local people and is recognised as a diligent constituency MP. Indeed, canvassing the areas I gained from him, the most common question was, “Where’s Stephen?” As a former councillor in his constituency, I want to thank him for his support.

I also follow on from Lyn Brown, who retired at the election after 19 years’ service in this House and an impressive 36 years total elected service to the borough of Newham. I know Lyn made a big impact in Parliament and leaves a strong legacy. I want to thank her for all her support in the last few years, especially during the election. Her support and advice have been invaluable, and I know that supporting other Members is part of her record in this place.

West Ham and Beckton has a long history, but this is a new seat made up of the southern half of the old West Ham and the Beckton and dock areas of the larger East Ham seat. The area has had multiple constituencies over the years, including at one point Ernest Bevin’s old south London seat of Woolwich East, which took in North Woolwich, the part of Kent that is north of the Thames—a curious but often forgotten bit of history, with a completely baffling county border.

Others who have represented parts of this area in recent times include Jim Fitzpatrick and the irrepressible Tony Banks, but the first Labour MP to represent here was the original Keir—Keir Hardie, the founding father of the Labour party, who was first elected to Parliament in West Ham South in 1892.

In 1906, Will Thorne, the founder of the union that is today GMB, which was founded in Canning Town in the heart of my constituency, was elected to the same seat. When he was elected, there were just 29 Labour MPs. Things have moved on somewhat since then. In fact, I am told that more MPs are members of the GMB than are members of the Conservative party; I thank them for demonstrating that so beautifully this afternoon. I say this not to be controversial, but mainly to drum up some canvassing support for the next election.

This is a big legacy to take on, because West Ham and Beckton has been at the heart of the Labour movement’s history for over a century. It is also at the heart of this country’s economic history. It contains the Royal Docks, which were the centre of much of the country’s shipping and trade until their decline and closure in the early 1980s. The area was also a hub for manufacturing and infrastructure, much of which, but not all, has since gone. Beckton gas works may now be primarily remembered for its spoil heap, which became Beckton alps, and its one-time ski slope opened by Princess Diana, or as a film location for many movies and music videos, most notably “Full Metal Jacket”.

Beckton is, however, still the site of Europe’s largest sewage treatment plant. He is not here any more, but I was hoping that might reassure my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Blair McDougall) a little bit. It was a key part of Bazalgette’s work to clean

up London in the Victorian era and today is part of the Thames tideway tunnel. Sadly, river pollution is still a topical issue, two centuries on, as was so eloquently outlined by the hon. Member for Chichester (Jess Brown-Fuller).

Many industries have gone, and shipbuilding at Harland & Wolff and the Thames ironworks are just a memory—although the local football team the ironworks, which started in West Ham, is doing all right—but companies in some traditional industries, including Britvic and Tate & Lyle, still have big local factories at the heart of the community, and that is. The constituency is also a key element of London’s economic future. The ExCel exhibition centre brings in 4 million visitors every year. London city airport is London’s most central airport and is important to the City of London. We are also the new home of London City Hall and have London’s only enterprise zone, which aims to create 35,000 new jobs and tens of thousands of new homes on brownfield sites. Education is also thriving, including at the University of East London and the London Design & Engineering university technical college.

Locally, we like to celebrate our heritage, and you will find many parks, buildings and roads named after local heroes from the arts, sports, politics and public life, such as local boxers and footballers, the speedway stars of the ’30s, ’40s and ’50s who used to thrill on the racetrack at the old West Ham stadium in Custom House, and local factory worker and suffragette leader Minnie Baldock, who founded the first London branch of the Women’s Social and Political Union. The same goes for momentous events in London’s history; the meeting in 1931 of Mahatma Gandhi and Charlie Chaplin is marked by the Gandhi Chaplin memorial garden, which is on the site of the house where they met.

Most recently, to mark the move of City Hall, we honoured Sri Lankan first world war veteran and pioneering race relations campaigner Kamal Chunchie, who fought for better lives for the local black and Asian community, and who, in 1926, founded the Coloured Men’s Institute, where City Hall now stands, to further that aim. He speaks to the diversity of my constituency. We are one of the most diverse places in the country, with communities from every part of the world working and living alongside one another. It is what makes the area such a great place to live and to represent. Each community that arrives adds to the mix, but also joins in those long-standing east London traditions of hard work, community spirit and plain speaking.

Kamal Chunchie also reminds us that while much focus is placed on the changes that have happened since 1945, there has been diversity much longer. In the 1920s, Canning Town had the largest black community in London. Migration has been a fact of east London life for centuries. German immigration into east London in the Victorian era is part of my family history. The debate around those who choose to make the UK their home is frequently too narrow, and too often driven by populist voices. We forget our history at our peril, but east London is a testament to its vibrancy.

My constituents do not lack ambition, aspiration or talent—they have it in inspirational quantities—but too often, they lack opportunity. Poverty is a real issue and, in recent years, has become much worse. Locally, we have seen children going to events in the hope of getting food because they are hungry; parents sleeping in shifts

[James Asser]

on mattresses on the floor because there is not enough room for the whole family to have beds; and children forced to do their homework in the bathroom because there is no other space for them to do it. This Government were elected on a mandate for change. For many of my constituents, that is not an aspiration; it is a necessity. My early Labour predecessors were sent here to represent those who had no voice, those who needed to be lifted out of poverty and those who deserved a better life. I am under no illusion; more than a century on, that demand is still real. I have been sent here to support change, and to fight to improve lives.

It is my great regret that my father is no longer alive to see me elected. It would have meant a lot to him. His advice to me was, "Make sure you always do your best, because no one can ask more of you." In my election acceptance speech, I promised my best to my constituents, and I repeat that promise today. I will do the best I can for everyone in West Ham and Beckton, and I will give my best to this House, too. I believe that together we can achieve the absolute best for our country and the people of my constituency. The people of West Ham and Beckton deserve no less.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call Llinos Medi to make her maiden speech.

4.50 pm

Llinos Medi (Ynys Môn) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Madam Deputy Speaker. Before I begin, I extend my deepest condolences on behalf of Plaid Cymru to all the families affected by the horrific attack on innocent children in Southport. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Ham and Beckton (James Asser) on his maiden speech. His constituency has some similarities with mine, which is a place of hard work, community spirit and plain speaking. We will get along well.

It is an honour to deliver my maiden speech. I am deeply humbled by the fact that the people of Ynys Môn, my home island that I love so dearly, have put their faith in me as their MP, and I will work hard to be worthy of that trust. Ynys Môn is known for its political unpredictability. We have been represented by four different parties since the 1950s, making elections here quite the spectacle—a treat for political anoraks, but nerve-racking for candidates. The people of Ynys Môn keep their representatives on their toes, and I thank them for that. It reminds me that in every decision and every debate, they come first.

Reflecting on my constituency's rich political history, I first mention Megan Lloyd George, the first female MP for a Welsh constituency and a pioneer for women in politics. She served Ynys Môn as a Liberal and an advocate of home rule for Wales. Her legacy paved the way for greater female representation in this House. She was followed by Labour's Cledwyn Hughes, whose parliamentary career of 28 years included his tenure at the Welsh Office, during which the Welsh Language Act reached the statute books in 1967. That was a significant milestone in the history of our language.

Cledwyn Hughes was followed by a Conservative, Keith Best, until 1987, when Ynys Môn made history by electing its first-ever Plaid Cymru MP. I owe Ieuan Wyn Jones a huge debt of gratitude, and I am honoured

to follow in his footsteps. His legacy remains unmatched, and I thank him for his continued support and guidance. Labour's Albert Owen took the reins in 2001. Albert served our island diligently for 18 years, always ready to work across party lines to serve the people of Ynys Môn. The constituency turned blue again in 2019. I pay tribute to Virginia Crosbie, whose work ethic I greatly admire.

Now Ynys Môn is Plaid Cymru green again. It was yet again very close; there were 637 votes in it. Yes, Ynys Môn is the gift that keeps on giving on election night, but I am very aware that this nail-bitingly close result makes it my duty to work even harder to earn the trust of the people in all communities on Ynys Môn, whether they voted for me or another party, or even chose not to vote.

Budget responsibility is the topic of today's debate, which offers me an opportunity to reflect on my professional background. From 2017 until my recent election, I was the leader of Ynys Môn county council. During that time, I witnessed at first hand the human consequences of the austerity measures imposed by successive Governments. Those decisions forced us to make cuts to essential services—decisions made not by choice, but by necessity, due to the reckless fiscal policies set in Westminster. I recognise the important principle of budget responsibility behind this Bill. It is a sensible step to ensure that the Government's plans are independently assessed by the Office for Budget Responsibility before implementation. That oversight is important to prevent the fiscal mismanagement that led to the previous Government's disastrous mini-Budget, which included the largest package of tax cuts in 50 years without any efforts to make the public finance numbers add up. Such a situation must never be allowed to occur again.

However, I have a nigging concern that the Government might use the chaos of their predecessors as an excuse to shy away from taking bold economic decisions. Child poverty in Ynys Môn stands at a staggering 35%. We need bold measures, such as the abolition of the two-child cap on benefits, and real investment in our services and infrastructure to tackle the pressing issues. I fear that tinkering around the edges will not be enough to drive growth in our economy. We need real investment to attract well-paid jobs and bring some dynamism back into our economy.

Just today, we saw the Secretary of State for Wales refuse to commit to the electrification of the north Wales main line. We recognise the fiscal difficulties facing the Government, but investment in the economy should not simply be seen as a cost to be cut. I urge the Government not to let the shock of the mini-Budget deter them from making the necessary investment in our communities.

As council leader, I saw how the previous Conservative Government undermined our plans for the Wylfa nuclear site. We had plans to create high-quality, long-term jobs and build skills and supply-chain opportunities. Our efforts also focused on ensuring that any development would respect our island's unique environment and culture and the Welsh language. Sadly, the Conservative Government pulled the plug in 2019.

Now more than ever, we need clarity and commitment from the new Government. Like many areas, Ynys Môn is bleeding young people, who leave in search of better opportunities. We need high-skilled, well-paid jobs to sustain our communities and ensure that they flourish.

My journey into politics was not typical. As a farmer's daughter, I grew up understanding the value of hard work, watching my father, a first-generation farmer, establish a farm alongside my mother. I left school at 16 and undertook a care course. By the age of 18, I was working as a carer in our care homes. I have been a carer, a teaching assistant and a youth worker. I have also had several other roles, including selling eggs and milk recording on milk farms. In 2013, I entered politics, standing as a county councillor. Like many women, I initially lacked the confidence to step forward—I was forced into it—but by 2015 I had become the leader of the opposition, and in 2017 I became the first female leader of Ynys Môn council.

My personal journey has not been typical, either. In 2015, I found myself homeless with my two children. It was tough, but now I am the MP for Ynys Môn. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] As for the most important lesson from my experience, I want to inspire other women to believe that "If she can do it, I can do it." I aim to bring women along on this journey, regardless of their starting point. I will always be filled with pride when women come up to me to say, "Thank you. I've gone for it because of you." I am not here for myself. I want people in Ynys Môn who might also have been through a tough time to see my work here and be inspired to put themselves forward.

Ynys Môn is known as *Gwlad y medra*, which translates to the land of the can-do. That attitude has always guided my approach to politics, and will continue to do so in my work here. I look forward to cracking on with the job. I will work with colleagues from across the House with a can-do attitude to secure a brighter future for the people of Ynys Môn. I thank my two children, Elliw and Twm, for their continued support, which has ensured that their mother is stood here as the MP for Ynys Môn. *Diolch yn fawr iawn.*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call Rosie Wrighting to make her maiden speech.

4.59 pm

Rosie Wrighting (Kettering) (Lab): I congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your elevation.

It is a privilege to follow such amazing maiden speeches this afternoon, including from the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Llinos Medi), whom I admire for taking women along her journey with her. I had the privilege of meeting the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mr Reynolds) last week; it is an honour to share this House with other young Members on both sides. I share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham and Beckton (James Asser) about the pollution in our rivers and thank him for bringing that issue to the House.

Nothing prepares you for the pride you feel representing the area that you were born and raised in, and the pride that I feel addressing this House as the Member for Kettering—or, for those who are not from there, Kettering. I pay tribute to my predecessor, Philip Hollobone. Philip was an assiduous Parliamentarian who attended this House as often as possible and spoke here frequently to raise issues of concern to the people of Kettering. Despite our political differences, Philip has shown me kindness in recent weeks.

On the line of Philips who have represented Kettering, I also thank Phil Sawford, Kettering's last Labour Member, who made his maiden speech in this House on 28 July 1997—coincidentally, also the day I was born. Phil's impact as a Labour MP in Kettering was evident throughout the campaign, as his work was referenced on countless doorsteps.

I owe a continued debt of gratitude to the Sawford family. Andy Sawford, the former Member for the Corby constituency—parts of which have moved into the Kettering constituency, with Little Stanion, Cottingham and Middleton—played a crucial role in the campaign. During his time in this House, he ensured that north Northamptonshire's voice was heard. He provided me with guidance and an unwavering belief from the outset that we could bring the necessary change for Kettering.

The Kettering constituency is located in the heart of England, although I am not sure it is as sunny as some of the constituencies represented here. It is home to natural beauty, from the Weekley Hall wood to the River Nene, and the people of Kettering have achieved amazing things, such as establishing the local wellbeing cafe Johnny's Happy Place, and hosting a cheerleading team that has won world titles. And we even have James Acaster.

Kettering is proud of its stamp on history. The town played a significant role in the abolitionist movement, particularly through the efforts of William Knibb, an influential critic of slavery. Kettering has a rich arts heritage, with notable figures such as novelist J. L. Carr and painter Alfred East. The constituents of Kettering are pleased by and grateful for the contributions of Dame Sarah Gilbert, a scientist born in Kettering who played a key role in developing the first vaccine during the pandemic.

Kettering is known for its industrial links to shoe and boot manufacturing, so it is no wonder that I went on to have a career in the fashion industry. There are semi-rural areas, and the urban town of Kettering alongside the smaller towns of Rothwell—more commonly known as Rowell—and Desborough, which is known for its co-operative heritage and is home to the last shoe and boot manufacturer, Cheaney. Burton Latimer is where Weetabix are made—the scent of Weetabix can often be smelled in the air. My own village, Geddington, is famous for its historic Queen Eleanor cross and its strong sense of community. We have unique communities across the towns and villages in the constituency. You may not have been to Kettering, but you most likely have sat on a swing made by Wicksteed. Members on this side of the House have almost certainly distributed leaflets that were printed in the constituency in recent months.

Growing up in Kettering had its challenges, despite all the good things it offered. I was raised in a single-parent family. My mum, who is a local youth worker, made significant sacrifices to demonstrate to me and my brother Joe that, despite the odds being against us at times, we could still strive for great things if we wanted to. Today, I come into this Chamber as the youngest woman here—a young woman who has not come from privilege and the first woman to represent Kettering.

Under the last Government, my generation faced significant hardships. There is a lot of talk about gen Z, but many in my generation have had challenging experiences, such as education being moved to our

[*Rosie Wrighting*]

living rooms; growing up on social media and experiencing the dark place that it can be, especially during the campaign; fear of a climate crisis in our lifetime; renting in insecure housing, with the idea of home ownership only a distant dream; and trying to build a career in the midst of a cost of living crisis. It is this that has led to my generation's trust in politicians being so low.

I am here today having campaigned and joined the Labour party because I believe in the upcoming change, not just for my generation but for all generations. In my constituency, the need for change could not be more apparent. The maternity ward of Kettering general hospital, where I was born eight weeks early and cared for as a premature baby, now has RAAC—reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete—and a floor is closed off. After unfunded promises of a new hospital from the previous Government, I will fight for the people of Kettering to get the healthcare they deserve.

Kettering currently has the highest crime rates in Northamptonshire. Predominantly, violent and sexual offences are reported. But with Labour, we can see a shift towards community policing and increased support for youth services, to prevent young people from taking part in county line gangs. I know that every day in my constituency people are struggling with the cost of living crisis. That is why this Bill is so important. We must work to get a stable economy and lower energy bills with the launch of Great British Energy.

I will never forget the trust that people across the Kettering constituency have put in me. Kettering, a community with vast potential, requires a supportive Government to achieve incredible things, and that is what it now has. Thank you for the warm welcome, Madam Deputy Speaker, from the House staff and MPs on both sides. I intend to work hard here in Parliament and in my constituency for all the residents of the towns and villages. I look forward to the honour of representing Kettering in the years ahead.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): The hon. Lady may be the youngest woman here but she definitely packs a punch.

Members, please refrain from using “you” or “your”, because you are talking through the Chair and I do not think you mean me.

5.6 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Kettering (Rosie Wrighting). I wish her well in her new role. She brings youth with her, but also experience of how life is. That is important when it comes to representing people here.

It is lovely to see you in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish you well in your new role—well done. We have been incredibly blessed today with all the maiden speeches we have heard. Each Member showed their talent, skill and clear love of their constituency. We are all greatly encouraged. As I said to the hon. Member for Ceredigion Preseli (Ben Lake), we have seen MPs who will bring a lot to the debates we have in this Chamber, whether on the Department for Work and Pensions, roads, farming, fishing, bigger issues such as human rights around the world, or whatever it might be. Each MP will bring their expertise and their point of view,

which will enrich this House and encourage us, so I am pleased to have heard those speeches. It is a real pleasure and a privilege for me to sit and hear them.

I commend the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Llinos Medi). I loved the wee thing she said at the end about her can-do attitude. Every one of us can do in this House. The hon. Lady has told us we can do, so I think we can do from now on. I look forward to working with everyone on the things we can agree on. The issue for many of us in this House is not our differences. I suppose I maybe look at things in a slightly different way, but I do not often see the politics; I see the person. If we do that, we can see the goodness that we can all bring to the debates here.

I am very pleased that you have allowed me the opportunity to speak briefly about the Bill, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will not take too long. I was pleased to see the additional brake or fiscal lock, as it is clear that Governments should take cognisance of high-level support and opinion. I believe the Bill will secure just that. The Minister and the Labour Government are bringing the Bill forward for the best reasons, which is welcome, and I am very pleased to see it.

However, I do believe that advice should be considered here. It is the role of Governments to do what is right, with a total vision for the country, and we must always ensure that the decisions are made in this House by elected representatives and not by unelected Members behind closed doors. I know that our Government and our Minister will be aware of the need to strike a balance between taking reasoned opinion and taking instruction, and I know the Minister will take that on board. He has always spoken in a reasoned way in the House and I know that he will not be found wanting today when he gives his reasoned opinion at the end of the debate.

I firmly believe in the need for the OBR's opinion. The reason for that will be clear when we consider the political motivation that seeks to force the Government to spend more than £300 million on Casement Park in Northern Ireland, which could plainly necessitate tax increases because no part of the budget will allow the money to be allocated. I hope the Government will not pursue the project, and wanted to put that on the record.

As I said yesterday following the Chancellor's statement, I welcome the news that junior doctors will receive their much-needed pay rise. I do not think anyone in this nation will not be encouraged to know that they will receive the increase that we all think they should have. The Government have made that money available, and hopefully it will go in the right direction. The junior doctors' pay rise is a necessity, and the changes that will be necessary to generate it can be easily understood. Not one of us does not owe our NHS a vast thank you for all it has done.

When we were living through covid, many of us lost family members and loved ones, and we will be eternally grateful for the role that the NHS played. What is not so easily understood is why the tax paid by the average person in Warrington or Wrexham may be increased to fund a Gaelic Athletic Association project—I am referring, again, to Casement Park—which will generate income for a private sporting body, to the exclusion of other sports. I leave that comment on the record. The drive for this is political, not practical, and I hope that the

OBR would express the reasoned view that raising taxes for such purposes does not instil confidence in the financial future of the nation.

I hope the Bill will remind Members that every project we undertake must be paid for from the public purse, in these times when the average person is struggling to lead his or her life, in contrast to the position five years ago. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) spoke earlier about poverty across this great United Kingdom. In my constituency poverty levels have risen dramatically, especially among children. I can honestly say, for the record, that I confidently believe that the Labour Government and the Minister will address these issues throughout this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the children in my constituency who are experiencing levels of poverty that they have never experienced before, and the adults who struggle to pay their bills—every Member has brought an illustration of that to the debate—so I am encouraged to see the Labour party in the role it now has.

We have holes in the economy in Northern Ireland as a result of under-investment. Our pay structures need to be revamped and our education sector needs improvements to deal with the changing needs of our children. I am thinking in particular of those with special educational needs and disabilities. I remember having meetings about that with a Minister back home in Northern Ireland, and I am hopeful that some of the changes that we talked about have been implemented, but I am seeing demands on SEND education that I have never seen before in all my years as an elected representative—as a councillor, and as a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Our health sector needs an overhaul as well, and all this will take central funding, but we also need a change in the way that happens. We do not need massively high levels of middle management, and we do not need agency staff when we could give our nurses a 10% pay increase that would be cheaper than employing those staff. These are things that we need to change.

Earlier, in an intervention, I asked the Minister about the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. The Minister kindly confirmed that he would have a role involving integration and interaction with the regional Administrations. I am particularly encouraged that he will be visiting Northern Ireland, and the Assembly, in September this year. That shows me that the Minister—my Minister here, through the Labour Government—says what he means and will carry it out, which is good news—I welcome that. Culture and heritage are also important, but they can never take precedence over heart operations or chemotherapy. No debate on budget responsibility can overlook this foundational aspect. I hope that this will serve as a timely reminder to us all that we have responsibilities in this House that outweigh party politics. That must always be the first decision that we make in this House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call Matthew Patrick to make his maiden speech.

5.15 pm

Matthew Patrick (Wirral West) (Lab): Thank you for the opportunity to deliver my maiden speech in this important debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. The matter of budget responsibility is important to my constituents

in Wirral West, because they know the cost of getting it wrong—the cost to public finances, public services and public trust. I know they will support the measures we are introducing.

May I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Rosie Wrighting), my many hon. Friends and hon. Members on making their maiden speeches today? They have been beautiful, telling stories of constituencies and personal journeys. I think there is a theme to many of them—a theme about civility in public life, about ambition for everybody, and about the number of hours of sunshine that each of the various constituencies receives. I will no doubt look that one up.

I will focus my remarks today on the place and the people who have brought me here. In so doing, I hope to explain why I believe in the power of argument, disagreement and nuance. Hon. Members will know that my constituency is in the Wirral peninsula. What the House might not have realised is that we are quite particular about how you refer to the Wirral—it is never “Wirral” but “the Wirral”, and you are rarely “in it” but, rather, “on it”.

The rich history of Wirral West—one of Vikings, James Bond and a Prime Minister—would not be out of place in a Hollywood blockbuster. The Vikings came to the Wirral in 900 AD, and they brought with them their own Parliament, which they called “Things”. That is how one of the most beautiful villages we enjoy, Thingwall, was named. Hon. Members will probably be grateful that I am going to skip forward a few centuries of history to bring us closer to the present day. Daniel Craig—the most recent James Bond and, in my view, the best 007—was brought up, played rugby and went to school in West Kirby and Hoylake, and former Prime Minister Harold Wilson, who did so much for lifelong learning with the Open University and introduced important social reforms, lived in Spital.

Our past may be worthy of Hollywood, but our present and beautiful natural environment would not be out of place in a David Attenborough documentary. Its physical beauty has been captured by many of the finest photographers, but even they will tell you that there is no substitute for seeing it for yourself—from walking to Hilbre Island and watching as the seals swim through the River Dee, to admiring our golf courses, which are famous for hosting the Open.

Those people lucky enough to call Wirral West their home are part of what makes it so special. They bring passion to everything they do, and they carry that passion with a warm welcome and great dignity. That passion runs through each of the towns and villages. It is passion for one another and for our area, helping to expand opportunities to everyone. I cannot imagine another place with as many community groups, churches and businesses that work so hard to do such good, including scouts and guides groups, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, our schools and hospitals, and community hubs such as the Hoole Road hub—so many groups that support all people, whatever the difficulties they face. It is community spirit that has powered us through some difficult times, and I hope that this new Government can help to bring back some hope so that we can look forward to better days.

Wirral West, with its expanded boundaries, has been most recently served by two people: Margaret Greenwood and my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead

[Matthew Patrick]

(Alison McGovern). Margaret Greenwood is deeply passionate about our NHS and our environment, and those are two passions that I share. As an MP, Margaret knew that getting our NHS back on its feet is vital so that it can deliver world-leading care. We are fortunate in Wirral West to have two hospitals: Arrowe Park and Clatterbridge. I know the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care is particularly fond of the latter, given the support it gave to his family. I think back to the conversations I had in the election campaign, to the people waiting sometimes years for crucial operations and the stress that that waiting added to their daily lives. I will be thinking of those people as we do the work to turn the NHS around.

As Margaret often reminded us, there is no escaping the threat that is climate change. It came up often on the doorstep. People on the Wirral, from teachers to scientists and from environmentalists to parents are worried, like so many, about the threat of climate change. They know that it does not respond to strong rhetoric, borders or weapons. It is only action, joined up with our partners around the world, that will help us to tackle climate change and save the environment. When I see the wind farms off our Wirral shores, I am proud that we can be a home of green energy and green jobs, delivering the bold action that is desperately needed.

My other predecessor, who now serves Birkenhead, had a deep impact on my own journey—ambitious for me personally and many people like me, from working-class communities; ambitious for all of us, encouraging us, believing that we too can stand tall in places, even ones as grand as this. I grew up in Birkenhead. It is a wonderful place, but it is not without its struggles. Standing here now is a testament to my hon. Friend and to her encouragement and ambition for people like me. She will know that, as proud as we rightly are, some people from ordinary backgrounds can fulfil their ambitions, but it is still only some people, and there is much more that we must do. I will not rest until some people having opportunity becomes everybody having opportunity. The enormity of that task is matched only by its importance. It would be daunting, but for the fact that I know I am not alone in that mission. I am proud to stand alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead and all of my hon. Friends in this great task.

The Wirral has had many politicians who have made an important contribution to public life. They include my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Dame Angela Eagle) and her championing of women and the LGBT community, and Baron Hunt of Wirral, although Members will realise that I think it should be Baron Hunt of the Wirral, but I will come back to that. He comes from a different tradition from me but he has served people in this country with bravery and distinction. And of course, there was Frank Field, who we sadly lost earlier this year.

Frank was a dear friend of mine, and I miss him terribly. He was the first MP I met. He was interested in what everyone had to say, and as hon. Members across the House may know from personal experience, he was quite interested in disagreement, too. He was fascinated when what you had to say differed from his own views, and it was Frank who taught me that disagreement did not need to be tolerated in politics but rather to be sought out and embraced. He taught me that, if you

believe in something, you should feel free to say it, and that as long as you do so with reason, respect and humility, you should enjoy the consideration of others. Because we cannot reward the absolutists. Those who know everything with total certainty are, I think, the people we should most fear.

I am conscious, standing here, of the responsibility placed on me to represent the interests and people of Wirral West, and I will do that fiercely. I am deeply aware that representation is as much about listening as it is about speaking. The most interesting and informative conversations that I had on the election campaign were with people who disagreed with me. I learned much from them. In this House, while I bring from my career expertise in local government and economic policy, which I hope will benefit others, I intend to tap into the accumulated knowledge of hon. Members from all sides of the House. There has not been enough listening in our politics of late, and I believe that, if we are to restore faith in this House, which I believe we must, listening to our constituents and to one another is a vital step.

Frank and I spoke often about a whole range of issues and, even towards the end of his extraordinary life, he maintained a fascination with politics, with what it could do for people and with the disagreements that lay at its heart. A small part of his enormous legacy will be these three commitments that I make to this House. My commitment is to listen in good faith to arguments made in good faith. My commitment is to change my mind when it is right to do so. And my commitment is to stand up for the things that I believe in, so that others might do the same. That is what Frank would have expected, it is what the people of Wirral West rightly expect and it is what this House and our politics deserve.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): So it is “the Wirral” or “on the Wirral”—that is definitely noted. We now have Luke Charters.

5.25 pm

Mr Luke Charters (York Outer) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and congratulations on your elevation to the Chair.

I am proud to stand here as part of a changed Labour party that won the public's trust on the economy. I am so glad that we did, because we would otherwise still be at the behest of those on the Opposition Benches, who did so much to damage the public's finances. My constituents paid the economic price for their economic incompetence—the £22 billion black hole uncovered yesterday is just one example. Ultimately, that is why the Opposition paid the price at the ballot box. The people of York Outer and this country resoundingly sent a message at the general election: never again!

If anyone needs reminding why, they should take themselves back to 23 September 2022, when we had £45 billion of unfunded tax cuts, with no consultation with the OBR. The pound fell below \$1.09 for the first time since 1985. The central bank had to undertake emergency liquidity operations by purchasing long-dated gilts. Banks and building societies entered into a chaotic spin, with fixed-rate mortgage products being pulled—at one point, over 1,000 products were withdrawn in a single day. As the former Member for South West Norfolk once said, that is a disgrace.

Amidst all the chaos, there is a simple point: the mini-Budget did not meet the needs of the British people. Let us take some of the businesses that closed in the dying embers of the last Government. A music shop believed to be the oldest in the UK closed only a few months after the mini-Budget. Banks Musicroom had been in York since 1756, but ultimately market conditions saw it shut down in early 2023. The stationery company Thomas Dick, in Clifton Moor, which closed earlier this year, had been open 90 years but faced chaos and supply chain issues that left it no longer viable.

The decisions we make in this place have real consequences, and the impact we can have on people is very real. Before my election to this new role, my friend the Mayor of York and North Yorkshire ran a small business on our high street. I remember him talking just before the mini-Budget about what the impacts might be; he warned just how dangerous the mini-Budget would be, and he was right.

But it is not just about the impact on businesses. Last weekend, I visited Hoping Street Kitchen, a fantastic volunteer-run project that helps homeless people and those facing poverty across York. I was deeply inspired by its volunteers, sense of community and unwavering commitment to improving the lives of others. A volunteer told me first hand how crumbling public services, a lack of affordable housing and long mental health lists have created an unimaginable crisis. The project has gone from providing 30 to 40 meals a week during 2021 to providing 100 a week in 2024.

That is why it is critical that we implement our national mission to rebuild public services, build more homes and offer more NHS appointments. But it is also why I am speaking in this debate: this Bill is so important because it is the only way we can grow those public services with a stable economy. We saw yesterday just how difficult that challenge will be, which is why we must protect our economy now.

The Bill respects our institutions, rather than undermining them, and a prime example is how it gives real oversight to the Office for Budget Responsibility. It also includes provisions for the Treasury Committee to have a greater say in key fiscal moments. However, with the heightened responsibilities that the Bill gives the OBR, we need to think about the most effective ways in which the OBR could be properly scrutinised by Parliament, and the Bill could make more specific provisions on the Treasury Committee's scrutiny role of the OBR. This week, I met the team from the Institute for Government that authored a report earlier this year on how Select Committees can better hold regulators to account. I commend that report, and I would welcome a debate on how this place best scrutinises the OBR.

What the Bill really protects against, however, is knee-jerk reactions and fantasy Budgets. If we are to get the growth we so badly need, we must behave like an established economy, not an emerging one that came out of the mini-Budget. That is why the Chancellor's presence at the G20 over the weekend and her warm words about Britain being open for business are so important. If we can fix the lamentable legacy that the Conservative party left, we will have real cause for optimism. I was pleased that the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Jeremy Hunt) commended the work of the OBR in his first speech as shadow Chancellor, but it felt somewhat jarring for him to flippantly suggest:

"We all understand the politics of a Bill that allows the Government to make endless references to the mini Budget".—[*Official Report*, 22 July 2024; Vol. 752, c. 408.]

George Orwell once said:

"The secret of rulership is to combine a belief in one's own infallibility with a power to learn from past mistakes."

The Conservative party clearly has some way to go in that regard, but under this Government the green shoots of economic recovery are already starting to show. We may have inherited a particularly difficult situation, but the evidence of stable markets and an increase in the pound show the confidence in the security that this Government bring. After all, I made it clear in my maiden speech how welcome it is that the country has some good Yorkshire representation in No. 11, embodying the value of frugality.

We know there are tough decisions to make, and we are not hiding that from the British people: just take yesterday as a prime example of our approach. This Bill seeks only to offer greater transparency over decision making and it treats taxpayers' money with respect. That is why I am proud to sit on the Government Benches, and it is why the people of York Outer can be confident that this is a Government that will serve them well.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Yuan Yang to make her maiden speech.

5.31 pm

Yuan Yang (Earley and Woodley) (Lab): First, I would like to congratulate my fellow Members on their wonderful maiden speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Mr Charters) made remarks about budget scrutiny that I agree with. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Matthew Patrick) spoke cinematically of his peninsula and about the role of reason in political debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Rosie Wrighting) and I seem to share a birthday week, and I very much welcome the diversity of generations we see across the Chamber. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Llinos Medi) spoke powerfully about her experience of homelessness; I am glad to hear such testimony in the House today. I share a predecessor with the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mr Reynolds); he displayed an exemplary knowledge of railway bridges, and we share concerns about Sonning bridge and the congestion on it.

I welcome you to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker, and thank you for calling me in this debate on budget responsibility. During the Minister's remarks, I strained to find a joke to make about national accounts, but I deemed that it would be too much of a liability. I then considered making a joke about fiscal take, but I thought that was too taxing. I assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are no more jokes about economics in my speech. Joking aside, I first became engaged in politics while studying economics 16 years ago, and I very much welcome a change in the way that we manage our economy.

I am proud to stand before Members today representing my home constituency of Earley and Woodley, a new seat on the east and south of Reading. Most of the households in my constituency have never been part of a Labour seat, so for many residents I am their first Labour MP in history. I will work hard continuously to earn the trust of every one of my constituents, although it may be some time before I win over the former Member for Maidenhead, Theresa May.

[Yuan Yang]

I want to thank four of my predecessors. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda) is well loved by his former constituents in my seat. His hard work, alongside the work of his predecessors and our Labour group on Reading borough council, connected the Elizabeth line to Reading.

My other predecessors have retired from the House of Commons. For Theresa May, that retirement is extremely well earned. She stepped up to lead our country at a time of crisis, proving the maxim that it takes a woman to clean up the mess the men have left behind. Even at the height of her national responsibilities, she was always present and well respected in her constituency. John Redwood, the former Member for Wokingham, was a man of conviction and authenticity. I respect that very much in a politician, even though I do not share many of his convictions. Finally, Alok Sharma, the former Member for Reading West, displayed international leadership, convening crucial climate talks as the President of COP.

For the first time in history, we now have three constituencies in Reading and, what is more, three Labour MPs. Earley and Woodley has become a new constituency because of the families who have chosen to settle there, moving out from central Reading, London, the rest of the UK and, indeed, the rest of the world. It is a success story for house building as well as for multiculturalism. It is a beautiful area, stretching from Sonning, on the banks of the Thames, to Shinfield, on the banks of the Loddon. In Earley, my family and I live within dog-walking distance of four lakes and woodlands. I want to ensure that future generations have access to nature and to affordable housing, because both have been under threat for too long.

Sonning has a long history, featuring in the Domesday Book, but most of the area in my constituency has been built more recently. After the first world war, Reading contributed to the national campaign to house returning soldiers, by building homes in Whitley and Whitley Wood. The area is now home to Reading football club. There is high-flying history in Woodley, too, which produced aircraft during the second world war.

Most of the houses in Earley, including my own, were built from the 1960s onwards. At one point in the 1980s, the area was the largest housing development in Europe. Shinfield parish, which covers Spencers Wood, Three Mile Cross and Grazely, has had the most recent developments. Alongside Shinfield Studios, the largest new film studios in the UK, we have the Shinfield Players, a community theatre.

However, our constituency is not without its challenges. In many parts of the constituency, the building of infrastructure has not kept pace with the needs of residents, and we need a new Royal Berkshire hospital. We need to ensure that new investments benefit local people. We face deprivation, too, and I will support our grassroots community organisations to work alongside local authorities on regeneration. For those living in our new builds, reform of the leasehold system is much needed, and I look forward to working on all these points with our new Government.

At the heart of my constituency is the University of Reading, which does world-leading research into climate science and meteorology. We are also home to the

European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts. Now, there has been much competition in the debate this afternoon about who has the sunniest constituency. Although my constituency may not enter that competition, it surely holds the power to adjudicate the winner.

The research prowess of the University of Reading, as well as the Thames valley cluster of science and technology giants, has made our area prosperous as well as diverse. We are proud of our diversity; our diversity makes us stronger. Yet there are those who seek to divide us and to weaponise our country's problems to turn us against ourselves. It is clear that we face many problems and that the politics of the past has failed to deliver, and in conversations with residents I have heard again and again the despair that has crept into our democracy, but I fundamentally believe that our democracy is worth fighting for.

I was born in 1990 in China, a country without the right to vote. Three decades later, another crackdown on democracy has led to hundreds of thousands of Hongkongers seeking refuge in the UK. It is never easy to leave your home or to move countries. I came here with my parents as a four-year-old and it took them many years to find stable work. I still remember my mother, the evening before I started secondary school, telling me, "Don't compare yourself to the other kids. Their families have money and connections. We don't and we don't know anyone in this country." As a 10-year-old, I did not know what having connections meant, but I did learn not to compare myself to the other kids, and I think that my mother's advice has stood me in good stead.

I thank my parents very much for supporting me throughout my campaign, and I feel lucky that we call Earley and Woodley our home. To all those families arriving here, wherever they are from and wherever they started off in life, I want to say that wealth or connections should not be a prerequisite for your children's success. I am proud to be part of a Labour Government who will do our utmost to break down the barriers to opportunity.

I joined the Labour party after university, because I saw opportunities drying up for my generation. I studied economics during the financial crisis and graduated during the onset of austerity. While studying my masters in economics, I realised how much economic debate had become detached from the real-world crises around us. With fellow students, I set up Rethinking Economics, a charity that campaigns for better economics education.

I have spent most of my career trying to make economics and business news engaging and accessible, starting at *The Economist* and then spending eight years at the *Financial Times*, where my colleagues taught me so much and supported me so well. I will miss them, but in the words of Cynthia Freeland: "I fully understand that I am now no longer part of the pack, but part of the prey." And so it should be in a democracy with media freedoms—although less bloodlust would be welcome across this House, I am sure.

I have worked in places without media freedoms. I have interviewed labour activists, protesters and fellow journalists who gave up their own freedom for their causes. Some are still in jail today. When I stood for election, some of my friends told me I was brave, given the abuse and violence against women and girls in our society and in politics, which I have suffered and which

we must address, but I think I would be lucky to have a fraction of the bravery of some of my former interviewees. Their determination makes me even more determined to defend and improve our democracy, which has to be constantly renewed through our actions.

Our democracy has to be renewed through reform—through empowering our communities, widening participation in democracy and ending the corrupting influence of money in politics. Our democracy also has to be renewed through delivery—through building a fair economy that can support people. It is my greatest honour to be part of a Government that will do both.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Euan Stainbank to make his maiden speech.

5.40 pm

Euan Stainbank (Falkirk) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Earley and Woodley (Yuan Yang), especially for her commitment in her career before coming to this place to economics education and journalism, a noble profession and one that is critical in today's world. I thank all hon. Members across the Chamber who have given their excellent maiden speeches, and I pay tribute to the parliamentary staff and the Speaker's Office, who have been utterly exemplary in introducing new Members to our roles over the last few weeks.

It is the honour of my life to be elected for the Falkirk constituency. Falkirk is my home: it is where I was born, where I grew up and where I have spent the vast majority of my adult working life. The name for those from Falkirk is "Bairns", or "the Bairns", and the historical understanding is that true Falkirk Bairns are those born within the boundaries of the old borough of Falkirk, as I was—and here I will beat my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Rosie Wrighting) and the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mr Reynolds)—27 days into the new millennium. As my partner Innes told me on the night after the election, if it turns out I did not get here early enough to be the Baby of the House, I can be proud enough to be the Bairn of the House.

I pay tribute to my predecessor John Mc Nally for his nine years of service to the people of Falkirk and to his office staff. I also thank John for his 10 years prior to that serving the people of Herbertshire and Denny and Dunipace on Falkirk council. I first spoke to John last month, when he popped by an event hosted by the Forth Valley Sensory Centre and the Royal National Institute of Blind People Scotland on the very important topic of town centre accessibility with all the candidates vying for the Falkirk seat. The stories I have heard about John from those in the Forth Valley Sensory Centre, as well as throughout the community, show him as a caring and passionate representative, always ready to lend a hand to anybody in need. I wish him well in future.

Accessibility is a cause that I am passionate about. How accessible our streets are can often be the difference between somebody being forced to stay home or being able to access their community. I encourage all hon. Members, especially Scottish Members, to read the RNIB report "Street Credibility: making Scotland's streets accessible for people with sight loss", an excellent guide to how we can use our role to make streets safer and easier to access for everyone.

I would like to take hon. Members through my constituency and the towns, villages and estates that make it up. We start with the Braes villages where my grandfather John and my late grandmother Janet are from, Limerigg and Slamannan. Across the Braes there is also Avonbridge, Standburn, California, Shieldhill and Whitecross. As we travel north down the Braes we get to Maddiston, Brightons, Rumford, Redding, Reddingmuirhead, Wallacestone and Polmont. As we go through Westquarter and Laurieston, the tops of the Callendar Park high flats peek out as we enter the town of Falkirk and the Falkirk South ward that I was honoured to represent for the last two years.

Surrounding the town are the estates of Hallglen and Lionthron, Bantaskin, where my mum Susan was raised, and Tamfourhill, where she first lived. Up north, past the stadium and the Kelpies, we find Middlefield, New Carron, Bainsford and Langlees. To the west, we pass through Camelon, where the Union and Forth & Clyde canals bisect at the famous Falkirk wheel, towards Bonnybridge, Dennyloanhead, Head of Muir, Greenhill and the Carron valley, where we find the town of Denny and the villages of Dunipace, Banknock, Longcroft and Hags.

As my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Blair McDougall) stated in his maiden speech today, and as many others in the Chamber have said, it is our people who make our communities. Those wonderful communities host most of my family and friends. When my dad Duncan made Scotland his home in 1992—I know my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Martin Rhodes) said in his maiden speech that he moved in the same year—both he and my mum Susan, a Falkirk native, wanted a community that I and my brother David would feel we could call our home for life. I am proud to represent my constituents in this place, but even prouder that I am representing my neighbours.

We will all be better off under a Government who seek to unite and serve, rather than a Government who seek to divide. I know that this Labour Government will serve the people of my constituency better than we were served before. Prior to politics, my experience of service was earned in the hospitality sector: from the age of 16, I was pouring pints and serving tables at hotels and restaurants; even earlier than that, I was running a match-day kiosk at Parkhead.

I swiftly moved on from the latter job—the only place to be at 3 pm on a Saturday is the Falkirk stadium, the home of the Invincibles. This year, Falkirk football club became the first non-Glaswegian men's team to go unbeaten for an entire league season in Scotland since the 19th century. I am looking forward to welcoming the sizeable number of Jambos in the Scottish parliamentary Labour party to our league cup fixture on 17 August, when I am hoping we can bring back memories of when we ended their invincible tilt in January 2015. *[Laughter.]* It was a bit niche, that one.

Not everybody has recognised the value of my experience in the hospitality industry, as a recent online comment from a detractor illustrates:

"Euan can't be the MP, that's the boy who used to work at that tapas place."

I humbly thank the people of Falkirk for electing the boy, who—prior to my entry into politics two years ago—did indeed work at Christie's Scottish Tapas in

[*Euan Stainbank*]

Falkirk, the well-deserved winners of the Scottish restaurant of the year award in 2024. I went back to Christie's on the day after the election to celebrate in the best way possible, in the heart of Falkirk's town centre. If any Member is planning a visit to the stunning Kelpies in Helix Park, the one-of-a-kind Falkirk wheel, the historic Callendar House estate or the newly restored Rosebank distillery—and I suggest they do all four—I strongly recommend a subsequent refreshing trip to one of Falkirk's incredible cafés, restaurants and bars. Among the highlights are Christie's Scottish Tapas, Behind the Wall, the Sanam Tandoori, Finnegans café and the Wheatsheaf Inn, which are even harder to avoid than the restaurants in Carshalton and Wallington.

Both my trip to my old bit on the day after the election, and my online detractor declaring my electoral incompatibility based on my pint-pouring past, reminded me that the service provided by those working in hospitality is not properly valued by all of us who use it. If our feet are still sore from canvassing, I know at first hand that that is nothing in comparison to the shift people put in cooking, cleaning and serving, day in, day out. If anybody in this Chamber thinks it is all just so easy, I recommend that they fasten their apron, get behind the cooker and get ready for the lunch rush.

On behalf of hospitality workers, the most important message that I can pass on is “Make sure we are paid properly.” The experience of hospitality workers, who often deal with low pay and insecure work despite their work ethic, displays the fundamental reasons why Labour's new deal for working people, manifested in the forthcoming employment rights Bill, matters so much. Despite servicing the essential elements of our economy and our communities, substantial parts of our working population are being told, when they look at their payslip, that their work does not matter.

The same impression is felt acutely by those working in the public sector—our teachers and school staff, NHS and social care workers, refuse collection workers and now especially college lecturers and staff, such as those at Forth Valley college in my constituency. I welcome the significant pay offer that this Labour Government announced yesterday; I encourage the Scottish Government to use any consequential funding that will flow from it to settle the disruptive and long-standing disputes and give Scottish public sector workers the pay rise that they deserve.

For far too long, age-discriminatory bands have indicated to young workers that their time is worth less than anybody else's. We have had a relatively stagnant minimum wage that does not reflect the spiralling cost of living; zero-hours contracts, which I have worked on; and fire-and-rehire practices that prevent workers from having control over their lives. Those are all things that this Labour Government will change emphatically for the better.

As one of the first Members to be born in this millennium, I share and echo the concerns set out in other Members' maiden speeches about the low turnout across the country, but especially the consistently low turnout among young people. Many young people have spoken to me on the doorstep about how they feel alienated from politics and are losing trust in politics as a route to positive outcomes.

This disconnect should not exist. As a councillor, I spoke to so many passionate young people with bold and exciting ideas about how to change their communities for the better. I want especially to mention the young people at the Falkirk Youth Voice forum, the Scottish Youth Parliament Members for the constituencies of Falkirk East and Falkirk West, and the Falkirk Champs Board, all of whom I have worked closely beside. I was honoured to be invited to participate in a panel discussion last Tuesday that was hosted by the Duke of Edinburgh scheme; I draw hon. Members' attention to its Youth Voices 2024 study, which explores the issues that matter most to 3,000 young people from across the UK.

Work like this can be a road map to using our time here to make young people believe in politics as a force for good again. The starting place to mending this bridge is having representatives who listen to young people and work with them for better outcomes. Votes at 16 will be a substantial step in the right direction: I look forward to their being introduced in due course by this Labour Government.

We must also make young people's priorities our priorities and clearly show ambition for our future when tackling issues such as the cost of housing, the cost of living, mental health, the climate crisis, the moral stain of child poverty, and the NHS. While many young people understand that we must efficiently progress our progressive economic agenda, they deserve to see substantial progress by the end of this Parliament. I look forward to further credible plans being put forward by this Labour Government to make sure we can tackle those issues. I am especially looking forward to the first Labour Budget in the autumn, when I will work tirelessly on behalf of the people of Falkirk, advocating to see us permanently and sustainably end the cruellest policies enacted during the past 14 years. As the people of Falkirk demanded change at this election, the young people of Falkirk, Scotland and the United Kingdom demand that they now see change. I will use my seat and my voice to champion them.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): We now come to the Front-Bench contributions.

5.50 pm

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): I begin, Madam Deputy Speaker, by congratulating you on your election and wishing you well in the Chair, as well as congratulating the new ministerial team, who I hope will enjoy their time at the Treasury as much as I did. I also congratulate all hon. Members across the House who made their maiden speech in today's debate: the hon. Members for Glasgow North (Martin Rhodes), for East Renfrewshire (Blair McDougall), for Southend West and Leigh (David Burton-Sampson), for Carshalton and Wallington (Bobby Dean), for Chichester (Jess Brown-Fuller), for Falkirk (Euan Stainbank), for Peterborough (Andrew Pakes), for Maidenhead (Mr Reynolds), for West Ham and Beckton (James Asser), for Ynys Môn (Llinos Medi), for Kettering (Rosie Wrighting), for Wirral West (Matthew Patrick), and for Earley and Woodley (Yuan Yang). All spoke very well, with eloquence and passion, and we on the Conservative Benches wish them well for the rest of their time in this House.

In contrast to those positive, uplifting maiden speeches, we have also heard Labour Ministers talking the country down, claiming to have inherited the worst set of

circumstances since the second world war. Frankly, Labour's approach is more OTT than OBR. To prove Labour wrong, we do not have to go as far back as 1945: we only have to revisit 2010. When we took over from Labour, unemployment was at 8%; the Conservatives nearly halved it to 4.4%. In 2010, the deficit was 10.3% of GDP, thanks to Labour's reckless borrowing; it is now 4.4%, and is forecast to fall to 1.2% in the coming years. In 2010, inflation was 3.4%; today, it is back at 2%, the Bank of England's target. Let us not forget that the final years of the last Labour Government saw Britain experience the deepest recession since quarterly data started being published—in fact, Labour Britain was in recession for longer than any other G7 country at the time, and we were the last to exit. That is why in 2010, Labour left us with that infamous note saying, “There's no money left”. In contrast, this month we left Labour with the fastest-growing economy in the G7, low inflation, low unemployment and 12 months of consecutive wage growth.

We Conservatives believe in sound public finances, fiscal responsibility and independent forecasts as the foundations of economic stability. That is why it was a Conservative Government who created the OBR in the first place, and it is why we are keen to safeguard its reputation for independence and focus. In that context, this Labour Bill feels more like gimmickry than government. It is clear that the Bill is really designed for one purpose and one purpose alone: to distract everyone ahead of Labour's tax rises in the autumn Budget. Is it any wonder that the IFS says that Labour's fiscal lock proposal is “largely performative”, or that even the Resolution Foundation describes the policy's impact as “relatively small”?

When the Conservatives created the OBR, our legislation recognised that for it to be effective and respected, it had to maintain a delicate balance between independence and accountability. Independent forecasts, free from Treasury interference, would give the public more confidence in them, avoiding the scenario that happened under the last Labour Government where their growth forecasts were out by as much as £13 billion on average. At the same time, elected politicians accountable to this House would retain control over fiscal decisions, because those are ultimately political judgments that should not be delegated to unelected bodies.

However, today's Bill challenges the delicate balance that we left in place. In fact, the most recent independent review of the OBR, carried out by the OECD, specifically warns against what it describes as “mission creep”. Presciently, the OECD says that attempts to expand the OBR's current remit risk drawing the organisation into areas where it does not currently have sufficient capacity or expertise, creating confusion about its role, and diluting its effectiveness. We on the Conservative Benches agree: the OBR should not be dragged into making actual or perceived political judgments, giving unelected officials the ability to essentially veto or shape decisions that are in substance political.

Quite frankly, the Bill and Labour's proposals are full of unanswered questions, which need answering today and throughout the Bill's passage. For example, is the OBR really equipped to decide what counts as a spending emergency? Should the OBR really be empowered to reasonably disagree with Ministers, who are elected, ignore their opinions and strike out on its own? The Bill

gives the OBR more powers; but what measures will the Government introduce to make the OBR more accountable to the House and its Members?

Can the Government explain why their fiscal lock completely ignores policies with large, indirect fiscal impacts but whose up-front costs do not reach the GDP threshold, such as Labour's new open-door immigration policy, or their watering down of laws that protect us from French-style strikes? Why has the Chancellor announced over £25 billion of spending in 25 days without an OBR forecast? Despite claiming a black hole in the public finances, Labour has already spent £8.3 billion of taxpayers' money on a public energy company, £7.3 billion on a national wealth fund and around £10 billion on inflation-busting public sector pay deals without asking for any improvements in productivity in return. Do they have a forecast for any of that spending, or has the fag packet been thrown away?

When the Minister gets to his feet, can he confirm that there will be no more tax rises beyond those already included in Labour's manifesto? Having already taken away the winter fuel allowance from millions of pensioners, will he rule out tax rises on people's pensions, capital gains and council tax?

It was a Conservative Government who created the OBR to end Labour's culture of inaccurate, politicised forecasts. The OBR has established itself as a fixture of the economic and political landscape, and we support it. But we have significant concerns about the Bill, and believe it will benefit from further scrutiny and improvement by the whole House at its next stage, so we do not oppose that additional scrutiny.

The Bill reveals the true fears and underlying motives of this Labour Government. It is an admission, and a confirmation, that one of the first laws they bring forward, after 14 years in opposition, is designed to save Ministers from their own Back Benchers' spending demands, and stop themselves from crashing the economy, as they have done on so many occasions before. The Bill shows that they have finally realised what everyone else already knew: this country can never trust Labour with our economy.

5.47 pm

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (James Murray):

I welcome your election to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a privilege to close this debate on the Budget Responsibility Bill on behalf of the Government. I thank all hon. Members for their contributions; in a moment I will address many of the points that they have raised.

Let me start by reminding the House why the Bill is so important and what it is designed to achieve. At the general election earlier this month, the British people voted for change. They voted to turn the page on 14 years of economic failure. People across Britain voted to remove the Conservatives from power. They voted to remove the party that crashed the economy, and whose Ministers we now know were reckless with the public finances right till the very end. People voted to give Labour the chance to serve. With that honour afforded to us, we have got to work straightaway in fixing the mess the previous Government left and getting our economy growing.

That economic growth is at the heart of our national mission as a Government. That growth underpins our plans in government to make people in every part of the

[James Murray]

UK better off and to get public services back on their feet in a sustainable way. We know that a crucial foundation for sustained growth is economic stability and fiscal responsibility. We have brought that stability and fiscal responsibility back into the heart of government. Our fiscal rules are non-negotiable. As the Chancellor set out yesterday, meeting them is a principle on which this new, Labour Government were elected, and that will guide her at October's Budget.

But we want to go further in restoring the trust that was so badly damaged by the Conservatives during their time in office, by embedding fiscal responsibility not just into our country's government but also into its laws. That is why one of the first Bills to be presented to the House of Commons by our new Government was the Budget Responsibility Bill whose Second Reading we are debating today. The Bill will hardwire fiscal responsibility into significant financial decisions of any future Government, and it will prevent any party ever again being able to play fast and loose with the public finances.

We saw under the previous Government what happens when politicians fail to show respect for taxpayers' money. People across Britain are still feeling the impact of Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng's recklessness nearly two years on from the economic disaster they created. The Conservatives' recklessness in 2022 showed just how much damage unfunded spending commitments can cause. Ministers at the time unleashed economic turbulence that pushed up people's mortgages and rents and made people across Britain worse off, though it hit the least well-off the hardest. We must never let that happen again.

Budget responsibility must never be optional. That is why Labour will hardwire this responsibility into Government through our fiscal lock, which will mean that all significant fiscal announcements in future will be guaranteed independent scrutiny from the Office for Budget Responsibility. This Bill empowers the OBR to independently produce an assessment of a Government's fiscal plans if it judges that the fiscal lock has been triggered. That will make sure that there is always proper scrutiny of a Government's fiscal plans, and guard against large-scale unfunded commitments and disasters such as the Conservatives' so-called mini-Budget ever happening again. This Bill is a crucial step in fixing the foundations of what we have inherited.

I will take a pause from focusing on the substance of the Bill to thank so many hon. Members for their truly excellent maiden speeches. We had a real tour around Britain, and I feel I have got to know places in all corners of our country through their passionate speeches about the places and people they are all so proud to represent.

We began with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Martin Rhodes), who spoke about Kelvingrove park, which I went to when I visited Glasgow. He spoke about the serious work of Government, and the importance of delivery and rebuilding trust in politics.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Blair McDougall) said that the hard decisions we make today are what create a better tomorrow. There is no better summary of the position we find ourselves in

today. He spoke passionately about the history of his constituency and the importance of a better future for the next generation.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Bobby Dean) spoke movingly about his upbringing and how it has influenced his politics. He also spoke about his anger at the previous Government's recklessness. I have to say that while I enjoy going to the pub when there are big games on, I do not know that much about football, so I actually understood the fiscal bit of his speech more than the football analogy.

The Minister of State, Home Department (Dame Angela Eagle): Shame!

James Murray: I am just being honest—honesty in politics!

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West and Leigh (David Burton-Sampson) made a very important point that we should all heed about civility in politics. He spoke about the diverse community spirit in his area, but I am not going to even begin to compete with him on how impressive the coastline is in my landlocked suburban constituency.

The hon. Member for Chichester (Jess Brown-Fuller) spoke about how special and sunny her constituency is. She began a new competition; now it is not only who has the most beautiful constituency, but the sunniest. I was very touched by her recognition of the importance of family for both inspiration and practical support in politics.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Andrew Pakes) spoke about his Co-operative and trade union values, which I think many of us Labour Members share. I did not know until he spoke about the connection between Peterborough and mustard, so that is something I have learned today. I thought that his focus on the promise of new towns really sums up our sense of optimism for the future. There is the idea of being proud of one's heritage, and honest about the challenges that we face, but he is also ready to achieve more in the future with a Government who support him. I wish him great stability in his seat.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mr Reynolds) gave a particularly rich history of his constituency, which went from bridges to "Carry On" movies, and he also mentioned the Spice Girls. I think a Spice Girls CD was the first I ever bought, but he may not know what a CD is. That sums up the different perspectives we come from.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham and Beckton (James Asser) spoke about the Royal Docks, where I spent much time in a previous role working at City Hall; I saw the great potential that that area of the capital city has. He eloquently set out the combination of heritage and diversity, past and present, that makes his constituency such a lively and wonderful place to represent. I make him an offer: when he is jumping on the Elizabeth line to visit the hon. Member for Maidenhead, he can stop off at West Ealing to say hello to me.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Llinos Medi) spoke honestly about the importance of keeping people in this place on their toes. That is right; the electorate do keep us on our toes, and one of the great benefits of our system is the way in which we are brought down to

earth every time we go back to our constituencies on Thursdays or Fridays. However great and important the debates in this place are, when we knock on that door or sit down in our surgery, we are brought right back down to earth. It is a great feature of our political system, and she was right to draw attention to it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Rosie Wrighting) spoke about how proud she was of the history of the place that she now represents and where she grew up. I was very moved to hear her speak about her mum's role as a local youth worker, and how that inspired her to do what she is doing in life. I wish her well as one of the youngest MPs in this place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Matthew Patrick) spoke about the natural beauty of his constituency—he was not the first Member to do so today—and the passion of the people there. His comments about politics being as much about listening as speaking were particularly thoughtful. We should all bear that in mind in this place. He made an important point about learning from those with whom we disagree, or maybe only appear to disagree, and about breaking down barriers through listening and having conversations.

My hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Mr Charters) spoke about businesses and voluntary projects in his constituency. He underscored how important it is that taxpayers' money is treated with respect. I know that the residents of York Outer will be very well served by the excellent new MP we heard from today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Earley and Woodley (Yuan Yang), whom I enjoyed campaigning with during the general election, managed to inject some humour into economics, which is quite an achievement for a maiden speech. I am not even going to begin to try to replicate that in my comments just now, but she spoke passionately about the importance to those in her constituency of having access to nature and affordable housing. I know from what she said, particularly about her personal experience, that she will be a true champion for breaking down barriers to opportunity.

Finally, we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk (Euan Stainbank), and it was worth the wait to hear his wonderful speech. He gave a fantastic whistle-stop tour of his constituency, and made many excellent recommendations of where to eat and drink next time we are in the area. What really came across is how connected he is to the community he represents, through his neighbours, his friends and his family. He used a phrase that sums up well what I and other Government Members want to do: unite and serve.

Those were all the maiden speeches we had today. It was a truly excellent tour of not just the country, but the talent we have in this place following the general election. I wish all hon. Members very well for however many years they spend in this place.

We heard from other Members about the substance of the Bill, including the shadow Ministers. They both seemed a bit confused about whether they support the OBR and the Bill. I am glad that they confirmed that they support the Bill and will not vote against it, but at one point the hon. Member for Grantham and Bourne (Gareth Davies) seemed to defend Liz Truss over her handling of the economy. He must be pretty much the last person in the country willing to do so; it was

certainly brave of him. We Government Members are clear on why the OBR is so important and what its role should be. The Bill sets out to strengthen that.

The hon. Gentleman asked what the purpose of the fiscal lock might be. The fiscal lock will prevent the sidelining of the OBR by giving it the power to start an assessment if the Government announce fiscally significant policies without one. I remind him that the current shadow Chancellor said, at the time of the disastrous mini-Budget, that some of the difficulties were caused by the lack of a forecast, so this is something that the Opposition agree with.

The shadow Minister also asked about the definition of an emergency. We are very clear that in emergencies—for instance, during the pandemic—it may be necessary for the Government to take rapid action. In those cases, it would not be appropriate to hold back the response to the emergency until a forecast could be produced. Finally, he asked whether the OBR reports triggered by the fiscal lock will be published. I can answer him simply: they will. That is set out in section 8 of the original Budget Responsibility and National Audit Act 2011.

I welcome the support from the Lib Dem spokesperson, the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney), for the Bill. She asked about the definition of “significant”, a point also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy). The threshold set out in the draft charter for budget responsibility, which we have on the gov.uk website, is 1% of GDP in any single financial year. The purpose of the legislation is to prevent large irresponsible fiscal announcements that could undermine economic stability, and that requires a threshold targeted at fiscally significant announcements. That is why we have chosen that figure in the draft legislation and the draft text published on gov.uk.

Let me mention two other Members who spoke in the debate. I welcome the support of the hon. Member for Angus and Perthshire Glens (Dave Doogan) for the Bill. I think that his only criticism was one word in the terminology, and we can probably live with that. He said that he was nauseous from hearing us talk about being a Government of service, but he may have to get used to feeling nauseous, because we will proudly be a Government of service every day that we have the honour to serve.

Finally, I am glad that this is not an exceptional debate in which the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) does not make an intervention. I welcome his support for the Bill, and for the Government's wider actions in resolving the junior doctors' industrial dispute. I reassure him that, like my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, I recognise the importance of working with political representatives from all nations in the UK.

As my right hon. Friend said at the beginning of this debate, a crucial first step to achieving sustained economic growth is delivering economic stability. This Bill will help provide that stability and ensure that fiscal responsibility is not only embedded in our approach to government, but locked into how government works from this point on. It will make sure that there is always proper scrutiny of the Government's fiscal plans, reinforcing credibility and trust, and making sure that no Government can ever again play fast and loose with the public finances. The Bill is a key step in fixing the foundations

[James Murray]

of our country as we set out to get the economy growing and to make families across Britain more secure and better off.

We now know that the Conservatives called the election to run away from the problems that they had covered up, rather than taking the tough decisions to fix them. While they may have run away from the problems that they created, they cannot run away from their record in office. People in Britain will not forget the last Government's recklessness in 2022, which showed just how much damage unfunded spending commitments can cause. Budget responsibility will never be optional under Labour, as it was under the Conservatives. We have brought fiscal responsibility back into the heart of government, and we will hardwire it into law through our fiscal lock. That is what this Bill will achieve. This Bill will draw a line under the economic recklessness of recent years and make it clear that it must never be allowed to happen again. Budget responsibility underpins our national mission to make people across Britain more secure and better off. For that reason and others, I commend this Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

BUDGET RESPONSIBILITY BILL: PROGRAMME

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Budget Responsibility Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

Proceedings in Committee, on Consideration and on Third Reading

(2) Proceedings in Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion four hours after their commencement.

(3) Any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion five hours after the commencement of proceedings in Committee of the whole House.

(4) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings in Committee of the whole House, to any proceedings on Consideration or to proceedings on Third Reading.—(*Jeff Smith.*)

Question agreed to.

BUDGET RESPONSIBILITY BILL: MONEY

King's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Budget Responsibility Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred by the Treasury in consequence of the Act.—(*Jeff Smith.*)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That at today's sitting, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 122B, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak and Ed Davey relating to Select Committees not later than one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings on that Motion may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Lucy Powell.*)

Business without Debate

SELECT COMMITTEES

Ordered,

That,

(1) the table in paragraph 2 of Standing Order No. 152 (Select Committees related to Government Departments) be amended by leaving out item 12, Levelling up, Housing and Communities, and inserting in the appropriate place:

Housing, Communities and Local Government	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	11
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(2) pursuant to Standing Order No. 122B (Election of Committee chairs), the chairs of those select committees subject to the Standing Order be allocated as indicated in the following Tables:

Select committees appointed under Standing Order No. 152:

Business and Trade	Labour
Culture, Media and Sport	Conservative
Defence	Labour
Education	Labour
Energy Security and Net Zero	Labour
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Liberal Democrat
Foreign Affairs	Labour
Health and Social Care	Liberal Democrat
Home Affairs	Conservative
Housing, Communities and Local Government	Labour
International Development	Labour
Justice	Labour
Northern Ireland Affairs	Labour
Science, Innovation and Technology	Labour
Scottish Affairs	Labour
Transport	Labour
Treasury	Labour
Welsh Affairs	Labour
Women and Equalities	Labour
Work and Pensions	Labour

Other specified select committees:

Environmental Audit	Labour
Petitions	Liberal Democrat
Procedure	Labour
Public Accounts	Conservative
Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs	Conservative
Standards	Conservative

—(*Lucy Powell.*)

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Now that the House has agreed to the allocation of Select Committee Chairs, I can announce that Mr Speaker has decided that the election of Chairs will take place on Wednesday 11 September between 10 am and 4 pm. Nominations will close at 4 pm on Monday 9 September. The election of the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee will take place to the same timetable. Nomination forms and a briefing note with more information are available from the Vote Office.

European Scrutiny Committee

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Standing Order No. 143 (European Scrutiny Committee) be rescinded.—(*Lucy Powell.*)

6.15 pm

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): It is important to have a debate on this motion. We have heard all afternoon splendid speeches and maiden speeches, have we not? But the thrust of this afternoon has been scrutiny, accountability and responsibility. It seems extraordinary to me that while the other House has a Committee to scrutinise our relations with the European Union—indeed, today it has proudly announced that it has been reformed—and the Government want to reform the House of Lords, we could have a situation in which there is only a Committee to scrutinise relations with the European Union in the other place. We have talked about scrutiny all afternoon. Of the 27 Committees referred to on the Order Paper, the European Scrutiny Committee is the only one that includes the word “scrutiny”, yet it is the one Committee that the Leader of the House wants to do away with. I find that extraordinary.

We have heard from the Government before the election, during the election and since the election about the importance of our relations with our friends in the European Union and how negotiations may take place on a whole raft of important issues. Do hon. Members remember the slogan, “Take back control of our borders, our money and our laws”? Surely the whole point of our debate about our relationship with the European Union is that this is the place where we debate and legislate for laws on behalf of the people, so if we are to take back control of our laws, surely those laws and the negotiations proposed by the Government on behalf of the people should be scrutinised in detail and earnest, as has been proposed all afternoon with regard to other matters.

I suggest to the Leader of the House, the Government and the Whips that we need to reflect on that. I urge the Leader of the House to withdraw the motion, reflect on it from the sedentary position of our sunbeds over the next month and bring it back to the House in September.

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Those of us who will be not on a sunbed but in our constituencies do recognise that point. The hon. Gentleman and I will take a different view on the benefits of what the Government are doing to reset our relationship with Europe now that we have left the European Union so that we can finally get the trading benefits sorted and sort out the border tax mess left by the last Government. Does he recognise that there is now a lacuna where people may question where such a debate will happen and what role parliamentarians may play in it, and that perhaps one fruitful thing would be to clarify what will happen to the European Statutory Instruments Committee, which seems to have been dissolved yet was looking at the European laws that we were transposing into UK law?

There are a number of questions that may not be for this evening but are for the future of this Parliament. Given what the hon. Gentleman is expressing, he and I might disagree on the outcomes, but we agree that they are important questions, and we would like to understand what will happen next.

Richard Tice: I thank the hon. Lady for her constructive and positive contribution. The reality is that it is incumbent on us, on behalf of millions of people who believe in democracy in this country and wanted to take back control, to scrutinise the negotiations that the newly elected Government will have in multiple areas with the European Union in Brussels and the European nations. It seems extraordinary to take away the ability to look at that in detail—I am not sure how millions of people will understand it.

Sir David Davis (Goole and Pocklington) (Con): I have listened to the hon. Member and the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy), and I guess I am the third way because I do not agree with either of them. The hon. Gentleman has a significant point. As the relationship with the European Union evolves over the next five or 10 years, it is important that the Government maintain the trust of the British people. If this mechanism does not exist, I would like the Leader of the House to say what mechanism will replace it. Will there be a duty on different Select Committees to report on their part of it? Or will there be some other mechanism to keep everyone on board with the journey that the Government are taking us on?

Richard Tice: I thank the right hon. Member for his most helpful contribution. He reinforced the point: where is the scrutiny that our citizens rely on us all to exercise on the Government? However well intentioned the Government's negotiations are, we have a role to play to avoid unintended consequences. It is splendid that the other place has its own scrutiny Committee—*[Interruption.]* I have not been invited over there. I reinforce the point that this is the democratically elected House. We are charged with scrutinising the Government's negotiations with partners all around the world. It is incumbent on the Leader of the House and the Government to continue the European Scrutiny Committee, which has done good work and is surely best placed to continue that focus.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): I served on the European Scrutiny Committee for the entirety of the last Parliament. Its work evolved from simply scrutinising the documents that came from the European Union and had direct effect on our law, to taking over much of the functions of the Exiting the European Union Committee after it was disbanded. The Committee was doing critical cross-Government scrutiny on things

such as retained EU law, the negotiations on the Gibraltar border and the continuing operation of the trade and co-operation agreement. As a Select Committee it was not departmental in its outlook but entirely cross-cutting across all of Government.

Richard Tice: I thank the hon. Member for that most helpful contribution, which reinforces the value of the Committee, its focus and its determination to get the laws right for our millions of citizens. I therefore urge the Leader of the House, again, to withdraw the motion and to reflect on these contributions. Let us come back in September, have a debate on it and find the right way to proceed. The motion should be withdrawn.

6.23 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Lucy Powell): I thank the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) for his contribution. I look forward to watching him race with his towel to the sun lounger—I am sure he will be beaten by many other Europeans.

I am a little confused by the hon. Member's plea to keep a Select Committee that was a function of our membership of the European Union, since he has spent his life and all his efforts getting us to leave it, which we have now done. Therefore the principal job of the Committee—to examine the documents produced by the EU institutions that the Government would automatically take on board—is no longer required. In fact, I understood that he and his party wished this Parliament, other Departments and therefore other Select Committees to take on that job of considering all such issues in detail, because we are no longer members of the European Union and are therefore no longer required to automatically take on those documents. I listened to what he said but am confused by it.

Richard Tice *rose*—

Lucy Powell: I am not going to give way, because we are all at the end of a long day and many of us are looking forward to our European holidays. I know that that is where the hon. Gentleman will be going straight away from here, to spend his euros on tapas and European beers. I will not take up his offer of withdrawing the motion. I have heard what he said, but perhaps he can reflect a little, over that tapas and a beer on his sun lounger, on the confusion he has displayed tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Southport Incident

Mr Speaker: Before the Home Secretary makes a statement, I must advise the House that although the matter is not yet sub judice, for the purpose of the House rules Members should exercise care in what they say about a major live criminal investigation. Members should take care not to say anything in this House that might prejudice a criminal trial. While the Home Secretary may wish to make factual statements for the record, I urge Members to avoid speculating about the guilt or innocence of any person, the identity of the person who has been arrested, or the motive for the attacks. Members may ask about the emergency services, the response to the attacks, the support for victims' families and other connected matters, but I urge the utmost caution in avoiding any remarks that might prejudice a future trial.

6.26 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): I would like to make a statement about the devastating attack that took place in Southport yesterday morning. It is difficult to comprehend or to put into words the horror of what happened. These were young children dancing to Taylor Swift and celebrating the start of the school holidays. What should have been a joyful start to the summer turned into an unspeakable tragedy.

Three young children have lost their lives: Bebe King, aged 6; Elsie Dot Stancombe, aged 7; and Alice Dasilva Aguiar, aged 9. The police have released some words that Alice's family have said:

"Keep smiling and dancing like you love to do, our princess."

Six other children and two adults are still being treated for their injuries in hospital. The whole House, and the whole country, is united in shock and in grief. Together, we send our thoughts, prayers and deepest condolences to everybody who has been affected by these terrible events.

This morning I joined the Merseyside chief constable, chief fire officer, police and crime commissioner and my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Patrick Hurley) to lay flowers on the street of the attack, and the Prime Minister is in Southport with the Mayor of the Liverpool city region this afternoon. I also met this morning with some of the first responders—the Merseyside police, North West Ambulance Service and Merseyside Fire and Rescue—who arrived at an unimaginably distressing scene yesterday and who responded with heroic professionalism. They were aided by passersby—NHS workers and off-duty emergency workers—who heard the calls of distress and ran to help.

As the police officers said to me when we spoke, they do these jobs knowing that they can be called upon in the toughest of times, but nothing, still, can prepare you for an attack on little children. I want to recognise the toll that can take. Those emergency workers were back at work yesterday. They live locally. Some of them had been to the dance centre in the past with their own children or relatives. They wanted to be out in their own community, continuing to serve and support the people of Southport. That is public service at its very best.

I also offer my sincere thanks to everyone in the NHS—hospitals across the region are tending to the victims and supporting their families right now—and to

Sefton council and Merseyside police family liaison officers, who are already working to provide extensive support to the victims' families and to the community. This morning I met staff from Victim Care and the Samaritans, and local youth workers, who are also already providing local support to those who need it. The Home Office and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government stand ready to support them and work with them as they deal with the distressing aftermath of this terrible attack.

Merseyside police are now leading an extremely serious criminal investigation, and they are being supported by counter-terrorism police. So far, Merseyside police have confirmed that just before noon yesterday morning they were called to the dance studio, where 13 people had been attacked—11 children and two adults who tried to prevent the attack. They arrested a 17-year-old male at the scene. The police have said that they are not looking for anyone else in connection with the attack and they do not believe that there is an ongoing threat.

As you have rightly reminded the House, Mr Speaker, this is an ongoing investigation, and it must not be impeded or compromised in any way. That means that all of us have a responsibility not to do or say anything to cut across or prejudice the criminal investigation. We must let the police do their job, and they have my full backing in that task. More than that, we must show respect for the families. When there are updates, Merseyside police work hard to try to provide information first to the families, although that is not always easy or possible.

Likewise, it is extremely important that people do not spread damaging misinformation online. False information has already been extensively shared in the last 24 hours. Those who do this for their own purposes risk undermining a crucial criminal investigation. I ask everyone to show some respect for the community in Southport, and for families who are grieving and in trauma. In these dark and difficult moments the police must be able to get on with their work, and communities must be given the time and space to grieve and to heal without outside voices seeking to use events to stir up division or advance their own views.

There will be other questions that flow as the investigation develops. We will doubtless in the days ahead discuss terrible violence and its causes. The investigation will of course pursue any contact that the suspect may or may not have had with different agencies before the incident took place. Southport will no doubt be in our minds when we debate Martyn's law, which was part of the King's Speech. But for today, the most important focus of all must be the injured children, the grieving and traumatised families, and the people of Southport, who are in shock at what has happened.

Tonight, people from across Southport are gathering for a community vigil. When I visited this morning, many people were gathering at Southport football club, which had thrown its doors open for the community, and where youth workers told me that they were determined to keep supporting Southport children with events this summer. I hope that everyone will recognise the sense of community and solidarity among the people of Southport, who have come together to support each other in the most terrible of times.

The words of one paramedic have stayed with me. He described how terrible it was when he arrived and how despairing he felt, but also how proud he was of his

[Yvette Cooper]

colleagues and passers-by who pulled together to help. He said that while facing the very worst of times, he also could see around him in his colleagues and passers-by who were working together to save lives the very best of humanity. That is what we keep in our hearts as we think of Southport, and as we think of the grieving families. Most of all, our thoughts are with the little children, and we keep them in our prayers tonight.

I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

6.33 pm

Mr James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for an advance copy of her statement.

This was a heinous attack on innocent children and those caring for them at the start of the summer holidays. It has no doubt left families broken and a community scarred. I am grateful to the Home Secretary for coming to the House to update us on the situation, and I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for allowing flexibility on the Order Paper so that this event could be discussed.

The Home Secretary and the Prime Minister have, of course, done the right thing by going to Southport today to offer the Government's condolences, and I echo their sentiment. All our thoughts are with the victims of this appalling attack, their families and the people of Southport at this incredibly difficult time. Our thoughts are especially with those who have lost their lives and those who are currently being treated in hospital, some of whom are in a critical condition. We think of their families at this time.

I want to thank our emergency services who responded to this horrific attack. We should never take the bravery of the people who serve us for granted, and it is a reminder that when they run towards danger and unknown circumstances, we are duty-bound to give them our support so that they can act decisively and with confidence, and do everything they can to save lives. Of course, our ongoing thanks go to the staff of the national health service who are currently caring for the victims who are receiving hospital treatment. Particular thanks go to the members of the public who intervened to help, despite the significant danger to them. Their bravery cannot be overstated.

We still know little about the details of what happened yesterday, and the right hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that we should give the police the time to do a proper and thorough investigation. She is also right to highlight the impact of misinformation and disinformation online; enough people are already distressed without their distress being amplified by speculation and gossip online. I would ask that she follow up on the conversations that I had in the United States of America with the social media platforms about their responsibility in this regard. This is also a reminder to all of us that we have a personal responsibility to check before we share, and that we should not feel the need to get involved in the grief of others.

There will, of course, be a time when we must ask how this happened, so that we can take the right steps to ensure that no child, no family and no community has to face the anguish that the people of Southport are

feeling today. It is too early for us to know the full picture, but an attack on innocent children enjoying their summer holiday strikes to the hearts of us all. No matter what drove this individual to commit this appalling crime, we stand together in solidarity with the people of Southport today.

I want to finish by saying that our hearts go out to the three young girls who have lost their lives: Bebe, Elsie and Alice. We cannot imagine what their families are going through now, and I know the whole House will join the Home Secretary and me in expressing our condolences to them. I thank the Home Secretary for her statement.

Yvette Cooper: I thank the shadow Home Secretary for his words, and for his support for the families and whole community in Southport. I particularly thank him for his tribute to the emergency service workers. He will know from all his past experience the heroism they show, but that was strained beyond anything we could have imagined by what they had to deal with yesterday. I also thank him for his recognition of the bravery of the passers-by who came forward to help.

I agree with the shadow Home Secretary about the responsibility on every one of us; the police need to be able to pursue their investigation. There will be wider questions for other days, but the most important thing is that every one of us supports the police in their investigation. I also agree with him about the responsibility on social media companies; we need to recognise that things are taking place on social media that go against their terms and conditions and their commitments. They need to take some responsibility for that.

Above all, this is about young children and their families, who will be grieving, and there will be many other children who were involved yesterday who will be facing great trauma as well. This is a moment when it is not just the people of Southport who will be desperately wanting to come together to support their own; this is about all of us, not just across this House but across the whole country, being there for the people of Southport and the families who have lost loved ones.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Southport (Patrick Hurley) is in the constituency, so I am going to call the most immediate neighbouring MP, Bill Esterson.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Southport is at the vigil that is taking place as we gather here. I am sure that he and his constituents are grateful for the visits of the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary earlier today. He and they will also be grateful to the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary for what they have said this evening.

This is about Bebe, it is about Elsie and it is about Alice. It is about three young children who were murdered. The Prime Minister talked about a collective trauma for the people of Merseyside, and I think that is exactly what is going on. My constituents are reflecting that, as are the people in Southport. I want to pass on the thanks of my constituents to the emergency services for their response, and for the fact that they are back at work today, as the Home Secretary said. I also want to thank those local people who intervened, as the shadow Home Secretary mentioned.

I want to add to what the Home Secretary said about the importance of the responsibility of everyone here and everyone more widely, and to the concerns that she and the shadow Home Secretary expressed about what has been said on social media. I think the best way to respond to it is to look at the overwhelming sense of love and support that is seen at the vigil, and in the many messages that have been left in the floral tributes and online from the vast majority of people, not just in Southport but across the country. That is the appropriate way to support those victims and their grieving loved ones this evening.

Yvette Cooper: I thank my hon. Friend for his words. I know how much he and his constituents, as close neighbours of Southport, will be feeling this now. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Southport, who I spoke to today. He set off back home the moment he heard about this horrific attack yesterday, to be there in the community. He was showing such leadership with the local residents in the community and at Southport football club, where so many people had come together today. This is just immensely hard for communities, as all of us will know having felt our own communities facing pressure, but it is still so hard to imagine just what the community will be going through. I know that they will very much welcome everyone's support.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): The Liberal Democrats extend our heartfelt condolences to those affected by the horrific events that have unfolded in Southport. I cannot begin to imagine the profound grief of the families of Elsie, Bebe and Alice, or the sense of clinging that the families of those children still in hospital must be feeling right now, knowing that they would do anything to keep those beautiful babies alive.

We echo the deep gratitude for our emergency services and the courage and professionalism that they will have shown, as well as for the adults in the room who were clearly trying to protect the others who were there. The community has endured the unimaginable: young lives lost in an act of such senseless violence. I pay tribute, along with the Home Secretary, to the outreach workers, the council and the police. She will know that councils are under a lot of strain right now. Is there extra funding that they will be able to access, so that they can address not just the scars that are happening now but the scars that are likely to emerge?

Finally, the Home Secretary is right to point out that this is not the time for "what ifs"—we need the investigation to happen first. I also echo her plea to everyone to think before they post on this matter. However, will she commit to come back to the House, because at some point there will be lessons that need to be learned? I hope that, collectively as a Parliament, we can say to this grieving community that, whatever lessons may be learned, we will make sure they are also enacted.

Yvette Cooper: I welcome the hon. Member's words and her support for Southport—the community, the families and the emergency workers. She is right to recognise the impact that dealing with something as awful as this can have on emergency workers—on those who had to respond—and it is right that we should recognise that and show our support; we owe those workers our support and thanks for what they had to face and the way they

responded. But, most of all, everybody will want to support the grieving families and the victims—those who have been most affected and who will have seen huge trauma as a result. Victim Care Merseyside is already working closely to provide support. The Merseyside family liaison officers do an incredible job; I have met them in difficult circumstances in the past, and I know they will continue to do so. The Home Office and other Government Departments stand ready to work with them and to support them to make sure that the community gets the support it needs.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I draw the attention of the House and the wider public who may be watching to the fact that the Sky News feed has a link to the JustGiving website to raise money for the bereaved families, with all the costs that will be associated with their bereavement? That is a practical way in which people can contribute.

May I also briefly draw attention to the fact that when these situations arise, some of the most heroic participants are women on the scene? I have never understood why the courageous women who went to help Lee Rigby confront his murderers never received a bravery award. I also still do not understand why Grace O'Malley-Kumar, who instead of running away from her murderer sought to fight the killer of her friend Barnaby, has not been honoured although it is not too late. Let us try to draw the inspiration we can even from the darkest of deeds such as this.

Yvette Cooper: I welcome the right hon. Member's tributes to the bravery of those who were there—not only at the incident in Southport yesterday but at previous horrific attacks. They were called on to show great bravery in the most difficult circumstances, and we should recognise that. We should all recognise that there were adults there yesterday who did everything they could to protect children who were being attacked, and who faced awful circumstances themselves as a result. All of them will be in our hearts and in the hearts of people right across the country.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): On behalf of myself and the DUP, I extend my deepest condolences to the bereaved, the devastated families and, importantly, those in hospital who are fighting for their lives. I also put on record my thanks to all the emergency services—the police and the ambulance service—and to those adults who made themselves available with no thought to their own safety. I think the message is clear for all the families: we grieve with you, our hearts ache with you and all of us in this great nation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have all of you in our prayers. Parents—mums and dads—want to know that their children are safe, so does the Home Secretary agree that that must be the goal? Perhaps she can outline just how that can be achieved?

Yvette Cooper: All of us will share the hon. Member's emotion, whether as a parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle, when we think about little children being affected in this way and just how devastating all of this is. It makes every parent want to hug their children a little closer when we see something as truly appalling as this happen.

[Yvette Cooper]

Having been in Southport today at the football club, the youth workers were really keen to say to me that they were going to continue to support Southport children all summer and continue to organise events for them. They were doing so this morning and they had children playing football. Little boys and girls were out playing football at the Southport football club today, and the youth workers and their families were supporting them. There was a real determination to come together to support families and children, to never let a horrific incident like this stop all of us supporting our children, and for them to be out in the sun this summer holiday.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Reform): On behalf of myself and Reform UK, I offer my heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the children involved. I commend the Home Secretary: she has carried herself with great dignity today, so I thank her for that. I was just looking at the three names of the children—it is absolutely heartbreaking to see the names of these little children. I kindly ask the Home Secretary, what more can we do as a House to support these families and the emergency workers up in Southport? Please send them our love.

Yvette Cooper: I thank the hon. Member for his support for the people of Southport and all the families. This is heartbreaking for the families of Bebe, Alice and Elsie. This is a moment for everyone to send them our love and support, and to do the same for the whole community in Southport, because this affects everyone. Everyone there knows someone who maybe once went to that dance class, is a neighbour, or is deeply affected by what has happened. This is our opportunity to support them, the police, who are carrying out this crucial investigation, and all the local groups and organisations who are coming together to support each other at this very difficult time.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement about this utterly horrific incident and for the way she made it. In memory of those who have already lost their lives and those who are still suffering in hospital, can we challenge the whole knife culture that exists on the streets of many of our communities and constituencies, where people believe that somehow or other carrying a knife is a good and cool thing to do? Young people have lost their lives. A horrific incident has taken place. People are traumatised by it. That message needs to go to everybody who thinks that carrying a knife is somehow a good or cool thing to do.

Yvette Cooper: I thank the hon. Member for his support for the families who are affected and for the people in Southport. He makes a wider point about the issues around knives and knife crime. This has to be a moral mission for all of us. There is wider debate that we will have on other days about some of those issues. For today, this is still about Bebe, Elsie and Alice. This is still about the families who are waiting by the bedsides of their little children tonight, and those across the community who will be thinking of them.

Mr Adnan Hussain (Blackburn) (Ind): I join the Home Secretary in expressing my deepest and heartfelt condolences to the families of Alice, Bebe and Elsie. Words cannot express the sorrow they must be feeling after experiencing

the worst nightmare of every parent. Indeed, heartfelt prayers are with all those children and elders who are still in the hospital, and solidarity with the entire community of Southport. Will there be additional support mechanisms put in place for all the emergency workers who attended the scene, to ensure their wellbeing is a priority?

Yvette Cooper: Again, I welcome the support for the families and for all those who are not just grieving, but dealing with trauma today. It is important, as I think I said earlier, that we think of the emergency service workers, who had to deal with the most difficult of circumstances on our behalf. They have done so to keep the rest of us safe. Let us be clear: they saved lives yesterday. They showed bravery when they arrived on the scene and they saved lives, and they will have endured the most difficult of circumstances to do so. I raised this with the chief constable of Merseyside and also with the chief fire officer, to ensure that those who were there, including the paramedics, get the proper support that they need. I can assure the House that I was told that that support is already being put in place and that the Merseyside police are already getting the additional support.

PETITIONS

Mill Field Housing Development Proposals in Market Deeping

6.53 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I rise to present a petition on behalf of my constituents, just shy of 2,000 of whom have signed a petition calling on the House of Commons to protect Market Deeping's much loved Mill Field. Market Deeping has little over 6,300 people living in it, so almost a third of the town has signed. Mill Field is an area of 11 hectares of green field, bordered by mature hedgerows and trees. On one side there is Milford Road, the last rural lane in Market Deeping. The site has been used by the community for a variety of purposes over many years, from the 19th century onwards. It should be a designated green space, but, sadly, it has been earmarked for development. This is despite opposition from the local community and from Market Deeping town council. The development is being imposed on a community that does not want it, and it threatens unspoiled grassland used by families for generations. This petition is due to the tireless work of Pamela Steel and the Friends of Mill Field and I present it on their behalf this evening.

Following is the full text of the petition.

[The petition of residents of South Holland and the Deepings,

Declares that South Kesteven District Council should reconsider its plan to develop Mill Field, one of the few remaining green fields within the parish of Market Deeping, given that Lincolnshire County Council, which owns the field, has put it forward as suitable for large housing development; notes that Mill Field is an intrinsic part of the rural character of the local area, and should be protected given its historical use for community events and so it can continue to provide residents with space for informal recreation; further notes that planning policy is clear that local communities should not have unwanted development forced upon them.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges South Kesteven District Council to protect Mill Field from development and removes Mill Field from their draft local plan and designates it as a Local Green Space, so protecting it for future generations in perpetuity. And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P003004]

Dental Health Care

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to see you in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I rise to present a petition on dental healthcare on behalf of my constituents in York Central and others. York has a significant NHS dental crisis: less than 40% of adults have accessed NHS dentistry in the past two years, and 1,707 residents have therefore signed the petition to call for a new approach to oral health, with a focus on prevention, supporting children, older people and those with co-morbidities, and addressing the workforce shortages, including with a dental school at the universities of York and Hull combined.

The petition states:

“The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to discontinue the current unworkable NHS dental contract and instead bring dental services fully back into the NHS through a National Dental Service.”

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the current NHS dental contract has failed and that UDAs (Units of Dental Activity) do not match the time required for dentists to provide dental care to their patients; further that in England only £35 is spent per person on dental care, compared to £47 in Wales, £55 in Scotland and £56 in Northern Ireland, making funding and the system unviable for most dentists undertaking NHS work; further that patients must deal with extremely long waiting lists to see a dentist; further that in order to reduce waiting times, more dentists need to be trained up in the UK to meet future shortages through commissioning a number of new dental schools, including the joint universities of York and Hull in other locations, to run alongside their outstanding medical schools; further that there is need to address the workforce challenges within a dental workforce plan; further that preventative dental care through fluoridation should be accelerated, as well as a school check-up service and supervised brushing programme; and further that everyone over the age of 60 should be prioritised since poor dental health can lead to malnutrition and other comorbidities.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to discontinue the current unworkable NHS dental contract and instead bring dental services fully back into the NHS through a National Dental Service.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P003005]

Food Security

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jeff Smith.)

6.59 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Pope Benedict said that

“food security is an authentically human requirement. Guaranteeing it for present and future generations also means safeguarding ourselves against the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources.”

It will not have escaped your notice, Madam Deputy Speaker, or that of other Members of the House, that I represent a rural constituency with a preponderance of agricultural employment. Many of my constituents are employed in agriculture, horticulture, the food industry and related jobs. Lincolnshire boasts some of the best growing land in the country. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Lincolnshire is responsible for 30% of the nation's vegetables, producing 19% of its poultry and 20% of its sugar beets, not to mention 90% of its ornamentals and flowers. I mention that last section because horticulture—the ornamental sector—is an important employer in my constituency. By the way, Lincolnshire, as hon. Friends from further north in the county will know, also processes 70% of the UK's fish. Horticulture and potato crops use 6% of the farm area in greater Lincolnshire, and Lincolnshire has a total agricultural output of more than £2 billion, representing 12% of England's total agricultural output.

The critical point in all this is the quality of the land. Again, it will not have escaped the notice of the House that much of that land is alluvial. The silt, and the peat further inland, makes it prime growing land. Grade 1, 2 or 3a land predominates in the Fens. Other Lincolnshire colleagues in the House tonight will recognise why that matters so much not only to the local economy and to local society, but to the national interest. Food security is not merely an indulgence; it is critically important to the common good.

Aphra Brandreth (Chester South and Eddisbury) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for securing this important debate and for being such an eloquent champion on the issue of food security. My constituency, like his, has a large rural community, and when I speak to farmers it is clear that food security is national security. The previous Government did a great deal on this issue, from the farm to fork summit to the food security index. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to see more from this Government on food security—for instance, legally binding food security targets?

Sir John Hayes: With the perception for which my hon. Friend is already becoming known in the House, she anticipates the next part of my peroration. She represents an area that I know well; it is glorious, and I know now too that it has a glorious new Member of Parliament. The point she highlights is that over recent events, particularly the pandemic and the war in Europe, food security has gone from being a marginal matter—one that people like me raised regularly, but that was seen as rather self-indulgent, because people know I represent an area of the kind I describe and they felt I was merely championing those domestic interests—to a matter that goes well beyond the domestic to one of profound national importance.

[*Sir John Hayes*]

Recent events have shown us the salience of economic resilience. We need to be sure that not only in times of crisis, but in other times, we can withstand the shocks that are the inevitable consequence of human circumstances and human frailties. Making our country more resilient in those circumstances has become a national imperative. I am delighted to say that, in what I hope we can all agree is a post-liberal age, the issue of food security, far from being marginal, has become mainstream. The Minister is an old parliamentary friend, having shadowed me—with great style, if I may say so—when I was a Transport Minister. I happen to know that he shares my view about salience; I therefore anticipate his response with enthusiasm bordering on glee.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend undertake to continue to share his insights into food security with the Labour party, which has no particular history in that respect? Indeed, its Front-Bench team consists of a Secretary of State from Croydon, a Minister of State from Cambridge and a couple of others from Hull and Coventry. They know little of country ways; they know little of the importance of food security. I hope that my right hon. Friend, in his charming and constructive way, will ensure that the Labour party, and particularly its Ministers, learn from his great knowledge.

Sir John Hayes: I will hear nothing negative said about Cambridge, given my connection with King's College; I have never knowingly been to Croydon, so I cannot comment on it. What is certainly true is that this goes beyond party politics. My right hon. Friend is right to emphasise that any responsible Government would recognise that the salience of the matter has changed, as I have set out. We have been through some difficult times in recent years, and they have concentrated minds in a way that might not otherwise have happened.

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

Sir John Hayes: I will happily give way so that the hon. Gentleman can make one of his rare interventions in the House.

Jim Shannon: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. The issues that he has outlined also apply in my constituency, where agriculture is really important: it creates some 3,500 jobs in the factories. I live on a farm—I declare an interest as a member of the Ulster Farmers' Union—and I well understand farming issues.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the strategy that he hopes to see here at Westminster must encompass all the regions of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? If we work together with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, we can make a food strategy that works for us all. Does he agree that that is the best way forward?

Sir John Hayes: This is a kingdom-wide priority, as I have made clear, so the hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the issues in his part of our United Kingdom. However, I will return to Lincolnshire, if I may.

Over 90% of fens farmland is grade 1 or 2 quality. That is interesting in itself, given that grades 1 and 2 cover about 21% of all farmland nationally, while grade 3a

covers a further 21%. Disturbingly, since 2010 my region has lost 3,232 hectares of best and most versatile farmland—the greatest absolute loss within a single region. Worse still, the county that I represent is being targeted for large-scale developments, which are invidious in the light of my point that the common good and the national interest are served by protecting our food security. In Lincolnshire alone there are currently applications for large-scale solar developments equivalent to the size of 62 Hyde Parks, totalling 9,109 hectares or 1.3% of the total land across the county.

Gareth Davies (Grantham and Bourne) (Con) *rose*—

Sir John Hayes: I know that some of those proposed developments are in the constituency of my hon. Friend, to whom I am happy to give way.

Gareth Davies: In setting out our concerns, my right hon. Friend speaks not just for South Holland and The Deepings, but for the whole of Lincolnshire. Just before the general election, a written ministerial statement set out several provisions and thoughts about the problems that he describes. It specifically mentioned Lincolnshire and the issue of geographical clustering. Does he share my disappointment that the new Labour Government have not committed to those provisions and those statements?

Sir John Hayes: I anticipate disappointment, but I would not go so far as to say I share it. My hon. Friend has been a resolute champion for his constituents in respect of both food security and resisting developments that they simply do not want. If we believe in the devolution of power and in empowering communities to have a greater say in their futures, we cannot simultaneously snuff them out when they disagree with Government priorities—ignore them and disregard their perfectly proper concerns. That is something that my hon. Friend would never do. Where I disagree with him is that I have hope. There are those who will say that the new Minister is not up to the job, but I do not agree: I have worked with him previously, and I know that he is a diligent and decent man who will take these matters very seriously. I would not want to entirely write off the prospect that we will make an argument that is sufficiently persuasive to affect Government policy, even if we cannot change it entirely.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in a situation where there are competing priorities between environmental stewardship, food production and house building, there needs to be clarity from the Government about how they evaluate and prioritise the relative distribution of the high-quality land that my right hon. Friend has spoken about? Without some real teeth around what food security means through national security legislation, there is a wide range of interpretations that leave the cause he is speaking to in a vulnerable position.

Sir John Hayes: This is why the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Bourne (Gareth Davies) was so powerful, because, as my right hon. Friend has just said, there are competing imperatives. Energy security and food security must not be allowed to contradict one another; both can be pursued with the right approach and with a sensitive treatment of where

different applications are located. My argument tonight is that that sensitivity—that precision—is not currently prevailing. Indeed, the scale of the applications we are talking about in Lincolnshire alone is over 2,000 acres in some cases, eating up vast swathes of highly productive agricultural land. Once that land is eaten up, one suspects it will never return to agricultural production.

There is a myth about wind turbines. Those who have been in this House for a long time and those who followed my career even before they became Members of this House, as I know many did, will remember that I have been campaigning against onshore wind since the time I got to this place. That is not only because of the aesthetics of onshore wind—as all men and women of taste would acknowledge, they are grim—but because the concrete used to anchor the wind turbines will never leave the ground, even when they have ceased to serve their purpose. Nobody seriously believes that there will be a commercial interest in removing that concrete, which will fill valuable growing land—spoil the soil, if I can turn a phrase that might last and make an impression on you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and on others too.

The issue is the Government taking forward their priorities in a way that is consistent but, as I said before, also sensitive to the imperative of food security alongside that of energy security. There are 14 solar applications in Lincolnshire constituencies that are nationally significant infrastructure projects—by definition, those are large projects. In other words, more than 50% of nationally proposed solar plants are in Lincolnshire, Leicestershire or Rutland, which cannot be sensible. Of course we should be pursuing renewable technologies, but surely solar belongs on buildings. Every large commercial building, every warehouse—they are springing up everywhere—every office block and many more houses could accommodate solar panels and deliver solar power, yet we are allowing developers to make applications on the best growing land in our country, often for no better reason than their own self-interest. I cannot accept that this Minister believes in that, or that he is going to allow it. When he responds, I hope he will say that he will not.

There is another threat facing my constituency, and it has an effect on food security too. That is the immense number of pylons that are proposed—87 miles-worth of huge pylons, along the whole of the east coast, neither wanted nor needed by local people. I say “not wanted” for self-evident reasons, but they are not needed, either, because there are better ways of transmitting power. As Lincolnshire county council has argued, the offshore grid is a much more suitable way of transmitting power. Pylons are yesterday’s technology, yet we face the prospect of them filling the big skies of Lincolnshire. We either care about the glory of our landscape or we are careless of it.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con) *rose—*

Sir John Hayes: I know that my hon. Friend cares about it deeply.

Martin Vickers: On pylons, my right hon. Friend will perhaps recall that on the final day before the election, I held an Adjournment debate on National Grid’s Grimsby to Walpole proposals, and the then Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero, Justin Tomlinson, said he would

like to see a review. Does my right hon. Friend share my hope that the new Government will follow that decision and instigate a review?

Sir John Hayes: I was in the Chamber when my hon. Friend held that debate; I rushed there when I saw his name on the screen, as I so often do. He was right to highlight the National Grid decision-making process, and to play his part in that discussion, as have I and other Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Bourne. I am more hopeful than many that we can persuade National Grid and Ministers to look at other options. Undergrounding is a possibility in the fens, for example, where tall structures have a disproportionate impact on the landscape, but as I said, I think the offshore grid proposed by the county council is perhaps the best way forward.

The last Government published for the first time in 2021 a UK food security report; I hope that this Government will take forward that type of work on a non-partisan basis. They committed to assessing our food security at least every three years, and hosted the Farm to Fork summit in 2023. I hope that this Government will continue in that vein.

The public procurement of UK food is also a pressing priority. I have never really thought that any Government of any colour—and I have been in quite a number of them—really got the issue of public procurement right. I was always told not to say this with civil servants in earshot, because it is like speaking in front of the children, in a way, and it is rather rude, and I had some very good civil servants, but I always felt that civil servants were putting impediments in the way of our using procurement as a tool to deliver national priorities.

Procurement could be used more intelligently to bring about better ends; food procurement is a really good example of that. Why on earth are public bodies not prioritising British food? Why is it that any number of public sector organisations, from the health service to the prisons, from schools to this place and local authorities, are not buying British? Surely we should be buying British to support our country and the jobs that go with food production. I do hope that my “Backing Britain, buying British” campaign will gain support across the Chamber, and when I produce the badges, which will be coming out shortly, I will ask the Minister to wear one with pride.

David Chadwick (Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe) (LD) *rose—*

Sir John Hayes: I see that the hon. Gentleman is gagging for a bite already. I give way to him.

David Chadwick: Last week I was privileged to attend the Royal Welsh show in my constituency of Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe, one of the biggest constituencies in England and Wales. I spoke to many farmers, and top of their list of concerns was the power imbalance between producers and retailers. Will the right hon. Gentleman agree with the Lib Dem manifesto, which called for a strengthening of the Groceries Code Adjudicator to ensure fairness in the supply chain, thereby protecting producers and guaranteeing food security?

Sir John Hayes: I do not make a habit of saying kind things about Liberals of any description, but I am going to say something quite kind to the hon. Gentleman because he is right to draw attention to that code. When I was a Minister in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, as it was, I was instrumental in arguing the case for the Groceries Code Adjudicator. I met the first adjudicator and brought the second, the current incumbent, to my constituency to meet a group of farmers and growers during the last Parliament. The hon. Gentleman is right about the strength of that role, which just proves something that not everyone here will know: even Liberal Democrats sometimes get it right.

In summary, I believe that now is the time for food security. Now is the time, building on the last Government's beginning—it was a belated beginning—to make food security a central tenet of the new Government's priorities. I know the Minister enjoyed good relations with farmers and growers during his period as a shadow Minister—that has been reported to me by my constituents and others—and he will have heard this argument made by them, and not only by us representatives in this place. It is really of vital importance, in the national interest and for the common good that we no longer allow our valuable agricultural land to be used for all kinds of other purposes, and so compromise this country's food security, making us more dependent on imports, more vulnerable, increasing emissions, increasing food miles and damaging local economies. That is not the way forward. Let us make food security matter.

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

7.21 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Daniel Zeichner): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and it is very good to see you in your place.

I thank the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) not only for his very kind words and warm welcome, but for his customarily thoughtful speech, and not least his very comprehensive account of his wonderful county of Lincolnshire and the huge contribution that it makes to our food production. I also thank the other hon. Members who made very thoughtful contributions to the debate.

I cannot tell the House how delighted I am to stand at the Dispatch Box on the Government side of the Chamber for the first time as Minister for food security and rural affairs. The very title is a clear statement of this Government's commitment to rural areas, and as has been said, this Government absolutely recognise that food security is national security. That is why we need a resilient, secure and healthy food system that works with nature, but also supports British farmers. This Government are offering a new deal for farmers to boost rural economic growth and strengthen Britain's food security, and we will set out more details in due course.

Frankly, climate change is one of the most significant threats to our food security. We have seen it this year in the extreme weather events that farmers are having to deal with. It is absolutely the case that taking the difficult decisions now to address climate change will

enhance, rather than threaten, our food security. We have to face up to the challenge of an energy transition to achieve that, and in doing so must plan how we will use land in this country to ensure a proper balance between food security, restoring and preserving nature, and clean energy.

I was interested to hear the observations from Opposition Members after their 14 years of opportunity to do the things that they are now keen to do, but we will pick up on many of their suggestions. Certainly one of the key ones will be to publish a land use framework; that was promised by the previous Government, but there were many delays, and we are now picking that up. It will work in tandem with our spatial energy plan.

I can assure the House that communities will quite rightly continue to have a say on proposals for their area. It is important for this Government that where communities host clean energy infrastructure, they should directly benefit from it. However, we will not get into a position where the clean energy that we need does not get built and the British people end up paying the price.

Credible external estimates suggest that ground-mounted solar used just 0.1% of our land in 2022. The biggest threat to nature, food security and our rural communities is not solar panels or onshore wind; it is the major climate crisis, which itself threatens our best farmland, food production and, indeed, the livelihoods of farmers. The Government will absolutely proceed on the basis not of hearsay and conjecture, but of evidence.

One of the Government's five missions, which I am sure people have heard much about, is our commitment to making Britain a clean energy superpower. That is part of a wider ambition to deliver on existing net zero emissions targets. Farming has a big role to play in contributing to net zero; 70% or so of UK land is used for agriculture, and farmers are custodians of the natural environment. They absolutely work hard to manage their land responsibly while providing the food we all need.

I am glad that there is now consensus around the need for farmers to produce food. There was a curious period a few years ago when it seemed as though food production had somehow been forgotten. I can see the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings nodding wisely because he knows to what I refer, and I am pleased that we have all moved on and can agree on the notion that food production is so important.

Sir John Hayes: The previous Government, albeit belatedly, changed planning guidance to give additional protection to grade 1, 2 and 3a land of the kind that I described. Furthermore, they said that when an energy developer expressed an interest in developing a site—of solar panels, for example—any assessment of the soil should be entirely independent. Those seem to be perfectly reasonable policies—reasonable enough for a reasonable man to accept.

Daniel Zeichner: The right hon. Member tempts me into a level of detail that I am afraid I am not prepared to go into this evening. We are examining all these issues and will come to a considered position. We want to get the balance right and that is what we will do, because the transition to more climate-friendly practices does not need to come at the expense of food production or farm profitability. In our view, net zero can absolutely support economic growth, including by accelerating the

uptake of innovative technologies to increase productivity and efficiency in the agriculture sector. That, in turn, will support net zero food production, the efficient use of land and nature recovery.

Our intention is to work closely on that necessary transition with not just the farming industry, but all stakeholders involved. We will work with farmers to ensure that we avoid imposing unnecessary costs, and—this, I hope, will be welcome to many in the sector—we absolutely guarantee that we will protect farmers from being undercut in trade deals.

The right hon. Member, as I rather anticipated, mentioned solar in particular. As with all major infrastructure projects, there is a rigorous application process, and food production is rightly considered in it. I point hon. Members to the decision letters on these solar projects, which are available on the Planning Inspectorate website. That is the normal procedure in planning decisions. All the documentation will be found there, not just the final decision letters. I hope that makes it clear that all objections, relevant evidence and points raised throughout the planning inquiry are addressed and given weight in coming to a planning decision. I appreciate that the decision letter is a long, complex document, as indeed it should be, given the important issues raised. There is a limit to what I can say, as I am bound by the planning propriety guidance, which is clear that during the legal challenge period, planning Ministers and officials cannot comment on the decision, summarise it or interpret it.

Graham Stuart: Does the Minister see any merit in legislating for a food security target?

Daniel Zeichner: That is under consideration, and we will come back to that in due course. I note that, where appropriate, solar projects can be designed to enable continued livestock grazing. There is also a science of agrivoltaics developing, in which solar is integrated with arable farming in innovative ways. Solar energy can be an important way for farmers to increase their revenue from land less suited to higher-value crop production. There is also evidence that solar can improve biodiversity. We recognise that, sadly, confidence among farmers is at a record low, but this Government want to change that. We look forward to working closely with farmers to strengthen food security, progress the energy transition and boost rural economic growth.

I thank everyone who has contributed to an interesting and informed debate. As ever, most importantly, I thank the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings, and not just for securing the debate today. I am sure the debate will continue, and I look forward to conducting it in the same constructive manner in which we have started it tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

7.29 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 30 July 2024

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Digital Markets: Strategic Market Status Determination

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds): On 30 July 2024 the Department for Business and Trade has published a consultation entitled “DMCCA 2024: consultation on turnover and control regulations”. The consultation will be open for a six-week period and the Government will publish its response afterwards. A copy of the consultation will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and published on gov.uk.

Under the DMCC Act, the Competition and Markets Authority will receive new powers to designate firms exerting significant control over digital markets as having strategic market status in respect of specific digital activities, for which turnover will be an important aspect of the designation assessment.

The Competition and Markets Authority, other relevant decision makers and civil courts will also be empowered to issue significant monetary penalties, up to 10% of global turnover depending on the breach, for non-compliance under the DMCC Act regimes, and up to 5% of global turnover for the road fuels regime.

This consultation seeks views on technical provisions to be made in secondary legislation to set out how turnover of a business should be determined for the purpose of the DMCC Act measures. The consultation includes the detail of each factor required to determine turnover, including: activities to be included in the calculation of turnover; the relevant period and trigger event for the determination of turnover; and the calculation of turnover in relation to financial institutions. How turnover is calculated will affect which firms are designated as having SMS and the statutory maximum values of penalties available for the relevant breaches under the digital markets, competition, road fuel and consumer regimes.

These provisions will support the Competition and Markets Authority, other relevant authorities and the civil courts to calculate turnover-based penalties accurately, fairly and proportionately, and to estimate appropriately for the purposes of SMS designation.

[HCWS44]

Horizon Convictions Redress Scheme

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds): I am today announcing the launch of the Horizon Convictions Redress Scheme, it will be delivered by the Department for Business and Trade.

The Post Office Horizon scandal, which began over 20 years ago, has had a devastating impact on the lives of many postmasters. This scandal is one of the biggest miscarriages of justice in our history.

As a result of the passage of the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Act 2024 and the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Act 2024, hundreds of postmasters in all parts of the UK have now had their wrongful convictions quashed.

The UK Government have been working very closely with both the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to identify those who have had their convictions overturned.

Those who we have identified as being wrongfully convicted will shortly receive a letter. It will confirm that their conviction has been quashed, and it will provide further information on how to access financial redress.

Those who have not received a letter, and believe that they are eligible, will still be able to come forward and register for the Horizon Convictions Redress Scheme.

Victims will be able to choose from two clear options.

They can either accept a fixed settlement of £600,000.

Or they can choose a full claim assessment.

The full claim assessment is designed for cases where the victim believes their losses exceed £600,000 and they wish to have their application fully examined by the Government.

We know that every case will be different, and we fully support the right of every postmaster to choose what is best for them. Recognising that postmasters have suffered immeasurably already, we are ensuring that regardless of the settlement they choose, they will be able to receive a preliminary payment of £200,000.

We recognise, too, that many of these cases stretch far back in time and some individuals may not have all the information at their fingertips to proceed with an application right away.

To help, we are making sure they can access historical data from both the Post Office and HMRC.

From today, victims of this scandal will be able to register and apply for financial redress by visiting www.gov.uk/horizon-convictions-redress-scheme

[HCWS42]

Low Pay Commission Remit

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds): This Government are committed to making work pay. As part of our ambitious agenda, we pledged to update the remit of the Low Pay Commission to formally take account of the cost of living for the first time, and I am pleased to confirm that this has been achieved.

As Members will know, the Government set the minimum wage rates each year following the advice of the LPC. Recommendations are made by the LPC each October for the minimum wage rates that are to apply from the following April, in line with the parameters set out in the annual remit from the Department for Business and Trade. I have written to Baroness Stroud, the chair of the LPC, to set out an updated remit.

Following the cost of living crisis, which has harmed working people in recent months and years, the remit asks the LPC to consider the cost of living for the first time. The remit highlights the need to also consider the impact on business, competitiveness, the labour market and the wider economy. We are ambitious in developing a path towards a genuine living wage, but we know that this path must be backed by evidence and consistent with delivering inclusive growth for workers and businesses.

As part of the Government commitment to a genuine living wage that benefits every adult worker, we also pledged to remove discriminatory age bands. The new remit published this week will take a major step towards this, asking that the Low Pay Commission recommends a national minimum wage rate that should apply to 18 to 20-year-olds from April 2025. This should continue to narrow the gap with the national living wage; we are taking steps year by year in order to achieve a single adult rate. We are committed to achieving a single adult rate, and we will ensure that any impacts on youth employment or participation in education and training are considered carefully as we move towards this.

Since the establishment of the Low Pay Commission, through the National Minimum Wage Act 1998, it has become respected internationally. This Government are proud to confirm our continued commitment to the LPC, and we extend our thanks to the commissioners and the secretariat for their independence, their diligence, and their expertise.

I can confirm that the new remit maintains the request to recommend minimum wage rates for workers above school age but under 18, and for those eligible for the apprentice rate, which should increase as much as is possible without damaging these groups' employment prospects. The remit also asks the LPC to recommend next year's accommodation offset rate.

We recognise the importance of providing sufficient notice of changes to the minimum wage, so the timelines remain unchanged in the new remit. We have asked the LPC to report back by the end of October, and the rates will increase in April 2025.

The Government are also pleased to confirm that this year's remit asks the LPC to continue and expand its cutting-edge research on the impacts of the national living wage and national minimum wage, and in particular its assessment of the impact on groups of low-paid workers with protected characteristics.

This year marked the 25th anniversary of the creation of the minimum wage in the UK. Few would now disagree that it has been one of the most consequential and beneficial economic policy interventions of recent decades. Now is the time to build on this by delivering a genuine living wage, removing unfairness for different age groups, and making work pay.

We look forward to receiving the recommendations and wider advice of the Low Pay Commission in October.

[HCWS43]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Saving Nature

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Steve Reed): Nature in Britain is dying.

Britain is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world.

Our wildlife is in crisis, faced by the perfect storm of habitat loss and fragmentation, climate change, pollution, resource consumption pressures and invasive species. Nearly half of our bird species and a quarter of our mammal species are at risk of extinction. Biodiversity has been declining at an unprecedented rate.

Our precious national parks and national landscapes are in decline. Our rivers, lakes and seas are awash with toxic sewage and pollution.

We are behind on our tree planting and woodland targets. Much of what we already have is under-managed and in poor condition, missing out on the benefits we need for carbon, nature and people.

Air pollution continues to plague our towns and cities, and remains the biggest environmental risk to human health, damaging biodiversity, our waterways and crop yields.

Household recycling rates have remained largely static since 2015. Beach litter remains abundant on UK coastlines, with plastic items constituting over 88% of the total litter collected. We have over 1 million fly-tipping incidents in England a year.

We feel this destruction of nature wherever we live: fewer birds in the garden, more of our land under water, people getting sick after swimming in our lakes and sea, and birds and mammals killed by toxic plastic pollutants.

Parents now worry their children and grandchildren may never experience the beauty of the natural world as previous generations have.

And why did we get into this situation? Because the last Government irresponsibly positioned themselves against nature. They let water companies pay out bonuses while our rivers have been filled with sewage.

It is evident that the previous Government failed to protect and restore nature. The previous environment improvement plan did not focus enough on delivery of our Environment Act targets.

That is why today we begin to chart a new course.

Today I announce that the Government will launch a rapid review of the environmental improvement plan to complete before the end of the year to make sure it is fit for purpose to deliver our ambitious targets to save nature.

We will leave no stone unturned in this effort, as we embark on an intensive programme of engagement with stakeholders across the environment and nature, farming, resources and waste and water sectors, working hand in glove with businesses, local authorities and civil society across the country.

This new Government will introduce a new, statutory plan to protect and restore our natural environment, with delivery plans to meet each of our ambitious targets. This includes those on water, circular economy and air quality as well as delivering against the target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030.

Without the advice, experience, evidence and actions of the voluntary and private sectors, farmers and landowners, wider public bodies and the public itself, we recognise that we will not meet our targets.

That is why we will work in a spirit of openness and collaboration on this review, ensuring that experts and stakeholders have a say in plans and play a vital role in its delivery.

Nature underpins everything, but we stand at a moment in history when nature needs us to defend it.

Without nature there is no economy, no food, no health and no society. We human beings are not merely observers of nature, we are an integral part of it, and our future depends on protecting it.

That is why this Government will begin the work of saving it.

[HCWS47]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Adult Social Care Workforce

The Minister for Care (Stephen Kinnock): This Government are being honest about the appalling economic circumstances we inherited, and take seriously their responsibility to help manage down overall fiscal pressures in 2024-25. As a result, we have decided that the adult social care training and development fund proposed by the last Government, decisions around which had been suspended since the announcement of the election, will not be continued.

While the adult social care training and development fund will not be taken forward, we still intend to provide funding for adult social care learning and development, with the budget maintained at the level we spent last year. Further details about how and when this would be administered will be shared in due course. We also confirm that we will continue to develop a care workforce pathway—the new national career structure—for adult social care and that, linked to this, a new level 2 care certificate qualification has been developed and launched. In addition, the commitment to Oliver McGowan mandatory training and supporting the sector to deliver this remains.

We are committed in our support for the adult social care workforce. Our long-term plans will include a new deal for care workers through a fair pay agreement. We will also take steps to create a national care service underpinned by national standards, with the aim of delivering consistency of care across the country.

[HCWS50]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Afghan Resettlement

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Seema Malhotra): In August 2021, following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, the UK undertook a military evacuation from Kabul. This evacuation is known as Operation Pitting.

During Operation Pitting, the UK Government “called forward” a number of people for evacuation. These people were identified as being particularly at risk. They included female politicians, members of the LGBT+ community, women’s rights activists and judges.

Due to the speed and the circumstances surrounding the evacuation, a number of families became separated, and some individuals were evacuated to the UK without all of their immediate family. The Government pledged at the time that there would be a route for separated families to reunite under the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme.

This Government are implementing that commitment and providing a means for families who were separated by the military evacuation from Kabul in August 2021 to be reunited in the UK.

Afghan citizens resettlement scheme pathway 1 stage 2: separated families will open today, Tuesday 30 July. The window to submit an expression of interest will remain open for 3 months until 30 October 2024.

Those who have been resettled in the UK under Afghan citizens resettlement scheme pathway 1 and were evacuated during Operation Pitting without their immediate family members can submit an expression of interest under this pathway. Operation Pitting refers to the military evacuation to the UK from Afghanistan between 13 August and 28 August 2021.

Eligible individuals can submit an expression of interest for:

A spouse or unmarried partner

Their dependent children aged under 18 at the time of the evacuation.

In addition, any children who were evacuated without their parents will be able to submit an expression of interest for their parents and siblings aged under 18 at the time of the evacuation. Additional family members may be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Further information on who is eligible and how to submit an expression of interest will be made available on gov.uk shortly.

[HCWS45]

Legal Migration

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): Migration has always been an important part of the history of our nation. For generations, people have travelled here from all over the world to contribute to our economy, study in our universities, work in our public services and be part of our communities. And British citizens continue to travel across the world to make their homes abroad. This Government recognise and value the contribution legal migration makes to our country and we believe the immigration system needs to be properly controlled and managed.

Under the previous Government, net migration trebled in five years, heavily driven by a big increase in overseas recruitment. This Government are clear that net migration must come down. While we will always benefit from international skills and talent, including to keep us globally competitive, immigration must not be used as an alternative to tackling skills shortages and labour market failures here in the UK. For that reason, we are setting out a new approach.

The Office for National Statistics estimates that net migration in the year to December 2023 was 685,000, compared to 184,000 in the year to December 2019, before the pandemic. Non-EU long-term immigration for work-related reasons increased from 277,000 in the year to December 2022 to 423,000 in the year to December 2023, and work-related reasons replaced study as the main reason for long-term migration.

The number of work visas issued (including to dependants) in the 12 months to 31 March 2024 (605,264) was over three times the number for 2019, prior to the pandemic, and 24% higher than in the 12 months to 31 March 2023 (486,614). That reflects a failure over many years to tackle skills shortages and other problems in the UK labour market, meaning too many sectors have remained reliant on international recruitment, instead of being able to source the skills that they need here at home.

This is why we are setting out a different approach—one that links migration policy and visa controls to skills and labour market policies, so that immigration is not

used as an alternative to training or tackling workforce problems here at home. This approach will be important to enabling delivery of the Government's broader agenda.

The Migration Advisory Committee will work with Skills England, the Industrial Strategy Council and the Labour Market Advisory Board as part of a new framework to support a coherent approach to skills, migration and labour market policy. For us to deliver on the Government's missions, we will need to tackle labour market challenges in all parts of the United Kingdom, so these bodies will engage and work closely with the devolved Governments.

The Education Secretary has announced the launch of Skills England, which will bring together the fractured skills landscape, create a shared national ambition to boost the nation's skills, and lead the work on identifying sector skills gaps and plans.

The Chancellor has convened the first growth mission board, and the Work and Pensions Secretary has set out a plan to bring people back into the labour market, supported by a new labour market advisory board to help drive change and get Britain working again. The King's Speech highlighted the intention of setting up the industrial strategy council, which will engage business and focus on key sectors to take advantage of new opportunities that can promote growth right across the UK.

Alongside the development of these plans and the establishment of the new framework, the Home Office will strengthen the Migration Advisory Committee, so that it can highlight key sectors where labour market failures mean that there is over-reliance on international recruitment.

As a first step, I am commissioning the MAC to review the reliance of key sectors on international recruitment. In particular, I am asking the MAC to look at IT and engineering—occupations that have consistently, over a decade or more, been included on shortage occupation lists and relied on significant levels of international recruitment. These occupational groups are in the top 10 occupational groups in the UK that have the highest percentage of their workforce made up of new foreign workers who have been issued visas.

We will also consider ways to strengthen the Migration Advisory Committee, including through the deployment of additional Home Office staff to its secretariat, ensuring it is able to work more strategically to forecast future trends, while continuing to review and provide independent, evidence-based recommendations on key areas of the immigration system.

A number of changes to the system were made earlier this year, including:

Restricting most overseas students from bringing family members to the UK.

Restricting the ability of care workers and senior care workers to bring dependants with them and requiring all care providers sponsoring migrants to register with the Care Quality Commission.

Increasing the general salary threshold for those arriving on skilled worker visas by 48% from £26,200 to £38,700.

Abolishing the 20% going rate discount, so that employers can no longer pay migrants less than UK workers in shortage occupations.

This Government support these changes and will continue to implement them.

The family immigration rules, including the minimum income requirement, need to balance a respect for family life with ensuring that the economic wellbeing of the UK is maintained. To help ensure that we reach the right balance and have a solid evidence base for any change, I will commission the MAC to review the financial requirements in the family immigration rules. The minimum income requirement is currently set at £29,000, and there will be no further changes until the MAC review is complete.

On 23 May, the previous Government announced a series of measures, building on the recommendations of the Migration Advisory Committee, to reduce the potential for abuse on the student and graduate visa routes. This Government strongly value the economic and academic contribution that international students make to this country, including those here on the graduate visa, and that is why it is important to ensure that the system is effective and not open to abuse. Therefore, we will continue with the previously announced measures to ensure that international students, the institutions they are coming to study at and the immigration system as a whole are protected from those who wish to exploit it—working closely with DFE to ensure that the measures are effective.

[HCWS51]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Building the Homes We Need

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Angela Rayner): The Government have today set out the first major steps in their plan to build the homes this country needs.

Our manifesto was clear: sustained economic growth is the only route to improving the prosperity of our country and the living standards of working people. Our approach to delivering this growth will focus on three pillars: stability, investment and reform. But this growth must also be generated for everyone, everywhere across the country, and so nowhere is decisive reform needed more urgently than in housing.

We are in the middle of the most acute housing crisis in living memory. Home ownership is out of reach for too many; the shortage of houses drives high rents; and too many are left without access to a safe and secure home.

That is why today I have set out reforms to fix the foundations of our housing and planning system, taking the tough choices needed to improve affordability, turbocharge growth and build the 1.5 million homes we have committed to deliver over the next five years.

Restoring and raising housing targets

Planning is principally a local activity, and it is right that decisions about what to build and where should reflect local views. But we are also clear that these decisions should be about how to deliver the housing an area needs, not whether to do so at all, and these needs cannot be met without identifying enough land through local plans.

We are therefore reversing last year's changes, which loosened the requirement for local authorities to plan for and meet their housing needs, and we are going further still by mandating that the standard method be used as the basis for determining local authorities' housing requirements in all circumstances.

A mandated method alone is, however, insufficient to deliver on our scale of ambition, and the current standard method is not up to the job. It relies on decade-old population projections and an arbitrary urban uplift that focuses too heavily on London, and it lacks ambition across large parts of the country. We are therefore updating the standard method and raising the overall targets from around 300,000 to approximately 370,000. The new method provides a stable and balanced approach. It requires local authorities to plan for numbers of homes that are proportionate to the size of existing communities, by taking 0.8% of existing stock as a floor, which is broadly consistent with the average rate of housing growth over recent years. It also then incorporates an uplift based on how out of step house prices are with local incomes, using an affordability multiplier of 0.6%, up from 0.25% in the previous method.

This approach means that there is no need for any artificial caps or uplifts: the previous cap will no longer apply, and the urban uplift will be removed. With a stable number, reflective of local needs and the way housing markets operate, we will stop debates about the right number of homes for which to plan, ensure targets reflect the way towns and cities actually work, and support authorities to get on with plan making.

Building in the right places

If we have targets that tell us how many homes we need to build, we next need to make sure we are building in the right places. The first port of call for development should be brownfield land, and we are proposing some changes today to support more brownfield development: being explicit in policy that the default answer to brownfield development should be yes; expanding the current definition of brownfield land to include hardstanding and glasshouses; reversing the change made last December that allowed local character to be used in some instances as a reason to reduce densities; and in addition, strengthening expectations that plans should promote an uplift in density in urban areas.

It is however also clear that brownfield land can only be part of the answer, and will not be enough to meet our housing needs, which is why a green belt designed for England in the middle of the 20th century now must be updated for an England in the middle of the 21st. The green belt today accounts for more land in England than land that is developed—around 13%, compared to 10%. Yet as many assessments show, large areas of the green belt have little ecological value and are inaccessible to the public. Much of this area is better described as grey belt: land on the edge of existing settlements or roads, and with little aesthetic or environmental value. It is also true that development already happens on the green belt, but in a haphazard and non-strategic way, leading to unaffordable houses being built without the amenities that local people need.

This Government are therefore committed to ensuring the green belt serves its purpose, and that means taking a more strategic approach to green-belt release. We will start by requiring local authorities to review their green-belt boundaries where they cannot meet their identified housing, commercial or other development needs. There will be a sequential approach, with authorities asked to give consideration first to brownfield land, before moving on to grey-belt sites and then to higher performing green-belt land, recognising that this sequence may not make sense in all instances, depending on the specific

opportunities available to individual local authorities. We are defining grey-belt land through reference to the specific reasons for which the green belt exists, so that it captures sites that are making a limited contribution to the green belt's purposes, with additional guidance set out in the consultation. Existing protections for land covered by environmental designations, for example national parks and sites of special scientific interest, will be maintained, and there will be a safety valve to ensure green belt is not released where it would fundamentally undermine the function of the green belt across the area of a local plan as a whole.

But we cannot wait for all release to come through plan making. Where authorities are under-performing—be that lacking a sufficient land supply or failing to deliver enough homes, as measured by the housing delivery test—we will therefore also make it clear that applications for sites not allocated in a plan must be considered where they relate to brownfield and grey-belt land. This route will maintain restrictions on the release of wider green-belt land, meaning it would remain possible for other green-belt land to be released outside the plan-making process where “very special circumstances” exist, but such cases would remain exceptional. We are also strengthening the general presumption in favour of sustainable development by clarifying the circumstances in which it applies, and introducing new safeguards to make clear that its application cannot justify poor-quality development.

Whenever green-belt land is released, it must benefit both communities and nature. That is why we have today translated our golden rules into policy, meaning that development on green belt will need to: target at least 50% of the homes on site as being affordable for housing developments; be supported by the necessary infrastructure, such as schools, GP surgeries and transport links; and provide accessible green space.

To maximise the value delivered to communities, we are making it clear that negotiations on viability grounds can take place only where there is clear justification. This will enable fair compensation for landowners, but not inflated values. If we see quality schemes come forward that promise to deliver in the public interest, but individual landowners are unwilling to sell at a fair price, bodies such as Homes England, local authorities and combined authorities should take a proactive role in the assembly of land to help bring forward those schemes, supported where necessary by compulsory purchase powers. If necessary, my Ministers and I will consider the use of directions, including by local authorities and Homes England, to secure “no hope value” compensation where appropriate and justified in the public interest.

Moving to strategic planning

These changes will enable a significant amount of land to come forward. I nonetheless recognise that delivering on mandatory and higher housing targets and releasing the right parts of the green belt will not always be straightforward. As such, local authorities will be expected to make every effort to allocate land in line with their housing need as per the standard method, and will need to demonstrate that they have done so at examination of their plan. There are, however, instances where local constraints on land and delivery—such as significant national park, protected habitats and flood risk areas—can make it difficult for an authority to

meet its full target, and the current system is not sufficiently effective in enabling need to be shared between authorities in such instances.

That is why the Government are clear that housing need in England cannot be met without planning for growth on a larger than local scale, and that it will be necessary to introduce effective new mechanisms for cross-boundary strategic planning. This will play a vital role in delivering sustainable growth and addressing key spatial issues, including meeting housing needs, delivering strategic infrastructure, building the economy, and improving climate resilience. Strategic planning will also be important in planning for local growth and local nature recovery strategies.

We will therefore take the steps necessary to enable universal coverage of strategic planning within this Parliament, which we will formalise in legislation. This model will support elected mayors in overseeing the development and agreement of spatial development strategies for their areas. The Government will also explore the most effective arrangements for developing SDSs outside of mayoral areas, so that we can achieve universal coverage in England, recognising that we will need to consider both the appropriate geographies to use to cover functional economic areas, and the right democratic mechanisms for securing agreement. Across all areas, these arrangements will encourage partnership working, but we are determined to ensure that, whatever the circumstances, SDSs can be concluded and adopted. The Government will work with local leaders and the wider sector to consult on, develop and test these arrangements in the months ahead before legislation is introduced, including consideration of the capacity and capabilities needed, such as geospatial data and digital tools.

While this is the right approach in the medium-term, we do not want to wait where there are opportunities to make progress now. We are therefore also taking three immediate steps:

First, in addition to the continued operation of the duty to cooperate in the current system, we are strengthening the position in the NPPF on co-operation between authorities, in order to ensure that the right engagement is occurring on the sharing of unmet housing need and other strategic issues where plans are being progressed in the short-term;

Secondly, we will work in concert with mayoral combined authorities to explore extending existing powers to develop an SDS; and

Thirdly, we intend to identify priority groupings of other authorities where strategic planning—and in particular the sharing of housing needs—would provide particular benefits, setting a clear expectation of co-operation that we will help to structure and support, and using powers of intervention as and where necessary.

Delivering more affordable homes

Although increasing supply will be an essential part of improving affordability, we must also go further in building a greater share of genuinely affordable homes. That is why the Government are committed to the biggest growth in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation. As of 2023, there were 3.8 million social rent homes, 200,000 fewer than the 4 million that existed in 2013. According to revised figures we are publishing today, only 110,000 to 130,000 homes are now due to be delivered under the affordable homes programme, down from an aspiration of up to 180,000 when it was launched. On current plans, delivery is due to decline. We will stop that happening. In the first instance, this Government's

aspiration is to ensure that, in the first full financial year of this Parliament—2025-26—the number of social rent homes is rising, rather than falling.

We are therefore proposing a number of changes in planning policy designed to support the delivery of affordable homes: removing the prescriptive requirements that currently tie local authorities' hands with respect to particular types of home ownership products, and allowing them to judge the right mix of affordable homes for ownership and for rent that will meet the needs of their communities; setting a clear expectation that housing needs assessments must consider the needs of those requiring social rent homes, and that local authorities should specify their expectations on social rent delivery as part of broader affordable housing policies; and testing whether there is more that could be done to support developments that are predominately or exclusively affordable tenures, in particular social rent.

It is also evident that mixed use sites, which can comprise a variety of ownership and rental tenures including rented affordable housing and build to rent, provide a range of benefits, creating diverse communities and supporting timely build out rates. Our changes today mean that local authorities will need to take a positive approach to mixed tenure sites through both plans and decisions.

Alongside our reforms to the planning system, we have today also confirmed a range of new flexibilities for councils and housing associations, with more to follow in the coming months. The first relate to the affordable homes programme, which provides grant funding to support new homes for social rent, affordable rent and shared ownership.

We know that, particularly outside London, almost all the funding for the 2021 to 2026 programme is contractually committed. We have asked Homes England and the Greater London Authority to maximise the number of social rent homes in allocating the remaining funding.

In London, there have been significant delays, including from changed regulations on building safety and many other pressures, which mean that even existing contracts are at risk of falling through because they are no longer deliverable under the current terms. We have therefore agreed with the Greater London Authority new flexibilities to the existing programme so that they can unlock delivery in London, with changes to deadlines for homes completing and tenure mix to enable some intermediate rent homes.

The second flexibilities relate to right to buy. Over the last five years, there has been an average of 9,000 council right to buy sales annually, but only 5,000 replacements each year. Right to buy provides an important route for council tenants to buy their own home. But the discounts have escalated in recent years and councils have been unable to replace the homes they need to move families out of temporary accommodation.

The Government have therefore acted on the commitment in the manifesto and started to review the increased right to buy discounts introduced in 2012, on which we will bring forward more details and secondary legislation to implement changes in the autumn. The Government will also review right to buy more widely, including looking at eligibility criteria and protections for new homes, and will bring forward a consultation in the autumn.

More immediately, we are increasing the flexibilities on how councils can use their right to buy receipts. The Government will remove the caps on the percentage of replacements delivered as acquisitions and the percentage cost of a replacement home that can be funded using right to buy receipts, and councils will be given the ability to combine right to buy receipts with section 106 contributions. These flexibilities will be in place for an initial 24 months, subject to review. I encourage councils to make the best use of these flexibilities to maximise right to buy replacements and to achieve a good balance between acquisitions and new builds.

To further empower and enable councils to build their own stock of affordable homes, I am today confirming our commitment to invest £450 million in councils across England under the third round of the local authority housing fund. This will create over 2,000 affordable homes for some of the most vulnerable families in society, including families currently living in cramped and unsuitable bed and breakfasts, and Afghan families fleeing war and persecution.

In addition to the actions we are taking today, we are committed to setting out details of future Government investment in social and affordable housing at the spending review, so that social housing providers can plan for the future and help deliver the biggest increase in affordable housebuilding in a generation. We will work with Mayors and local areas to consider how funding can be used in their areas and support devolution. The Government also recognise that councils and housing associations need support to build their capacity and make a greater contribution to affordable housing supply, which is why we will set out plans at the next fiscal event to give councils and housing associations the rent stability they need to be able to borrow and invest in both new and existing homes, while also ensuring that there are appropriate protections for both existing and future social housing tenants.

We will also engage with the sector and set out more detail in the autumn on our plans to raise standards on quality, and strengthen residents' voices. The Government are committed to introducing Awaab's law to the social rented sector, and will set out more detail and bring forward the secondary legislation to implement this in due course.

Building infrastructure to grow the economy

Alongside building more houses, we also need to build more of the infrastructure that underpins modern life, so today we are taking what are just the first steps in reforming how we deliver the critical infrastructure the country needs.

With respect to commercial development, the Government are determined to do more to support those sectors which will be the engine of the UK's economy in the years ahead. We will therefore change policy to make it easier to build growth-supporting infrastructure such as laboratories, gigafactories, data centres, electricity grid connections and the networks that support freight and logistics.

Alongside consulting on revisions to planning policy, the Government are also seeking views on whether we should expand the nationally significant infrastructure projects regime to include these types of projects, and if so, what thresholds should be set for their inclusion.

Turning to green energy, boosting the delivery of renewables will be critical to meeting the Government's commitment to zero carbon electricity generation by 2030. That is why on this Government's fourth day in office we ended the ban on onshore wind, with that position formally reflected in the update to the national planning policy framework published today. We must however go much further, which is why we are proposing to: boost the weight that planning policy gives to the benefits associated with renewables; bring larger scale onshore wind projects back into the nationally significant infrastructure projects regime; and change the threshold for solar development to reflect developments in solar technology.

We are also testing whether to bring a broader definition of water infrastructure into the scope of the nationally significant infrastructure projects process, providing a clear planning route for new strategic water infrastructure to be delivered on time.

And recognising the role that planning plays in the broader needs of communities, we are proposing a number of changes to: support new, expanded or upgraded public service infrastructure; take a vision-led approach to transport planning, challenging the now outdated default assumption of automatic traffic growth; promote healthy communities, in particular tackling the scourge of childhood obesity; and boost the provision of much needed facilities for early-years childcare and post-16 education.

Supporting local planning

These reforms to planning policy make it more important that every local authority has a development plan in place. The plan making system is the right way to plan for growth and environmental enhancement, ensuring local leaders and their communities come together to agree on the future of their areas. Once in place, and kept up to date, local plans provide the stability and certainty that local people and developers want to see our planning system deliver. But too many areas do not have up to date local plans, just a third of plans have been reviewed and updated in the past five years. In the absence of a plan, development will come forward on a piecemeal basis, with much less public engagement and fewer guarantees that it is the best outcome for communities. That is why the Government's goal is for universal coverage of ambitious local plans as quickly as possible.

In pursuit of that goal, we therefore propose to take a pragmatic approach to the interaction between the changes we have set out today, and the fact that local authorities across England will have local plans at various stages of development. In practice, this means that:

for plans at examination, allowing them to continue, although where there is a significant gap between the plan and the new local housing need figure, we will expect authorities to begin a plan immediately in the new system;

for plans at an advanced stage of preparation (regulation 19), allowing them to continue to examination unless there is a significant gap between the plan and the new local housing need figure, in which case we propose to ask authorities to rework their plans to take account of the higher figure; and

areas at an earlier stage of plan development should prepare plans against the revised version of the national planning policy framework and progress as quickly as possible.

While this will delay the adoption of some plans, it is important to balance keeping plans flowing to adoption with making sure they plan for sufficient housing. The Government also recognises that going back and increasing housing numbers will create additional work,

which is why we will provide financial support to those authorities asked to do this. While I hope the need will not arise, I will not hesitate to use my powers of intervention should it be necessary to drive progress, including taking over an authority's plan making directly. The consultation we have published today sets out corresponding proposals to amend the local plan intervention criteria.

We will also empower inspectors to take the tough decisions they need to at examination, by being clear that they should not be devoting significant time and energy during an examination to "fix" a deficient plan. The length of examinations has become increasingly elongated, with the average going from 65 weeks in 2016 to 134 weeks in 2022. I have therefore instructed the planning inspectorate on my expectations for how examinations will be conducted, which will in turn mean that Inspectors can focus their effort on those plans that are capable of being found sound and which can be adopted quickly.

More broadly, the Government know how important it will be to bolster capacity, capability and frankly morale in planning departments up and down the country. Skilled, professional planning officers are agents of change and drivers of growth, playing a crucial role in delivering the homes and infrastructure this country needs. Today we are therefore looking to build on the manifesto commitment to recruit 300 new planning officers by consulting on increasing fees for householder applications, which for too long have been held well below cost recovery levels, constraining planning departments in the process. Moving to what we estimate is a cost recovery level of £528 would still be low when compared to other professional fees associated with an application, and is estimated to represent less than 1% of the average overall costs of carrying out a development, with homeowners also benefiting from a range of permitted development rights which allow them to improve and extend their homes without the need to apply for planning permission.

In the medium term, the Government want to see planning services put on a more sustainable footing, which is why we are consulting on whether to use the Planning and Infrastructure Bill to allow local authorities to set their own fees, better reflecting local costs and reducing financial pressures on local authority budgets.

Finally, in demanding more of others, I am clear that we as Ministers must demand more of ourselves. I have already said that when my Ministers and I intervene in the planning system, the benefit of development will be a central consideration, and that we will not hesitate to call in an application or recover an appeal where the potential gain for the regional and national economies warrants it. Today I can confirm that we will also be marking our own homework in public, reporting against the 13-week target for turning around ministerial planning decisions.

First step of a bigger plan

The actions we are taking today will get us building, but they represent only a downpayment on this Government's ambitions.

As announced in the King's Speech, we will introduce a Planning and Infrastructure Bill later in the first Session, which will: modernise planning committees by introducing a national scheme of delegation that focuses their efforts on the applications that really matter, and places more trust in skilled professional planners to do

the rest; enable local authorities to put their planning departments on a sustainable footing; further reform compulsory purchase compensation rules to ensure that what is paid to landowners is fair but not excessive; streamline the delivery process for critical infrastructure; and provide any necessary legal underpinning to ensure we can use development to fund nature recovery where currently both are stalled.

We will consult on the right approach to strategic planning, in particular how we structure arrangements outside of mayoral combined authorities, considering both the right geographies and democratic mechanisms.

We will say more imminently about how we intend to deliver on our commitment to build a new generation of new towns. These will include large-scale new communities built on greenfield land and separated from other nearby settlements, but also a larger number of urban extensions and urban regeneration schemes that will work with the grain of development in any given area.

And because we know that the housing crisis cannot be fixed overnight, the Government will in the coming months publish a long-term housing strategy, alongside the spending review, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced yesterday. These are the right reforms for the decade of renewal the country so desperately needs. In every area, we will endeavour to make changes with the input and support of the sector, but we will not be looking for the lowest common denominator answer, and we will not be deterred by those who seek to stand in the way of our country's future.

There is no time to waste. It is time to get on with building 1.5 million homes. A copy of the consultation on the national planning policy framework and associated documents will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses, alongside an update on targets for the 2021 to '26 affordable homes programme.

[HCWS48]

Local Audit Backlog

The Minister of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Jim McMahon): Local authorities and other local bodies, including police, fire, transport and waste authorities, as well as national parks, provide vital public services to local communities. Effective local audit ensures transparency and accountability for public money spent on these vital services, and builds public confidence.

The Government have inherited a broken local audit system in England. This is evidenced by a significant backlog of outstanding unaudited accounts. Last year, just 1% of councils and other local bodies published audited accounts on time. The backlog is likely to increase again to around 1,000 later this year, and will continue to rise further without decisive action. This is not acceptable, and it cannot continue.

This Government's manifesto committed to overhaul the local audit system to enable taxpayers to get better value for money. A growing backlog will severely hamper necessary fundamental reforms to repair the system, and will continue to undermine local accountability and governance. We must act now to get the house in order and to rebuild the system so that it is fit, legal, and decent, and the public have an effective early warning system.

This statement outlines immediate actions the Government—together with the Financial Reporting Council, the National Audit Office, and organisations in the wider system—are taking, which are designed to address the backlog and put local audit on a sustainable footing. The previous Government launched a welcome consultation on this issue in February. Despite a lack of action, there was clear support for the core elements of the approach to clearing the backlog. All key local audit organisations support these bold measures, recognise their exceptional nature, and continue to share the conviction that this urgent and decisive action is needed to reset the system and repair the foundations of local government.

Local authorities and other local bodies, alongside their auditors, are our partners in this plan to restore a system of high-quality and timely financial reporting and audit, while managing the impact of this in a sustainable way. I commend the commitment of local finance teams and auditors in their work to date.

Proposed secondary legislation

I intend to lay secondary legislation when parliamentary time allows, and at the point at which the comptroller and auditor general requests, I will also lay a new code of audit practice, again subject to parliamentary time. Taken together, these measures aim to facilitate a return to timely, purposeful audits of local body accounts. The secondary legislation would amend the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 to set a series of backstop dates.

The first backstop date would clear the backlog of unaudited accounts up to and including 2022-23, but given the size of the audit backlog, it is unlikely that all outstanding audits will be completed in full ahead of this date. The Government recognise that this is likely to have unfortunate consequences for the system in the short term, and have been forced to take this difficult decision due to the backlog we inherited. This Government is determined, however, to make the tough choices necessary to begin rebuilding the foundations of local government. Where auditors have been unable to complete audits, they will issue a “disclaimed” or “modified” audit opinion. Auditors are likely to issue hundreds of “disclaimed” audit opinions and disclaimed opinions will likely continue for some bodies for a number of years.

The proposed legislation will include five further backstop dates up to and including financial year 2027-28 to allow full assurance to be rebuilt over several audit cycles. It is the aspiration of the Government and key local audit system partners that, in the public interest, local audit recovers as early in this five-year period as possible. This means disclaimed opinions driven by backstop dates should, in most cases, be limited to the next two years, up to and including the 2024-25 backstop date of 27 February 2026, with only a small number of exceptional cases, due to specific individual circumstances, continuing thereafter. The proposed backstop dates are:

Financial years up-to-and-including 2022-23: 13 December 2024
 Financial year 2023-24: 28 February 2025
 Financial year 2024-25: 27 February 2026
 Financial year 2025-26: 31 January 2027
 Financial year 2026-27: 30 November 2027
 Financial year 2027-28: 30 November 2028

While there will be modified and disclaimed opinions, auditors’ other statutory duties—including to report on value for money arrangements, to make statutory recommendations and issue public interest reports—remain a high priority. Our Government will make that crystal clear.

For financial years 2024-25 to 2027-28, the date by which category 1 bodies should publish “draft” (unaudited) accounts will change from 31 May to 30 June following the financial year to which they relate. This will give those preparing accounts more time to ensure they are high-quality accounts. This in turn will benefit auditors while still ensuring publication shortly after financial year end.

The proposed legislation will outline the following scenarios in which bodies may be exempt: where auditors are considering a material objection; where recourse to the court could be required; or from 2023-24, where the auditor is not yet satisfied with the body’s value for money arrangements. Where such an exemption exists, the legislation would include a requirement to publish the audit opinion as soon as practicable. For transparency, if a body is exempt, they would be required to publish an explanation of their exemption at the time of a backstop date.

Bodies that are non-exempt but have failed to comply with a backstop date will be required to publish an explanation, to send a copy of this to the Secretary of State, to facilitate scrutiny, and publish audited accounts as soon as practicable. The Government also intend to publish a list of bodies and auditors that do not meet the proposed backstop dates, which will make clear where “draft” (unaudited) accounts have also not been published. I intend to keep this under close review and may explore further mechanisms to take appropriate action, should reasons given be inadequate.

As previously committed to, the FRC and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales will not carry out routine inspections of local audits for financial years up to and including 2022-23, unless there is a clear case in the public interest to do so.

Communications to support local bodies and auditors

There will be extensive communications and engagement on these measures, to make clear the necessity of these steps and emphasise the context for modified or disclaimed opinions. Local bodies should not be unfairly judged based on disclaimed or modified opinions, caused by the introduction of backstop dates that are largely beyond their control. Auditors will be expected to provide clear reasons for the issuing of such opinions to mitigate the potential reputational risk that local bodies may face. We will work with partners to provide communications support to the system.

Guidance for auditors would be published by the Comptroller and Auditor General and endorsed by the FRC, confirming that there are no contradictions to the requirements or the objectives of International Standards on Auditing (UK). A proportionate approach is required and all system partners including the FRC, NAO and auditors, are aware that this is the Government’s objective. The FRC’s and ICAEW’s regulatory activity would consider auditors’ adherence to the code and whether proper regard has been given to the statutory guidance.

Audit fees

Issuing a disclaimed or modified audit opinion and a subsequent return to being able to fully complete audits will require differing levels of work by auditors. Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd will set scale fees and determine fee variations where the auditor undertakes substantially more or less work than assumed by the scale fee and will consult with bodies where appropriate. In doing so PSAA will apply the following principles: if auditors have worked in good faith to meet the requirements of the code of audit practice in place at the time the work was conducted—and have reported on work that is no longer required—then they are due the appropriate fee for the work done, and the body is due to pay the applicable fee, including where there is a modified or disclaimed opinion. Conversely, if an auditor has collected audit fees in part or in full, and the backstop date means that the total work done represents less than the fee already collected, then the auditor must return the balance and refund the body the appropriate amount, this ensures that the bodies pay only for work that has been done and reported.

Conclusion

I recognise that aspects of these proposals are uncomfortable. Given the scale of the failure in the local audit system that this Government inherited, however, we have had to take this difficult decision to proceed. Without this decisive action, the backlog would continue to grow, and the system will move even further away from timely assurance. The secondary legislation I will lay will give effect to these proposals and start to repair the foundations of local governance. Significant reform is needed to overhaul the local audit system to get the house in order and open the books. I will continue to review the evidence, including considering the recommendations of external reviews to date, and will update the House in the autumn on the Government's longer-term plans to fix local audit.

[HCWS46]

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

The financial inheritance this Government have received is extremely challenging. The previous Administration has left a £22 billion public spending gap this year alone, £2.9 billion of which is unfunded transport commitments. Communities up and down the country have been given hope for new transport infrastructure, with no plans or funds to deliver them. This Government will not make that mistake. This Government will rebuild our economic foundations while restoring transparency and public trust.

In recent weeks, the gap between promised schemes and the money available to deliver them has been made clear to me. There has been a lack of openness with the public about the status of schemes, some of which were cancelled or paused by the previous Government, without proper communication to the public.

As the Chancellor informed Parliament, I am commissioning an internal review of the Department for Transport's capital spend portfolio. We will bring in external expertise and move quickly to make recommendations about current and future schemes. This review will support the development of our new long-term strategy for transport, developing a modern and integrated network with people at its heart, and ensuring that transport infrastructure can be delivered efficiently and on time.

I am determined that we build the transport infrastructure to drive economic growth and opportunity in every part of the country, and to deliver value for money for taxpayers. That ambition requires a fundamental reset to how we approach capital projects with public trust, industry confidence and Government integrity at its heart.

[HCWS49]

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