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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**  
(HANSARD)

Thursday 3 September 2026

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The following abbreviations are used to show a Member's party affiliation:

| Abbreviation | Affiliation                        |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| Alliance     | Alliance Party of Northern Ireland |
| Con          | Conservative Party                 |
| DUP          | Democratic Unionist Party          |
| Green        | Green Party of England and Wales   |
| Ind          | Independent*                       |
| Lab          | Labour Party                       |
| Lab/Co-op    | Labour and Co-operative Party      |
| LD           | Liberal Democrat                   |
| PC           | Plaid Cymru                        |
| Reform       | Reform UK                          |
| SDLP         | Social Democratic and Labour Party |
| SNP          | Scottish National Party            |
| TUV          | Traditional Unionist Voice         |
| UUP          | Ulster Unionist Party              |

\*The term “Independent” may denote—

Members who have been elected as Independent candidates without affiliation to a political party; or

Members who have been elected after standing for a political party but no longer have the party Whip in the House of Commons.

# House of Commons

*Thursday 3 September 2026*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Speaker's Statement

**Mr Speaker:** Before we start questions, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the legendary Sir Billy Boston. He was a pioneer in the rugby world, switching codes from union to league, a record try scorer for Wigan, and the second highest all-time scorer of tries. He was a world cup winner for his country and the first ever rugby league player to receive a knighthood. He was known for the BBC documentary "The Rugby Codebreakers". Because he was black he could not play for Wales or for Cardiff. He was an exile who had to come north. May that never happen again. I wish Billy peace in death.

## Oral Answers to Questions

### DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Short-term Lets: Regulation

1. **Joe Powell** (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to improve the regulation of short-term lets. [901155]

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy):** Can I associate myself with your kind words, Mr Speaker, about the legend that is Sir Billy Boston? It was also a real pleasure to hear you say the word "Wigan" in the context of rugby league without choking.

This Government are committed to implementing the regulation of short-term lets. We believe in our communities and in their right to shape their own areas. This regulation is about putting power back into people's hands so that they can shape the right balance between the benefits that tourism brings and the needs of people locally for decent housing.

**Joe Powell:** Over the summer, the abuse of short-term lets in my community has continued with breaches of lease, antisocial behaviour, subletting of private rented properties and social housing, and even short-term lets hosting brothels. We still do not have a way of identifying where these lets are so that enforcement action can be taken, nor do we have a way of implementing London's 90-day cap on lets, so will the Secretary of State please do all she can to make it a priority to tackle these serious harms? Can she tell us when the register will go

live, and will she work with those of us affected and local councils so that we can find solutions for our communities?

**Lisa Nandy:** I assure my hon. Friend that we certainly will. The problem that he points to is a problem across the country. I recognise it in my own constituency of Wigan, where the council has taken decisive action to clamp down on houses in multiple occupation. What we have seen instead is short-term lets springing up to get around the ban, which is causing havoc in local communities. I can reassure my hon. Friend that in his first week in the job the Prime Minister asked me to accelerate this work, and that work is now continuing apace. In any case, the register will be up and running in full by March.

**Sarah Dyke** (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): In rural areas such as Glastonbury and Somerton, the growing number of short-term lets is displacing local families and workers from the rented sector, hollowing out our rural communities. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to make sure that any new regulation protects rural rented stock from being removed from the market?

**Lisa Nandy:** That is precisely why we are bringing forward the measure to introduce a register of short-term lets. We believe that local leaders need to be able to understand what is happening in their local areas and to shape that in order to have the benefits of tourism. Some areas may want to have more short-term lets available to support the tourism industry, but there are other areas, including in the hon. Lady's constituency, where there is a real need for local housing for local people, and local leaders should have the power to provide that.

#### Access to Sport: Poorer Families

2. **Mr Will Forster** (Woking) (LD): What steps she is taking to help make sports more accessible for poorer families. [901156]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock):** Everyone, regardless of background, should have access to quality sporting opportunities. Sport England targets investment towards deprived communities and places with the greatest need. For example, 50% of the awards from its £160 million movement fund have gone to areas ranked in the top 25% for greatest need.

**Mr Forster:** Four of my constituents—Ethan, Harrison, Jude and Lukas—who train at the Martial X Academy in Woking have been selected to represent their country in next month's martial arts world championships. As well as wishing them well, I hope that the Minister will take steps to ensure that the costs that they are having to pay to compete—over £1,000 each—is reduced in future to enable young athletes to represent their country.

**Stephanie Peacock:** I congratulate Ethan, Harrison, Jude and Lukas on their selection to represent England at the martial arts world championships. I am sure that the whole House will want to wish them good luck next month. The Government are committed to ensuring

that people, whatever their postcode, can access quality facilities and enjoy the sports that they love. On international representation specifically, the Government directly support Olympic and Paralympic pathways. For other international opportunities, parents should contact the relevant governing bodies or SportsAid for support and advice. Via Sport England, we provide over £60 million of funding to SportsAid, whose backing the best programme helps talented young athletes overcome financial barriers.

**Gill German** (Clwyd North) (Lab): This summer, Denbigh Town football club did itself proud as the host of four UEFA under-19 championship games, including a Spain versus Germany match that saw record attendance of almost 2,000 spectators. Thanks to significant investment in Central Park, including a £300,000 Cymru Football Foundation grant funded by this Government, not only is the club now match fit to host international games, but it has top-class facilities all year round for the whole community. Does the Minister agree that the inspiration and opportunities that that brings to children from all walks of life are immeasurable? How are the Government ensuring that facilities like those are available across the country?

**Stephanie Peacock:** My hon. Friend talks about the investment from the Government and the football foundation into Central Park. She is right; we know that the thing that is most likely to get young people active in sport is watching live sport. That is why we are so committed to investing in our community facilities.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

**Dame Caroline Dinenage** (Gosport) (Con): I know that the Minister cares deeply about increasing sporting participation, so she must be as disappointed as I am that the Government's rhetoric just does not match the facts. School sport funding has been cut; business rates rises mean that clubs and facilities are raising their participation fees, some by as much as 85%, making them less accessible for the poorest; local authorities are shutting their facilities; and the UK ranks near the bottom of EU expenditure on sport and physical activity. The Government say that this is important, but how can we believe them when existing facilities are shutting faster than they can invest in new ones?

**Stephanie Peacock:** I am grateful to the Chair of the Select Committee for all the work that her Committee does and for its report in the last year on this very issue. On school sport, £1 billion will go in over the next few years. There has been a change: it is revenue, it is capital and it is primary and secondary. However, we have to acknowledge that under the current system, not enough young people are getting active. We are investing £400 million into community facilities, but as our new Prime Minister has said, we absolutely want to go further and do more on sport.

**John Whitby** (Derbyshire Dales) (Lab): Does the Minister recognise the disproportionate impact that the removal of the school sport premium will have on children in small rural schools? Is that a conversation that she is having with the Department for Education?

**Stephanie Peacock:** As my hon. Friend will have heard in my answer to the Chair of the Select Committee, we make no apologies for changing the system. Not enough young people are getting active. As a former secondary school teacher, I know how important that is. I am happy to speak to my hon. Friend and, of course, I speak regularly to the Schools Minister about this issue.

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

**Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Making sport more accessible should be the ultimate goal of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and that is why we continue to urge the Government to stop raising taxes on sports clubs and to ensure that all sports, and especially female sports, champion fairness and safety. The Conservative party is clear: all UK sports and their governing bodies must follow the law when it comes to biological sex and ensure that there is a level playing field for female athletes to compete. Will the Government match the Conservative party's commitment to women's sport and remove public funding from sports bodies that refuse to follow the law?

**Stephanie Peacock:** We have always been clear that national sporting governing bodies will set their own policies for who can participate. It is incredibly important that we prioritise fairness, safety and competition, while balancing the need for inclusion and ensuring that everyone can participate.

### Access to Culture

3. **Amanda Martin** (Portsmouth North) (Lab): What steps she is taking to ensure that her Department's funding for culture reaches communities in all parts of the country. [901157]

6. **Leigh Ingham** (Stafford) (Lab): What steps she is taking to improve access to cultural amenities in towns and rural areas. [901160]

**The Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Ian Murray):** Everyone should be able to participate in and enjoy culture wherever they live in the country. Through our arts everywhere programme, we are investing £1.5 billion into arts, culture and heritage across England. In addition, our UK city and town of culture competitions are empowering cities and towns to celebrate their local culture, and we are focusing investment and engagement in our culture priority places to ensure that the benefits of culture can be felt everywhere.

**Amanda Martin:** Statistically, Portsmouth more closely resembles places such as Hull, Gateshead and the Wirral than its neighbours on the south coast. Our region is often overlooked as affluent, but my city has suffered loss of industry and faces serious deprivation and child poverty. Bringing in the good vibes, however, Portsmouth has so much to offer, from our historic dockyard to seafront creative activities and festivals, and Portsmouth is bursting with talent. This August we officially submitted our bid to become UK city of culture. Does the Minister agree that it is time for the first city of culture in the south of England and that Portsmouth deserves that investment?

**Ian Murray:** Nobody brings good vibes to the Chamber more than my hon. Friend. Portsmouth holds an important place in our national story, with its strong maritime history, thriving cultural sector and iconic sites such as the historic dockyard. The UK city of culture competition gives all bidders, win or lose, opportunities to deliver on their ambitions to use culture as a catalyst to make transformative change for their people and place. The competition has an independent panel of judges, chaired by the wonderful Sir Phil Redmond. I wish Portsmouth and all bidding places the very best of luck, and I thank my hon. Friend, who does so much for her constituents, for her lobbying.

**Leigh Ingham:** Mr Speaker, you know as well as I do that Stafford has brilliant cultural amenities, such as the Gatehouse theatre, which recently hosted a first-of-its-kind technical summer school, providing a unique opportunity for young people to experience technical theatre skills. However, it can be much more challenging for those who live in more rural areas, such as in those in my constituency, who do not necessarily get the same opportunities due to rural transport issues and a lack of cultural amenities. Will the Minister please tell me what the Government are doing to support cultural activities, particularly for young people in our rural areas?

**Ian Murray:** I commend the Gatehouse theatre in Stafford for all that it does for young people; it is a fantastic initiative. The DCMS understands that people in rural areas face additional challenges in accessing culture. We know that transport challenges make accessing touring productions and after-school activities more difficult. Indeed, that was something we discussed on Staffordshire Day in this place. Arts Council England is committed to responding to the specific needs of rural areas, such as working with artists, improving access for rural audiences and building partnerships for growth. Access to culture should not be a postcode lottery, either due to transport restrictions or availability, and that is what our arts everywhere programme is all about.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I thank the Minister for that answer. Castle Ward, a local National Trust site in my constituency, puts on a host of cultural and creative activities throughout the year to allow locals to engage with the arts. Bus services are needed so that people in urban and rural areas can access those activities. Will the Minister work in partnership with the National Trust on this issue right across this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

**Ian Murray:** Absolutely, and I commend the hon. Gentleman for the work done in his constituency, including at Castle Ward. Encouraging everyone to go and visit would be the best thing for me to do as the Minister. Transport connectivity for those attending cultural and music events and historic and heritage places came up at the Select Committee sitting I attended this week, so we are working hard to resolve these issues.

**Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD):** Wareham is fortunate to be served by the fantastic Rex cinema, which is Dorset's oldest cinema and one of the oldest in the country, and it is volunteer led. It shows two films every day and has been refurbished to maintain its art deco interior. However, its roof is now

over 135 years old and will cost £400,000 to repair. The volunteers have funded a new projector, but they just cannot raise that sort of money. Will the Minister consider extending cultural capital grants to community cinemas?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am struggling because we only get a short time for these questions. I think we should have an hour, and I hope somebody will reflect on that.

**Ian Murray:** In the interests of time, I will just say that I am happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss that issue in more detail.

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

**Rebecca Paul (Reigate) (Con):** Celebrating culture as a community can be an incredibly unifying experience, and many people will have enjoyed Notting Hill carnival this weekend, but 636 people were arrested for crimes including sexual offences and possession of weapons. Last year, it cost about £16 million just to police the carnival, and this year a further £4.6 million of taxpayers' money was provided for additional safety measures. Given those figures, are the Minister and the Secretary of State satisfied that this particular cultural event represents good value for taxpayers? What discussions is the Secretary of State having with colleagues about whether the present approach is sustainable?

**Ian Murray:** I congratulate the hon. Lady on her position and welcome her to her place. I look forward to the many discussions the ministerial team will have with her shadow ministerial team. I am sure that she will do a marvellous job.

It was the 60th anniversary of Notting Hill carnival. Everyone is concerned about the 636 arrests. It is a carnival that has been enjoyed by tens of millions of people over the past 60 years. Its policing is the responsibility of the Mayor of London, and we will work closely with the Mayor of London on what will happen over the next 60 years of the Notting Hill carnival. It is something that we should celebrate and enjoy, but that has to be done safely, without discrimination for anyone and without fear or favour for anyone.

### Frontier Artificial Intelligence

**4. Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind):** What recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of frontier AI on society. [901158]

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy):** I point the hon. Gentleman to the recent report from the AI Safety Institute in December, which showed that AI's role in social interaction, online harms, cyber-security and the workplace is increasing. We are taking the risks of AI as seriously as we take the opportunities, working closely with colleagues in the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade and the Cabinet Office. We are clear as a Government that companies cannot be allowed to mark their own homework.

**Shockat Adam:** I welcome the response from the Secretary of State. The company OpenAI has just created a program called Astra, which, in its own words, is the

most dangerous program it has ever created because it can hack other programs autonomously. That follows other AI programs unleashing themselves from their own security system and hacking other programs simply because they can—because they speak a language that only they seem to understand. AI is inevitably our future, but with the Government handing over NHS contracts and our public service records to big American AI companies, what is the Secretary of State doing to ensure that we are kept safe in this dangerous world?

**Lisa Nandy:** The hon. Gentleman is right to point to the fact that as frontier AI develops, it poses new challenges and new risks, not just in the area of hacking but by creating confusion about legal liability, safeguards and who is responsible. There is a clear role for Government, and we are working hard to make sure that we meet those expectations.

**Dame Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): My Select Committee's report "Science diplomacy: Sovereignty, strategy and the global race" highlighted the risk of the UK being cut off from frontier AI models at the whim of other countries—one country in particular comes to mind. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the impact on the UK's society and economy if we were unable to access those models?

**Lisa Nandy:** My hon. Friend is right to point to the UK's need for sovereign capability in AI. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), whose work I have inherited in this area. I also thank my hon. Friend for the contribution of the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee over a long period of time. We are taking the need to deal with the exposure of the UK very seriously, and I would be happy to meet her to discuss that further.

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

**Anna Sabine** (Frome and East Somerset) (LD): Frontier AI is supercharging misinformation online, but we still cannot get to grips with harms much closer to home. There are campaigners in the Public Gallery today, including Tulisa Contostavlos, who was the target of a fabricated story following an undercover tabloid sting, and is proof of the damage that an unregulated press can do. Such examples are why the Lib Dems want the full implementation of Leveson 1 and the commissioning of Leveson 2. Will the Secretary of State meet me and Tulisa to discuss finally getting proper regulation of the press?

**Lisa Nandy:** I would be delighted to offer the hon. Lady that meeting. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Tulisa, whom I have admired for many years for the way in which she has taken such a dreadful experience and used it to help others. Mr Speaker, can I also take this moment to acknowledge the absolutely tragic death of Professor Jason Arday, which happened since the House last met? There is an ongoing inquest and an ongoing investigation by the University of Cambridge. While the Government would not wish to undermine in any sense those ongoing inquiries, I want to reassure the House, and the many families who have been affected by the sort of practices that the hon. Lady references over many years, that we are not neutral when it comes to protecting our citizens.

### Overnight Visitor Levy: Rural and Coastal Communities

**5. Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): What discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on the potential impact of an overnight visitor levy on rural and coastal communities. [901159]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock):** I have had discussions with ministerial colleagues across Government and spoken to mayors and a range of tourism representatives. The Government are committed to giving powers to local areas to enact an overnight levy, and we will work closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and HM Treasury on developing the policy.

**Jerome Mayhew:** Rural and coastal communities are particularly reliant on seasonal tourism. If Members look at my registered interests, they will see that I used to run one of those businesses. Do the Government not understand that it is already tough enough out there, without them thinking up a new tax on holidays? Instead of ploughing on regardless, will the Government commit to publishing an independent assessment on the impact on businesses before any new tax is introduced?

**Stephanie Peacock:** I was in Blackpool last week discussing the issue with representatives of the sector and I visited the hon. Gentleman's constituency a few years ago, so I know how important tourism is to coastal communities up and down the country. Introducing a levy will be up to local areas, and it will make sense for those areas to invest the funds generated in improving the local tourism offer, as many have already committed to doing.

**Jessica Toale** (Bournemouth West) (Lab): Hotels in my constituency are largely in favour of an overnight visitor levy, on the proviso that the money is ringfenced for tourism purposes, not lost to the black hole of local authority or strategic authority finances. What reassurances can the Minister give hotels in my constituency?

**Stephanie Peacock:** As I just outlined, it will of course make sense for those funds to be reinvested in local tourism, but that will be a decision for local areas. That is why we are working closely with the Treasury and MHCLG, so that local areas can be empowered to make the decisions that are right for their areas.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Droitwich and Evesham) (Con): I welcome the new shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Rebecca Paul), and the new shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild), to their places. May I take this opportunity to thank the Secretary of State and her team for their constructive engagement with me over the last year?

However—there is always a "however" with me—on Tuesday the new Prime Minister committed the Government to bringing in a new holiday tax. On Wednesday, he told the House that he was helping businesses by cutting taxes, yet we all know that business rates and national insurance are increasing, which is

destroying over 100,000 jobs in tourism and hospitality alone. In what crazy Labour universe is it possible for the Prime Minister to claim that he is cutting taxes when the Government are actually increasing them and bringing in entirely new taxes?

**Stephanie Peacock:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I pay tribute to him for all his work as the shadow Secretary of State and as a Minister before that. It has been a pleasure to work with him, and I look forward to continuing to do so.

Of course, there is more than one tax; we are cutting taxes, but we are also introducing an overnight levy. As I have outlined, we are working across Government, with the tourist sector and with mayors to make sure we get that right for local areas. It of course makes sense for that money to be reinvested in the tourism sector, but that will be up to local areas to decide.

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester Withington) (Lab): I think rural and coastal communities can be encouraged by the success of the city visitor charge in Manchester, where we have raised £10 million for investment in advertising, tourism and cleaning the city. Will the Minister join me in rejecting the scaremongering and reminding people that this is a purely permissive measure? It is up to local areas to do it if they want.

**Stephanie Peacock:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is an excellent champion for his city of Manchester. He shares a really important example. It is right to caution against scaremongering. It is absolutely right that local areas have the powers to make the decisions themselves.

### Lidos

7. **Dr Simon Opher** (Stroud) (Lab): What steps she is taking to support lidos. [901161]

**Mr Speaker:** It helps if you get up to say the question number, Dr Opher.

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy):** I will get up, Mr Speaker. I thank my hon. Friend for his long-standing work on this—*[Laughter.]* Let me start again!

I thank my hon. Friend for his intense work on this issue. The Minister for sport will be delighted to meet him. However, my hon. Friend will know that lidos are a personal passion for me, and reversing the neglect of these much-loved community assets is something that this Government intend to make a priority. We will be in a position to say more about that shortly, but in the meantime I pay tribute to him and to my hon. Friends the Members for Peterborough (Andrew Pakes) and for Bournemouth West (Jessica Toale) for their campaign to ensure that lidos have their proper place in British public life.

**Dr Opher:** In Stroud I celebrated the reopening of our lido by making a splash, jumping in fully clothed next to a woman dressed as a lobster. I want to thank Save Stroud Lido, the Friends of Stratford Park Lido and the whole community for working to reopen the lido. As the Secretary of State knows, most of our lidos were built in the 1930s and are in financial difficulty, so I really look forward to meeting the Minister and maybe establishing a lido fund to support our lidos nationally.

**Lisa Nandy:** My hon. Friend makes a very compelling case. While I do not wish to pre-empt any imminent announcement, I will just say that the Government really recognise the need to support communities with the funding pressures that lidos face, including energy costs, and we will have more to say about that shortly.

**Dr Danny Chambers** (Winchester) (LD): There is a very passionate group of people in Winchester who have long campaigned for a lido to be built in the old leisure centre, and they are very excited that one of the proposals for the old leisure centre is a lido. Could the Minister explain what support is available for such facilities, which get people outside, exercising and being part of the community, which is good for physical and mental health?

**Lisa Nandy:** The hon. Gentleman will have heard the Minister for sport talk about the £400 million that we are putting into grassroots sports facilities, and he will also have heard my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Opher) about a forthcoming announcement that we are planning to make specifically around lidos. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman's community on defending, supporting and championing not just leisure facilities but lidos in particular. Most of the lidos in this country exist because of people like his constituents, who care for them and have supported them to stay open for many years. I would be very happy to visit and meet them at some point—but only on the condition that there is a woman dressed as a lobster as part of the event.

### Tourism Industry

8. **Joe Robertson** (Isle of Wight East) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support the tourism industry. [901162]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock):** Tourism drives economic growth and jobs across the country, including the Isle of Wight, and over the summer months the Great British summer savings scheme provided a temporary VAT cut for eligible businesses, to encourage visits to tourist attractions during the school holidays. At the same time, Visit Britain's "Starring GREAT Britain" campaign is promoting film and TV locations, to inspire global audiences to explore a wide range of regions across Great Britain.

**Joe Robertson:** Growth in tourism requires an increase in visitor numbers so that more money is spent on the high street, not a new tax. Oxford Economics says that the cost of the overnight visitor levy will be around £1.8 billion in reduced spending, and a decrease in tax receipts, not an increase. Will the Minister confirm that the visitor economy growth strategy will consider the harm caused by the new tourism tax, and say when it will be published?

**Stephanie Peacock:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who I know is a huge champion for his constituency, and indeed on this subject. We are committed to increasing visitor numbers—he will have heard my answer to the previous question on the overnight levy, and there is a strong case for any money raised to be reinvested in

tourism. As I said, I was in Blackpool last week speaking to tourism industry leaders and businesses, and far from the doom and gloom that the hon. Member alludes to, I witnessed a great deal of hope, hard work and dynamism.

**Rachel Blake** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): We have had a good debate about the overnight stay levy and short lets, but on Warwick Way in my constituency I have seen real harm to communities because of unregulated short lets. Does the Minister agree that for the tourism industry to be a real success, hotels cannot be undermined by short lets, and that getting the registration scheme in place and the Treasury to investigate where there might be breaches of HMRC rules are important steps forward in ensuring that?

**Stephanie Peacock:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has been a strong champion on this issue. It was a delight to visit her constituency earlier this year to talk and to see at first hand the problem that it creates. As the Secretary of State has outlined, this Government are committed to that register, and we know the difference it will make to communities such as my hon. Friend's and those up and down the country.

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

**James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): The visitor economy is worth £147 billion, supporting millions of jobs, but this Government have hammered the sector with higher taxes and they now plan a holiday tax. Perhaps there is some hope, however, as on Monday the Prime Minister told the House that he wants to go further than business rate relief for pubs and music venues. Will the Minister urge him to take up Conservative policy and scrap business rates for those venues as well as for restaurants, cafes, hotels and leisure attractions, and support that vital sector?

**Stephanie Peacock:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place and look forward to working with him in the coming months. He will have heard that the review of business rates for pubs and hotels announced just a few weeks ago by the Chancellor has been welcomed by a number of people, including the CEO of UK Hospitality, who said it was a "positive move". Under this Government we have seen the biggest investment in the tourism sector: the £6.3 billion Universal Studios investment at Bedford. It was a pleasure to be there a few weeks ago.

### Digital Inclusion: Newcastle-under-Lyme

9. **Adam Jogee** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to improve digital inclusion in Newcastle-under-Lyme. [901163]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Vicky Foxcroft):** As set out in the Government's digital inclusion plan, everyone in every community should be able to benefit from technology. That is why we launched the £11.9 million digital inclusion innovation fund, backing local projects across the country to help people get online. I am glad that Citizens Advice in Staffordshire was one of the funded projects, supporting people with digital skills and resilience, including online banking and job searching.

**Adam Jogee:** I welcome the Minister to her new position. Residents across Newcastle-under-Lyme, particularly in Betley, Wolseley and Wrinehill, have been digitally left behind by poor broadband connectivity for far too long. I have raised this issue before, but will the new Minister do what she can to ensure that my constituents who work and live in rural communities can get online? Will she come along to hear their experiences?

**Vicky Foxcroft:** Yes, absolutely; I would love to come along.

### Topical Questions

T1. [901173] **Adam Thompson** (Erewash) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy):** Let me start by recognising the extraordinary British sportsmen and women who lit up the world this summer. I also put on record what an honour it is to return to this place with a newly created Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) for the extraordinary work she did in a very short period, opening up opportunities for young people to benefit from the technological developments of the future, and taking decisive action on social media. I also thank the hon. Member for Droitwich and Evesham (Nigel Huddleston) for the constructive way he has both challenged and supported us as a Front-Bench team since the general election, always acting in the interests of the sectors that we both care passionately about. I welcome the hon. Member for Reigate (Rebecca Paul) to her place, and I am very much looking forward to working with her.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to the rugby league legend Sir Billy Boston, and to his incredible wife, Lady Joan, who sadly passed away a few weeks before Sir Billy. Billy was a sporting giant. His talent, determination and legacy will inspire generations for years to come. It was a privilege to work with you, Mr Speaker, following your campaign over many years to right a historic wrong and to ensure that he became the first ever knight of rugby league. Rest in peace, Sir Billy Boston.

**Adam Thompson:** Take-Two Interactive CEO Strauss Zelnick recently said that its business is now well over 90% digitally distributed. Take-Two has confirmed that the physical box of "Grand Theft Auto VI" will not contain a physical disc, but will instead contain a download code. Killing physical media prevents consumers trading in or sharing their games, and it erodes the concept of true ownership of a product. What is the Secretary of State doing to support the physical ownership of video games, as well as music and film?

**Lisa Nandy:** The Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) has just reminded me that he and I are so old that we started out loading cassette tapes when we played video games as kids. I am aware that people feel very strongly about this issue. My hon. Friend will know that decisions around media formats are ultimately for companies, but we as a Government believe that companies should always be clear with customers about what they are

paying for. That is why we have commissioned the Chartered Trading Standards Institute to develop guidance that will clarify people's ownership rights when they purchase digital games, music and films.

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

**Rebecca Paul** (Reigate) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her warm words. I am looking forward to working constructively with her and her team.

May I begin by paying tribute to PC Matthew Blades and PC Tom Clough, who were killed in a horrific head-on collision on the A66 last month? The car that collided with them was travelling in the wrong direction. My thoughts are with their families and friends at this terrible, terrible time. Their deaths have renewed concern about videos on TikTok and other platforms that glorify dangerous driving and police chases. The behaviour these videos encourage can have fatal consequences. We know the Government recently raised this issue with social media companies, yet the content remains up. What more will the Minister and the Secretary of State do to ensure that TikTok and other platforms crack down on that before more lives are lost?

**Lisa Nandy:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right, first of all, to pay tribute to those incredible police officers who lost their lives. May I associate myself with her remarks and put on record my sadness, love and sympathy to their families and loved ones? I agree with her that there is more that must be done to tackle what is becoming an epidemic in young people in particular using social media to encourage dangerous behaviour. I have a meeting set up with TikTok in the coming days. We have obviously been in close discussion with it and other social media companies since that tragic, appalling incident, but there is more that we as a Government intend to do and I would be very happy to meet her to discuss that further.

T3. [901175] **Callum Anderson** (Buckingham and Bletchley) (Lab): Nearly 60 years ago, a Labour Government designated Milton Keynes a new town. Today, we are one of the fastest growing cities in the United Kingdom. Millions are also drawn to attractions such as Bletchley Park, the MK Gallery and our international festival. I cannot think of a better candidate to be the UK city of culture. Does the Minister agree with me that culture and economic growth go hand in hand? Will she meet me and my Milton Keynes colleagues to discuss the merits of our bid?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock):** My hon. Friend is a great champion for his city. It was a pleasure to do a sporting visit to his constituency earlier this year. We have a really strong shortlist for the city of culture—and indeed for the town of culture. I look forward to visiting those on the final shortlist in the near future.

T2. [901174] **Olly Glover** (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): In my Oxfordshire constituency, Challow and Childrey cricket club's partnership with local state school King Alfred's Academy is providing cricket opportunities to students who may not otherwise have access to the sport. However, affordability and perceptions of cricket

mean that a participation gap remains between state-funded schools and independent schools. What further steps can the Government take to improve opportunities to participate in sport?

**Stephanie Peacock:** Cricket is incredibly popular, and I know how important it is in my own constituency—I visited Worsbrough to see the England and Wales Cricket Board's schools programme in action. Programmes like that are incredibly important for getting people, and in particular young people, involved and active in sport.

T4. [901176] **Danny Beales** (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Lab): This summer, 1.5 million people attended London Pride, a celebration of love, freedom and diversity. At the same time, though, discussions on GB News compared Pride and LGBT people to bestiality and even paedophilia. There have now been 12,000 complaints to Ofcom about this. Does the Minister agree that these sorts of comments have no place on an apparent news channel? Will she assure me and those who have complained that Ofcom will be effective in challenging hate speech on television?

**The Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Ian Murray):** I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this incredibly serious question to DCMS questions this morning. There is no place for homophobia or prejudice in our society, and the media has a duty to uphold the highest standards, not polarise or divide. I understand that Ofcom is investigating whether the programme has breached broadcasting code standards, and I expect it to do so without fear or favour. Through our media Green Paper, we are considering how to ensure Ofcom has the right powers to protect audiences and regulate TV services in the future. We have a proud free media and free press in this country, but that does not come without responsibilities, and GB News should be thoroughly ashamed of itself.

T6. [901178] **Mr Will Forster** (Woking) (LD): As we saw during the world cup, football is fundamental to our national identity. Football fans are having to pay almost £700 to follow their club in this season's premier league, so does the Secretary of State agree that we need to have more free-to-air sport, not less?

**Lisa Nandy:** The hon. Member will know from previous discussions we have had in this place that there is a balance to be struck between making sure we get the right level of investment in sport and making sure those sports are opened up to the widest possible audience. That is a conversation that we continue to have. There is another element to this, which is the cost of tickets, and this Government are taking action on secondary ticket touts, which I know the hon. Member's party strongly supports. Later today, we will have the pleasure of introducing the Sporting Events Bill to this place. Through that Bill, we are taking action to make sure ticket prices remain affordable and that those practices are stamped out when it comes to sporting events.

T7. [901179] **Gordon McKee** (Glasgow South) (Lab): Football is not the private property of Gianni Infantino or a handful of rich and powerful men; it belongs to the billions of people who watch it, play it and enjoy it. Given that UEFA is proposing to make a criminal

complaint about the conduct of FIFA's leadership, will the Minister join me and others in calling for a genuinely independent investigation into FIFA's decision to try to sell off the world cup?

**Lisa Nandy:** I absolutely, 100% agree with my hon. Friend that football belongs to its fans. For far too long, fans have been treated as at best an afterthought and at worst a nuisance when it comes to the future of their own clubs, their own tournaments and their own game. As a Government, we are appalled by what happened recently regarding the world cup, and the Prime Minister has been crystal clear that it is time for a change of leadership at FIFA.

T8. [901180] **Rebecca Smith** (South West Devon) (Con): An ever-growing list of charities have faced serious allegations of peddling extremism and even funding terrorism. Despite lengthy Charity Commission investigations, most of them continue to operate, such as the Iranian regime-linked Islamic Centre of England, which is reportedly sponsoring visas for people to enter the UK. It is painfully clear that the Charity Commission lacks sufficient powers to shut down these offending charities, yet the Government have wasted six months since first acknowledging this clear and immediate threat. Will the Secretary of State confirm when those powers will be granted?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Vicky Foxcroft):** The Charity Commission takes very seriously concerns about the alleged misuse of charities in the UK to promote the interests of foreign states. The Government's social cohesion action plan, published in March, set out our plans to strengthen the Charity Commission's powers to tackle extremists' abuse of charities. We are working with the Charity Commission to develop the necessary legislation, and we take this issue very, very seriously.

**Mr Speaker:** That completes DCMS questions. Some news for the House: when we return after the conference recess, the session will be for an hour.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

*The hon. Member for Battersea, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—*

### Christians in Palestine

1. **Kate Osamor** (Edmonton and Winchmore Hill) (Lab/Co-op): What steps the Church of England is taking to support Christians in Palestine. [901143]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Marsha De Cordova):** The Church condemns the persecution that we have seen and stands in solidarity with Palestinian Christian communities across the Holy Land as they continue to face profound hardship. The Church of England remains committed to supporting our Anglican partners, advocating for human rights and calling for the upholding of international humanitarian law and a just and lasting peace for the Palestinians.

**Kate Osamor:** Taybeh, an ancient Palestinian Christian village in the west bank, is facing record levels of escalating Israeli settler attacks. Father Bashar Fawadleh has warned that residents feel vulnerable and insufficiently protected. What engagement has the Church had with church leaders in Taybeh, and what further steps can the Church take to support this community and help ensure its continued presence and security in the Holy Land?

**Marsha De Cordova:** May I first thank my hon. Friend for her continued and steadfast support for the Palestinians? Since the start of this year, the UN has reported that 76 Palestinians have been killed by settler violence, and that number includes 18 children. As she has rightly mentioned, the village of Taybeh continues to experience near-daily raids on homes by settlers, and the village has been almost entirely encircled by roadblocks and fences. During her recent visit to the diocese of Jerusalem, the Archbishop of Canterbury met with Christian leaders, where she heard at first hand of the suffering being experienced by Palestinian Christians, including persistent violence, destruction of property, seizure of land and restrictions on movement. The settler terrorism that we are witnessing must come to an end.

**Tessa Munt** (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): May I encourage the Church Commissioners to support the Church in facilitating community events? Wells cathedral and Wells bishop's palace are at the centre of an amazing programme of year-round festivals, fairs and markets, but the Church Commissioners have suddenly served a stop notice on the Phelps' family at Palace farm in Wells, which for decades has offered—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but the original question was about Palestine. What the hon. Member is saying is not relevant to that question. Let us move on.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

*The hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—*

### Domestic and Sexual Abuse Casework: Training for Members

2. **Jen Craft** (Thurrock) (Lab): What training the House of Commons provides to hon. Members on responding to domestic and sexual abuse casework. [901144]

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney): The House of Commons Administration provides a variety of training for Members and their staff to help them respond to domestic and sexual abuse casework, which includes a day-long training course on dealing with cases of domestic abuse, human resources sessions on domestic abuse awareness and an e-learning module on safeguarding. The training courses equip participants with the knowledge and confidence to recognise signs, respond accordingly and provide access to support and resources.

**Jen Craft:** As Members of Parliament, we regularly support vulnerable women and girls who have experienced sexual abuse, sexual violence, rape, stalking, coercive behaviour and other forms of violence. These can be some of the most complex and sensitive cases, requiring knowledge of legal frameworks, safeguarding and trauma to safely support individuals in traumatising circumstances. I am extremely grateful to be able to lean on the expert guidance of SERICC, our fantastic local rape and sexual abuse service in Essex, but not all Members' offices are as fortunate. What guidance does the House of Commons provide to Members specifically on responding to rape and sexual abuse casework, and is there scope to provide more specialist and trauma-informed training?

**Nick Smith:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important topic, and it is great that she has good local services. I have already outlined the training and guidance we currently have on offer. The Commission is keen to ensure that Members are well supported in this area and is open to suggestions to develop the training offer. I will ask officials to get in touch with my hon. Friend.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

*The hon. Member for Battersea, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—*

### Churches: Financial Viability

3. **Josh Newbury** (Cannock Chase) (Lab): What recent assessment the Church of England has made of the potential impact of payments that churches are required to make to it on the financial viability of those churches. [901145]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Marsha De Cordova):** No parish is required to make payments to the national Church institutions. The parish share, or common fund, is a financial contribution that a parish makes to the diocese to help fund clergy stipends, pensions and housing, including mutual support for ministries in less affluent areas.

**Josh Newbury:** Whether it is holding coffee mornings to bring people together, stepping in to provide activities for young people where council services have disappeared, or providing affordable spaces for community groups, our churches are part of the fabric of Cannock Chase, but what they do carries a cost. One parish in my constituency saw its parish share reduced from £35,000 to £15,000, yet even that lower figure required it to draw on reserves, which are now exhausted. What assessment have the Church Commissioners made of how many parishes are in a similar situation, and what support might be available to those churches once their reserves have run out?

**Marsha De Cordova:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out the importance of churches in providing community support and care, which are essential in many local areas. On the specific case in his parish, I would be happy to put him in touch with the diocese of Lichfield so that he can discuss his concerns more broadly. On a wider note, the Church Commissioners are supporting parishes in the lowest-income communities with over £133 million of investment, representing a 46% increase on the previous funding window.

## Persecution of Christians Overseas

4. **Andrew Pakes** (Peterborough) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment the Church of England has made of the level of persecution of Christians overseas. [901146]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. May I remind Members that they are meant to stand up when asking a question? We are back to school; this is the first day of term. Let's get some memory power!

### Marsha De Cordova:

The Church remains deeply concerned about the ongoing worldwide persecution on the grounds of faith and belief, including recent cases in Sudan, Afghanistan, Palestine, India and many others, and all these countries have featured high on the most recent Open Doors world watch list. Alongside the UN Secretary-General, the Church believes that whenever one minority group is persecuted, no one is safe.

**Andrew Pakes:** Thank you, Mr Speaker—I stand rightly chastised.

To me, one of the most important aspects of being a Christian is being part of a global fellowship, and the Church of England stands as a light on the hill for our global community. I have been contacted on numerous occasions by churches and fellow Christians in my community who are deeply worried about the persecution of fellow Christians in Nigeria, and that is on top of the increasing persecution of Christians that we are seeing in other countries around the world. Given that the Church of England has a special role in our global fellowship, could my hon. Friend outline what more it can do in speaking out and providing solidarity with Christians in Nigeria and other parts of the world?

**Marsha De Cordova:** As my hon. Friend mentions, in parts of Nigeria Christian communities continue to face considerable persecution, particularly from Fulani militia and Boko Haram. This has been happening for many decades. Senior members of the Church have frequently visited and written to the Nigerian Government ahead of elections, urging them not to exploit ethnic or religious divisions, finance violence or pursue electoral success at the nation's expense. The wider Anglican communion and its agencies continue to offer support, financial aid and education in that space. The bishops in the other place raise cases and the experience of Nigerian Christians with the UK Government, and I invite my hon. Friend to raise such cases with the Government as well.

### Lighthouse Summer Holiday Programme

5. **Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): What steps the Church of England is taking to support the Lighthouse summer holiday programme. [901147]

**Marsha De Cordova:** Across the country, churches provide holiday clubs, activities and safe spaces for children and families, often in partnership with organisations such as Lighthouse. These groups help young people to develop skills and the confidence to become responsible, active participants in their local communities.

**Greg Smith:** Over the summer, I was delighted to visit Lighthouse Princes Risborough for both its opening and closing ceremonies. It welcomed 450 local children over a week for fun activities, with a lot of chaos—I may have been gunged in the closing ceremony—but all underpinned by Christian teaching. Similar schemes run in Great Missenden and Haddenham, too. Will the hon. Lady join me in thanking Eleya Kibble and her massive team of volunteers, trustees and church leaders for putting on such an incredible programme? More fundamentally, what is the Church doing centrally to underpin and support community-led and church-led programmes such as this?

**Marsha De Cordova:** I have to say that sounds like a wonderful visit—despite the hon. Member being gunged—and I join him in thanking Lighthouse in Princes Risborough, and in Great Missenden and Haddenham, for its incredible work in his constituency, and huge thanks go to Eleya Kibble and the team of volunteers. We know that without volunteers none of these schemes can be delivered. Since 2019, the diocese of Oxford has given over 300 financial grants, totalling £5.9 million, to its parishes to host youth groups and Lighthouse holiday clubs. The Church is committed to and will continue to support community projects such as these in their areas across the country.

#### Family Hubs and Community Cohesion

6. **Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): What steps the Church of England is taking to work with local authorities to help church communities to support family hubs and community cohesion. [901148]

**Marsha De Cordova:** Family hubs are a crucial one-stop shop for families to access vital support in one place, and the Church of England supports this with other denominations through the ChurchWorks Commission, which has produced helpful guidance and resources for churches and local authorities. That includes a toolkit that sets out how churches can be involved through signposting referrals, the use of buildings and by running specific services.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the Second Church Estates Commissioner very much for her answer. St Mark's church in Newtownards, in my Strangford constituency, held a brilliant summer scheme this year, offering games, songs and crafts for children from the local community. The church has the facilities and capacity to provide more activities and support for families throughout the year. However, with additional funding it could do much more. Given the need for central Government funding, what steps can she and the Government take to ensure that community organisations such as St Mark's have access to the funding they want and need to support local families and communities all the year round?

**Marsha De Cordova:** May I say how delighted I was to see the hon. Member's name on the Order Paper? He did not have to bob this time. I join him in congratulating churches on the valuable role they play in supporting young people, and I thank him for raising the excellent work of churches in Newtownards. Following my exchange with the right hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard), I wrote to the Local Government Minister and the

Children's Minister to discuss how faith-based organisations can work more closely with local authorities to expand youth provision. Supporting young people is part of the Church of England's Growing Younger priority, backed by a £1 billion investment over the next nine years. I would be happy to put the hon. Member in touch with the team and officials at Church House for further information. I also want to encourage all local authorities to see the great work that partnering with churches can deliver in supporting and providing opportunities for young people.

**Dr Marie Tidball** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Mr Speaker, it is good to see you after recess.

Over the summer, I attended a packed meeting about saving St John's church in Dodworth in my constituency, a grade 2 listed building that has been at the heart of my community for over 180 years and wants to serve that community by providing more services to children and young people and to older adults to prevent loneliness. However, it is currently temporarily closed and under threat of permanent closure due to urgent structural building work being needed. Those in our community want to save it, and I am working with them to reopen it and secure its long-term future to serve our community and our community groups, including by fundraising £250,000 and finding ways to meet the building's ongoing costs. Can my hon. Friend advise me on how we can access funding and support from the Church of England and any other relevant funding pots for St John's to ensure that this vital community space has a bright future.

**Marsha De Cordova:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on being a steadfast voice for her constituents and for St John's church, which is clearly providing great support services for children and young people, as well as for adults. Churches are the cornerstones of our communities. I would be happy to write to my hon. Friend with more details about funding opportunities and ways that the church can seek to raise funds locally to help, potentially, to save the church. Is that okay?

**Dr Tidball** indicated assent.

**Marsha De Cordova:** Wonderful!

#### Christian Nationalism

7. **Richard Baker** (Glenrothes and Mid Fife) (Lab): What steps the Church of England is taking to help tackle Christian nationalism. [901149]

**Marsha De Cordova:** The unacceptable use of Christianity to exclude or intimidate others is deeply offensive and frankly deeply concerning. The Church has established a working group to support parishes with theological, practical and pastoral resources, along with best practice advice. Recent work includes guidance on flying flags and webinars on the theology of patriotism.

**Richard Baker:** Does my hon. Friend share my concern about the promotion of Christian nationalist ideology in supporting the activities of the far right in this country and its poisonous propaganda of hate and division? Will she urge the Church of England to do all it can to counter Christian nationalism, and show that the true message of Christianity is love, compassion and respect for all?

**Marsha De Cordova:** My hon. Friend is spot on. He raises a really important issue, and I completely share his concerns about the misuse of Christian ideology. Church representatives are discussing and sharing their experiences of Christian nationalism with partners and churches across the nations of the United Kingdom, including the Church of Scotland. We all know that, throughout the Bible, we are called to learn to do right, seek justice, defend the oppressed, take up the cause of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow. When we think about and reflect on the Bible, we see that the greatest commandment of all is to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, but also to love our neighbour as ourselves. The people mentioned by my hon. Friend are neither patriots nor Christians, and they display little or no understanding of the faith that they profess to support.

#### SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

*The right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—*

##### Use of Minority Languages in Election Materials

8. **Perran Moon** (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): What assessment the Electoral Commission has made of the potential merits of introducing legal protections for the use of minority languages in election materials. [901150]

**Sir Jeremy Wright** (Kenilworth and Southam): The Electoral Commission has made no formal assessment of this. It would be a matter for Parliament to introduce such legal protections. It is prescribed in law that poll cards and ballot papers must be provided in English or Welsh, but there are no other prescribed language requirements relating to election materials. The commission translates voter materials, including voter registration forms, into a range of languages, informed by census data and community insights on voter needs.

**Perran Moon:** Meur ras ha myttin da, Mr Speaker. Since January this year, Kernewek, the Cornish language, has enjoyed part III protection under the European charter for regional or minority languages, alongside Welsh and Scottish Gaelic. In the light of that recognition, what steps can the Electoral Commission take to review its policies and guidance to ensure that Cornish speakers are not treated less favourably in elections than speakers of other protected minority languages?

**Sir Jeremy Wright:** I apologise to the hon. Gentleman that I cannot respond to him in Cornish.

**Mr Speaker:** Try!

**Sir Jeremy Wright:** I will not try, Mr Speaker. As the hon. Gentleman may know, the Electoral Commission is in discussion with his local authority at the moment, and I know it would welcome any further representations—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Mr Perkins, you just walked right in front of the Member who is asking the question.

**Mr Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): Apologies, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** There is something going wrong with the House. Can we please get back to remembering our courtesies to other Members when they are asking questions?

**Sir Jeremy Wright:** I know the Electoral Commission will welcome any further representations that the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (Perran Moon) wants to make. As I say, the commission keeps the languages it chooses to translate materials into under review.

#### CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

*The hon. Member for Battersea, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—*

##### Community Cohesion

9. **Sonia Kumar** (Dudley) (Lab): What steps the Church of England is taking to work with other faith groups to promote community cohesion. [901151]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Marsha De Cordova):** The Church has a long history of working across faiths to ensure community cohesion. Most dioceses have an interfaith adviser who advises—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I think I am being instructed on who sits where. Mr Perkins, when you came through the door, you walked directly into my line of sight to Perran Moon. It blocks my vision when you walk in front of another Member. I do not like being challenged on something when I am absolutely correct.

**Marsha De Cordova:** I will start from the top. The Church has a long history of working across faiths to ensure community cohesion. Most dioceses have an interfaith adviser who advises clergy and congregations about their interfaith engagement, promoting community cohesion. That work is supported through the national presence and engagement programme.

**Sonia Kumar:** One of the Church's greatest strengths is its ability to bring communities together. At a time of heightened community tensions, opportunities to bring all faith leaders together are ever more important. Over the summer, I worked closely with local faith leaders in my constituency to build resilience and manage the situation—an attack on one is an attack on all. Will my hon. Friend set out how the Church can strengthen dialogue, support cohesion and help communities resist division?

**Marsha De Cordova:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work that she is doing in her constituency on bringing our communities together. She rightly points out that the Church has a key role to play in drawing our communities together—both to protect them, and for peace and social justice. The Church supports the work of the Church Urban Fund and Near Neighbours, whose central aim is to promote interfaith understanding and stronger community cohesion. As I mentioned in my previous answer, the Church has established a working

group with the bishops to promote community cohesion in response to some of the deepening political polarisation. I hope to provide an update on that work in due course.

### Project Spire

**10. Blake Stephenson** (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): Whether the Church of England plans to proceed with Project Spire. [901152]

**Marsha De Cordova:** Yes, the Church Commissioners intend to proceed with Project Spire, as we continue to regard the historic links to African chattel enslavement with profound regret.

**Blake Stephenson:** Around the country, particularly in Mid Bedfordshire, parish churches are struggling to find the funds to save their historic buildings. Do the Church Commissioners not believe that the time, money and energy spent examining and absolving the Church's historic transgressions could have been better spent bringing hope and belonging to future generations and saving our historic churches?

**Marsha De Cordova:** I want to take this opportunity to make it clear that Project Spire is being funded out of the commissioners' own income. None of the money given in parish collections goes towards funding the project. It is also worth pointing out that, over the next three years, the commissioners are distributing £1.6 billion to provide record levels of support for Church ministry and mission across England. It is my sincere hope that Project Spire delivers exactly what the hon. Member points to: a sense of belonging in the Church for future generations. I also highlight the words shared by the Archbishop of Canterbury in her historic visit to the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, which I too have visited. She said:

"I pray not only in lament for the Church's involvement in the slave trade, but also for hope—hope that the God of healing can bring justice and reconciliation to all who are still impacted by its legacy."

### Places of Worship Renewal Fund

**11. Liz Twist** (Blaydon and Consett) (Lab): What discussions the Church of England has had with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on the second round of applications for the places of worship renewal fund. [901154]

**Marsha De Cordova:** Church officials are in regular contact with Historic England and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport regarding the places of worship renewal fund and are closely monitoring parish experiences of using the scheme. Following feedback, Historic England has also published a funding directory to help identify alternative sources of support.

**Liz Twist:** In communities like Blaydon and Consett, historic parish churches, such as St Ives' church in Leadgate—known locally as the miners' cathedral—are irreplaceable heritage assets, but carry huge repair burdens. What discussions has my hon. Friend had with the Department to ensure that round 2 funding is targeted towards former industrial communities with larger conservation needs?

**Marsha De Cordova:** My hon. Friend is right to point to the importance of historic buildings—such as St Ives', the miners' cathedral—to local communities, and the pressure that they all face. Historic England is managing applications and has indicated that it is measuring need and using an at-risk register as well as a local deprivation index to identify the best places to prioritise. It will be easier to assess the effectiveness of the new scheme once it has had a little more time to bed in. I will ensure that my hon. Friend receives details of the funding directory, which I hope will help parishes in her constituency to identify suitable sources of funding that they may be eligible for.

## Jackdaw and Rosebank Oil and Gas Fields

10.39 am

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero if she will make a statement on the future of the Jackdaw and Rosebank oil fields following the closure of the public consultation.

**The Minister for Climate Transition (Katie White):** First, I welcome and congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his new position as the shadow Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero.

The Scottish Court of Session quashed the original consents for these projects in January 2025. We published supplementary guidance in June 2025 to implement the Finch judgment, under which end-use combustion emissions must be taken into account in environmental impact assessments for oil and gas production projects. At that time, the Government reopened the window for applications.

The Jackdaw and Rosebank fields are each subject to a live regulatory process. The public notice periods, which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, closed on 10 and 17 August respectively, were part of that regulatory process. The Secretary of State will consider the representations received and will make separate decisions on each project in due course. I appreciate the strength of interest in this decision, but it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on either project.

I have to say that it is a little rich hearing the Conservatives suddenly talk about protecting jobs and caring about Aberdeen. Let us look at the facts: by the end of 2016, under the Conservatives, more than 120,000 UK oil and gas jobs had gone,

“more than a third of them in Scotland and the vast majority in the north-east”.

Those are not my words; they are the words of the Conservative MSP Liam Kerr. And what happened to Aberdeen on their watch? The independent think-tank Centre for Cities calls it “Aberdeen’s lost decade”. It found that between 2010 and 2022, the city lost around 9,000 jobs under the Conservatives. Real household incomes per head fell 6.7%, and nearly 15,000 people left the city. In fact, Aberdeen was one of just two of Britain’s 62 largest cities and towns to have fewer jobs than in 2010.

I say gently to the hon. Gentleman that that is an abysmal record from his party in government. He may have a selective memory about the Conservatives’ record in the north-east of Scotland, but I do not think his constituents do.

**Andrew Bowie:** I do not think the Conservative party will take any lectures from Labour on records in the north-east of Scotland, given the result in Aberdeen South only a few months ago, but I would like to thank the Minister for warmly welcoming me to my new position.

The public consultation on Rosebank and Jackdaw has now closed, so the Department can no longer hide behind process, delay or consultation exercises. It has dithered, prevaricated and delayed for far too long. Industry and workers in and around Aberdeen, and indeed across the United Kingdom, need an answer now. We have a new Prime Minister and a new Secretary of State, so how about a new direction? That is what our

oil and gas industry needs. That is what the thousands of workers in it, who do not know what lies ahead of them, need.

I have a simple question for the Minister: will the Government finally approve Rosebank and Jackdaw—something we already did in government—or will they continue the previous Secretary of State’s campaign against Britain’s North sea oil and gas industry? It was the previous Secretary of State who refused to appeal the ruling against the decision over two years ago, the previous Secretary of State who refused to fast-track the consultation process, and the previous Secretary of State who refused to act in the national interest. This goes beyond Jackdaw and Rosebank alone; it is about whether Great Britain chooses to produce its own energy or become ever more dependent on imports from overseas—dirtier and more expensive foreign imports. Where does the Minister want the energy that we need to come from if the Government do not get on and approve Rosebank and Jackdaw?

The question today is a simple one, but the answer could be transformative—for the North sea industry, for the north-east of Scotland and for the United Kingdom’s economic and energy security. When will the Government approve Jackdaw and Rosebank?

**Katie White:** As I say, I appreciate that there is a huge amount of interest in the process, but I am sure we can all agree that we want this robust process to take its course. The worst thing that could happen would be something prejudicing or interfering with the process, and we end up having to rerun it. We will be following that due process. As I said, the process ended in August, and the Secretary of State will be taking the decisions in due course.

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

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): As the Prime Minister said on Tuesday, our energy supply and our energy security are not a question of having either oil and gas, or renewables; they are about both. It is a great pity that proper process was not followed in 2022 or 2023. [*Interruption.*] The shadow Secretary of State says that it was; if that is true, why was it possible to challenge that in the courts? That is why it is really important that the Government get it right this time around.

On North sea oil and gas, it is really important that we recognise the importance of the supply chain, the workers, their companies and their communities, because we need those people if we are to make the energy transition that is so critical to our future. Does the Minister agree that it is vital we support them while we gear up on renewables, so that they are available to contribute and can make that transition happen as fast and effectively as possible?

**Katie White:** I thank my hon. Friend for his considered and thoughtful question. He is right. We are already drilling in the North sea, and we are clear that oil and gas have an important role. Under this Prime Minister, we have a pragmatic approach. It is important that we think about the workers, and he is right to think about the supply chain, both for the industries of today and the clean industries of the future.

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

**Pippa Heylings** (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): This summer, I saw at first hand the devastation that wildfires fuelled by climate change caused to Dunwich heath and the communities around it; my thoughts are with those impacted by wildfires nationwide this summer. That is why it is so shocking to see some parties across the House trading conservation of our environment for a scorched earth policy. We Liberal Democrat Members do not and will not accept assertions from the Conservatives and Reform that North sea licences would magically create billions to bring people's bills down now. But we do need to bring people's bills down—by investing in home-grown renewable power, while recognising that we need some oil and gas for decades to come. However, we must leave no part of the country behind in this pursuit. Will the Minister guarantee a genuinely just transition, with good-quality clean energy jobs, while protecting workers, supply chains and communities?

**Katie White:** The hon. Lady brings her usual passion and commitment to the debate. She talked about the wildfires over the summer; the Prime Minister announced yesterday that we would have a wildfire summit. On today's topic, we will continue with the robust process. I appreciate the strength of interest both in this place and outside, but given the quasi-judicial nature of the process, we cannot get involved further in it.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee.

**Mr Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): The Government are right to take their time and make sure that they get this right—we saw what happened when the previous Government did not do the work that was needed. This is a delicately balanced decision. The world already has all the oil it will need until 2050, so further exploration would increase the amount of oil there is, drive down prices and slow down the transition to renewables, but there is the strong argument that we will be importing oil and gas, and that new licences would slightly reduce the amount we import. My hon. Friend is right to take the time to ensure that we get this right. She should listen carefully to all the arguments being made on both sides of the House. Those jobs are important, but so is the transition that the Government are rightly committed to.

**Katie White:** I thank my hon. Friend, who has a long-standing interest in this area. He is right that we need to take our time with the process, respect its robustness and think about the implications. I know that the Secretary of State will be doing that, and will consider all the evidence that will be supplied to her.

**Douglas Lumsden** (Aberdeen South) (Con): I must admit that I am angry and disappointed when I hear Members on other Benches seeming to cast aside jobs in my constituency. On 18 June, the people of Aberdeen South sent the huge message to both this Labour Government and the SNP Government in Holyrood that they will not stand back and watch their jobs being destroyed. Every month, 1,000 jobs are being lost in the UK oil and gas industry. Every month, the Government dither and delay, which means more jobs lost. Does the Minister not accept that those workers deserve clarity, and not to have the decision kicked further down the road? They need assurance that their jobs will be saved.

**Katie White:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that question so passionately on behalf of his constituents. I agree that jobs are key; that is why, when it comes to the North sea, we have expanded training and support, and the new jobs service. I also agree that we want clarity on this decision. Regrettably, we cannot say a huge amount about the process today, because we want that process to be respected. It has to be a robust process, and it is quasi-judicial; I am very concerned to be respectful of that. I want to ensure, for his constituents and for the rest of the country, that a clear decision is made that respects that robust process.

**Torcuil Crichton** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): I can assure the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Douglas Lumsden) that this issue is about jobs not just in his constituency, but in Na h-Eileanan an Iar and across the whole UK. I have already presented the new Prime Minister with a map of the UK showing the postcode of payslips; almost every constituency is affected. I echo the Prime Minister's words to the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) the other day; he said:

"we need to be pragmatic—we will still need to rely on oil and gas for some years to come"—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2026; Vol. 790, c. 44.]

and that it would be a mistake to say that it has to be one or the other, when we need both. I remind the Minister making this decision that, when it comes to Rosebank and Jackdaw, we do need both.

**Katie White:** As we have all heard, there is a significant amount of interest in, thoughts and opinions in this place and outside. The Prime Minister has said that we will take a pragmatic approach, and oil and gas will remain part of our future going forward but, in terms of this specific process and those specific decisions, I cannot comment any further today.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Minister is surely aware that there is no route to net zero that does not go through oil and gas hydrocarbons, and that not exploiting resources on the UK continental shelf leaves us reliant on imports, which also has carbon consequences that must be taken into account. If we do not maintain critical mass in the supply chain in the north-east of Scotland and elsewhere, it will be more difficult to develop the next generation of clean, renewable energy—particularly marine renewables, which are being developed in my constituency. Finally, can she just remember that we are talking about two different commodities here? It is not helpful to speak about oil and gas as if they were the same thing.

**Katie White:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his thoughts. Oil and gas will be part of our energy mix, and the environmental impact assessment that is taking place will take account of Scope 3 emissions. He is right to mention, as others have, that the North sea offers opportunities in both clean energy and fossil fuel energy, and we need to think about it in a holistic sense.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): Personally, I cannot see that Rosebank is compatible with meeting our climate objectives, but I recognise that the process should be followed. Green Alliance has reported that the gas being wasted in the North sea would be enough to heat

570,000 homes. It has been over a year since the Government issued a methane action plan—I think the Minister took it over from me. Methane is more than 80 times more powerful than CO<sub>2</sub> in the short term, so what are we doing to reduce venting and flaring in the North sea?

**Katie White:** I thank my hon. Friend for all her work on this, not only in her previous role, but before she came to this place and throughout her time here. I am grateful for her awareness of the process. She raises an important point about methane: it is a very potent greenhouse gas, and reducing venting and flaring would represent a cost and efficiency saving. We should be using our energy efficiently. I am meeting with international colleagues in the coming weeks to discuss the issue, but we are also working on this domestically. I appreciate her raising that point, and we will continue to work on it.

**David Mundell** (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): The BBC and others have reported that importing liquefied natural gas is 10 times more polluting than pipeline gas. Does the Minister agree with that assessment? Further, has any assessment been made of what the impact of Jackdaw would be on reducing pollution?

**Katie White:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his specific questions. I have not seen the BBC's report; I would be very happy for him to send it to me. As I said to the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), Scope 3 emissions will be part of the environmental impact assessment, which will be given to the Secretary of State and will feed into her decision-making process.

**Richard Baker** (Glenrothes and Mid Fife) (Lab): If Jackdaw and Rosebank proceed, they will create and sustain thousands of skilled jobs and apprenticeships, which will be crucial to developing our renewables sector further in the future. Does the Minister agree that this should be a crucial factor in the decision?

**Katie White:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising the issue of jobs. Since we came into government, we have expanded the North sea jobs service to support workers. He is right that there is a huge crossover between renewables and oil and gas workers. It has struck me that at every wind farm we visit, we usually hear a Scottish accent. As I say, the Secretary of State will be aware of the point he makes about jobs.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): There is a geographical divide on this issue starker than I have ever seen in this place. Across all parties, every Member representing a Scottish constituency has stressed the issue of jobs, and how important this is to the north-east of Scotland. If that does not make it clear that Scotland needs to be in control of energy policy, I do not know what does.

The Minister has mentioned two things about the consultation. She has said that a decision will be taken in due course. Does "in due course" mean before the Budget? Does it mean in 2026, 2027 or even 2029? Could she pin it down slightly further than that? On Scope 3 emissions, will she be very clear and ensure that

what is published is what the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) asked for: a comparison of how much the import of LNG would affect the environment, as against how much approving Jackdaw would affect the environment?

**Katie White:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I admire her trying to lure me into a conversation on independence and devolution. I am afraid that that is not part of the scope of the discussion today, so I will not go into that.

On the timeline, I have said that a decision will be taken in due course. We are fully aware of the need for clarity, but the most important thing for me is the robustness of the process. The worst outcome for everybody would be if a comment I made today ended up inadvertently undermining the process. I agree on making sure that we have a just transition, and on supporting our Scottish workers when it comes to the jobs and industries of the future.

**Graeme Downie** (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): I think we need a pragmatic approach on oil and gas—one that is focused on people and prioritising British businesses and communities. I want to see a positive decision on both Rosebank and Jackdaw, but does the Minister agree that we are in this position—with less clarity and less security about what is going to happen—because of the Conservatives' abject failure to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and to run a properly managed decision process on Jackdaw and Rosebank in the first place, all while overseeing an absolute failure to effectively transition to a low-carbon economy, and the loss of over 120,000 jobs in the industry?

**Katie White:** I thank my hon. Friend for his excellent analysis of why we have ended up here; he is absolutely right. It is on all of us to respect the process. I think that the feeling of the House is that we want clarity, and the way to achieve that is by having a robust process. It is hugely important that we respect that today. I understand the amount of interest in this, but as I said in my opening remarks, I find it a little audacious that this is something that we have had an about turn on—and it is not the only thing that this shadow Secretary of State has had an about turn on.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): The fact is that the gas and oil coming from the North sea is declining year by year. The sad reality is that without a decision on the two fields, Jackdaw and Rosebank, we will be totally dependent on expensive inputs. I understand the Minister not wanting to interfere in the quasi-judicial process, but will she accept the principle that it is far better for us to supply our own oil and gas rather than importing expensive oil and gas from abroad?

**Katie White:** I appreciate the hon. Member's respect for the process and the need for clarity and robustness. He makes the important point that it is a declining basin and, therefore, we also need to make sure that we have other sources of energy. That is why record investment in clean energy has been secured from the Government and the private sector to make sure that we have as much energy in that area.

**Johanna Baxter** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): The Conservative party failed to invest in clean power, and now there is a suggestion that it failed to invest altogether. Will the Minister tell the House what action this Government are taking to ensure that overseas wars do not increase my constituents' bills, making the cost of living unaffordable?

**Katie White:** I thank my hon. Friend, who is passionate about her constituency and about this area. She is right that we are at the behest of the fossil fuel rollercoaster, and we have all seen the impacts of that over the last few years. We have had two international energy crises in the last four years, and we are, at the moment, a price-taker on the international fossil fuel markets, which has an impact on our constituents. That is why our Secretary of State is focusing on energy affordability as her priority.

**Dr Ellie Chowns** (North Herefordshire) (Green): We cannot discuss this issue without recognising that the climate breakdown is already costing us hugely: the hottest summer ever, the worst arable harvest ever, and the Met Office says that it was 130 times more likely that we faced this crisis this year. Just today, the World Meteorological Organisation has said that climate breakdown is super-charging natural phenomena such as El Niño. The shadow Secretary of State says that North sea communities need a new direction: yes, a just transition to clean energy for the future, not the dirty energy of the old. Will the Minister recognise that the climate damage created by Rosebank and Jackdaw will hugely outweigh any potential economic benefits and therefore rule them out? Fossil fuels must stay in the ground if we are to have a liveable future.

**Katie White:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question and for her passion on this topic. The environmental impact assessment that has been part of the process will take account of Scope 3 emissions. I can say no more about the Rosebank and Jackdaw decisions today, but what I will say is that this Government take climate change incredibly seriously. I hope that she heard the new Prime Minister talking about it on Tuesday and heard his commitment. He will also go to Turkey for the COP this year.

**Lizzi Collinge** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): As a member of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee, I have taken evidence on the complexity of the North sea oil and gas discussion and the long-term decline of that mature basin. As the Member of Parliament for two nuclear power stations, I will not take lectures on energy jobs and their importance, particularly given the lack of progress on nuclear under the Conservatives. I think the complexity of the discussion is lost on the Opposition, and some of their assertions, particularly on the prices of new drilling, is simply not based on any evidence. Although this is a complex discussion, does the Minister agree that what is clear and simple is that climate change is an existential threat, and that a clean and fair energy transition is vital to tackling climate change?

**Katie White:** I have been subject to my hon. Friend's tough questioning on the Select Committee, so it is a joy to have it in the House as well. I cannot say any more

today on the specific process because, as we have collectively agreed, its robustness is key, and I am cautious of saying anything that would jeopardise that because we want that clarity of decision. At the same time, as I have just said to the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Dr Chowns), we know that climate change is a key issue. We saw the wildfires this summer and, only this week, we saw the Prime Minister talking in his first interventions about committing to the COP and having a wildfire summit.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): I listened carefully to what the Minister said about the process, and I respect that. But most people who take a pretty level-headed, pragmatic view of the need for a transition over time still cannot get their heads around the short-term reality: when we have so much turmoil in the middle east, why would we extend the time that we are not relying on our own available resources? Also, speaking as a member of the Treasury Committee, when it would generate £1 billion to £2 billion of VAT receipts alone, and given the severe impact on the economy of the north-east of Scotland of not doing so, can the decision not be made more quickly based on principled guidance from this Government?

**Katie White:** As for the timeline, as I say, the decision will come in due course, but the robustness of the process is absolutely key. I have already stated to the House that it was only in August that these consultations closed. There is a lot of interest in this place and outside, and our Secretary of State wants to consider things properly to ensure that we can expedite the decision as soon as we can, but that has to be done properly or we will all end up back here again. Let us ensure that we respect the process, and we will do that. I have heard the right hon. Member's thoughts, but there is interest both in here and outside.

**Mr Jonathan Brash** (Hartlepool) (Lab): One of my great frustrations in the debate around energy security is the way that populism and ideology pollute the debate. Hartlepool has one of the largest clean-energy economies in England, through new nuclear, which some oppose, and through renewables, which others oppose, but both of which I support. I also support drilling in the North sea. It is good for jobs and good for the economy. Will the Minister take the message back to her Department that we must approve Jackdaw and Rosebank and go further to expand drilling in the North sea?

**Katie White:** I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and interest in this and other energy decisions. I cannot make any further comments on these particular projects because of the robust regulatory process that is under way.

**Graham Leadbitter** (Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey) (SNP): Both Labour and the Conservatives are guilty of failing oil and gas workers by driving uncertainty in this debate: the Conservatives by their U-turn on climate change policy, something which both the oil and gas sector and the renewables sector are deeply unhappy with, and the Labour Government by their complete lack of pace in decision making on regulatory issues, such as the transmission network use of system—TNUoS—charges, the 18 months to decide what is happening at Ardersier, and now on Jackdaw and Rosebank.

The whole energy sector needs pace in and clarity of decision making. Scotland would make this a priority with the full powers of independence. Will the Government put the same pace and effort in?

**Katie White:** I agree with the hon. Member that the Opposition have made a certain number of U-turns, and those U-turns keep coming so we will continue to see what their position is. Also, their lack of clarity on strategic planning for our energy systems—they are not listening—has had regretful consequences. Where I would disagree is that the deadline was in August, and everybody would expect us to listen to that evidence and take account of all that input. On not moving at pace, nobody would say that this Government have not moved at pace in terms of our clean energy mission.

**Mike Reader** (Northampton South) (Lab): The Energy Security and Net Zero Committee heard that production rose by a fifth between 2014 and 2019, when there was a much more favourable taxation regime, and that jobs continued to fall in the sector. The evidence is clear: approving Rosebank and Jackdaw will not protect jobs. The sector is unfortunately in decline. But does the Minister agree that if we can fix the transition costs that are stopping renewables, end the ridiculous delays from the National Energy System Operator on connections, end the SNP's blocking of nuclear and, of course, ramp up support and training for workers, that will help revive the sector and make it sustainable long term?

**Katie White:** I welcome my hon. Friend's interest in this matter and the wider debate. I appreciate the strength of feeling—I can hear the strength of feeling on both sides of this House. I cannot say any more about the specific process and the decisions that are under way, but we are doing everything we can to ensure that our energy system works efficiently and moves at pace. I look forward to continuing to engaging with him on that.

**Dr Roz Savage** (South Cotswolds) (LD): We have heard a lot from the Government about energy security, but if Rosebank were to go ahead, we would not own the oil or set its price and most of it would not be refined here. Thousands of homes in my constituency are off the gas grid and are heated with oil bought by the tankful at whatever the international price happens to be that week. Will the Minister explain what security a barrel sold on the international market at the international price buys for the households of the South Cotswolds?

**Katie White:** I thank the hon. Lady for her interest in this area. Getting into any defence of specific areas may lead me to potentially say things that I should not say as it is a decision for the Secretary of State. She will take into account the environmental impact assessment, and we are working through the large amount of evidence that has come into the Department.

**Catherine Fookes** (Monmouthshire) (Lab): I will say from the outset that I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy): I am afraid I do not agree with drilling for oil in Rosebank. It would not take a penny off bills, and it would absolutely blow our carbon emissions targets out the water. The Conservatives are living in another world if they have not lived through the summer that we have all lived through, with drought

and wildfires all across south Wales. We need to go hard on the green transition. Does the Minister agree that we should keep to our targets in the Climate Change Act 2008 and that we should not agree with the Conservatives to repeal it?

**Katie White:** I note my hon. Friend's opinion. As I say, there is a strength of feeling on the different sides of the House. We are noting that, but I will make no comment. On her question about the Climate Change Act, I was absolutely baffled at the Conservatives' position. It was not a position that the shadow Secretary of State took when he was in power, and many in his party would be ashamed. I noted the article in the *Financial Times* from a former Environment Secretary, who referred to it as "tin-eared".

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Our long-term goal must be energy independence so that we are never again at the mercy of volatile foreign regimes for our basic power needs. National Energy Action Northern Ireland has highlighted that roughly 39% of households in Northern Ireland are currently living in fuel poverty. That is compounded by the fact that 60% of homes in Northern Ireland still rely on heating oil and are subject to unregulated markets. Given that the public consultation has now concluded, will the Minister assure the House that the final decision will strike a balance between our environmental responsibilities and the urgent need to protect domestic energy security, shield hard-pressed working families from soaring utility bills and safeguard the thousands of vital jobs supported by our domestic energy sector?

**Katie White:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising those important points. The Secretary of State has put energy affordability at the heart of our agenda, and we will continue to do that. She has worked on fuel poverty for many years and is hugely passionate about it. When the strait of Hormuz and middle east crisis began, we took action on heating oil, and the Government are investing a record amount in warm homes. We need to do that at pace to make sure it is felt in constituencies and postcodes across our islands.

**Luke Myer** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I echo the comments made by the Chair of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee. At risk of inviting criticism from the left and the right, I plead for some nuance in this debate. These are two materially different prospects, and of course one of them is able to feed directly into our domestic market. I urge Ministers to make sure that the decision is made based on evidence rather than just ideology.

**Katie White:** I assure my hon. Friend that we are very much in favour of evidence-based policymaking.

**Chris Ward** (Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven) (Lab): Given the climate emergency that we are already living through, this is obviously a hugely significant decision for the Secretary of State. While I respect that the Minister cannot comment on the merits of each proposal, surely she can comment on how the House will be able to scrutinise any final decision. When a final decision is taken, can she confirm from the Dispatch Box that there will be a chance to debate and vote on it in the House?

**Katie White:** I thank my hon. Friend for his suggestion. He is absolutely right that the robustness of this process is key. We need to ensure that we respect the process, which will lead to clarity on the decision; that is the most important thing for us.

**Steve Yemm** (Mansfield) (Lab): A former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, has recently argued that the future of the North sea is not about a choice between oil and gas and renewables, but about protecting jobs as workers transition into the industries of the future. Does the Minister agree that the reason projects like Jackdaw and Rosebank matter so much is that they provide jobs, investment, skills and further tax revenues today, and that a just transition has to protect those workers and communities, rather than leaving them behind?

**Katie White:** I respect our former leaders, who have engaged many times in the energy conversation. My hon. Friend highlights many different areas that are impacted. The North sea does have an impact in each of those areas, and the Secretary of State will make a decision in due course, taking account of the new evidence that she has received.

## Bluetongue Virus in Livestock

11.16 am

**Robbie Moore** (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on bluetongue virus in livestock.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Stephen Morgan):** I begin by recognising that this is an incredibly difficult time for livestock keepers, veterinary professionals and those who are working directly on the impact of the bluetongue outbreak. Responding to outbreaks is at the core of the work of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and we will continue to use tried and tested methods to address this challenge.

Bluetongue affects cattle, sheep, goats, deer and camelids. It is spread by biting midges and can cause significant animal health impacts, although it poses no risk to human health or food safety. The first confirmed case of bluetongue serotype 3 in the UK this year was on 10 July in Staffordshire. As of yesterday, there have been 795 confirmed cases of bluetongue in Great Britain. We are supporting enhanced testing capacity. We have worked closely with the devolved Governments and industry throughout the outbreak, listening to farmers and jointly developing policies to ensure that farmers receive timely information and practical guidance. That has included regular disease alerts, social media updates, weekly communications to livestock keepers and a programme of industry webinars.

Vaccination remains the most effective and viable short and long-term control measure against bluetongue, both for this season and in the future. DEFRA and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate are working closely with manufacturers to monitor availability and taking proactive steps to ensure that additional vaccine stocks are made available as quickly as possible. I encourage all livestock keepers to remain vigilant, to monitor and vaccinate their animals and to report any suspicions of disease immediately.

Finally, I know that this has been a trying period for farmers, animal keepers and private vets. Support is available through Government guidance, the rural services helpline and Farming Help. We will continue to work closely with industry representatives to ensure that concerns are heard, information is shared promptly and support reaches those who need it. Through vigilance, vaccination and partnership, we will continue to meet this challenge and protect the health of our livestock sector.

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

**Robbie Moore:** Bluetongue is spreading across Britain at an unprecedented rate, devastating livestock businesses and putting farming families under immense financial and emotional pressure. I thank our vets and those on the frontline in addressing the spread of the virus.

As of yesterday, 795 cases have been confirmed this season, but there are more than 2,500 potential cases still under investigation, yet farmers and vets are being forced to wait up to three weeks for blood test results, leaving the livestock sector without a real-time picture of the outbreak. Why was testing capacity not significantly

increased over the summer period, and when will Ministers clear that backlog? In hotspot areas, will a proportionate risk-based approach be adopted?

These delays are more concerning given that DEFRA's expenditure on bluetongue testing was significantly reduced under this Labour Government by 74% in this financial year. Why did the Government allow that spending to fall so dramatically, just as the outbreak was accelerating? Ministers rightly advise farmers to vaccinate livestock, but supplies can take up to three or four weeks to arrive. Why have the Government not acted to secure adequate vaccine supplies by working more closely with vaccine manufacturers, veterinary bodies and industry?

Farmers also face mounting fallen stock disposal costs, yet repeated calls to Ministers for financial assistance have gone unanswered. Can the Government confirm today that financial assistance will be put in place, and will they review environmental permit constraints to ease carcase disposal?

Finally, bluetongue presents similar symptoms to those of foot and mouth disease, which is already present in continental Europe. With testing for bluetongue taking weeks to turn around, there is concern that a positive foot and mouth case could be hidden in the backlog. What assurances can the Minister give that he is alert to that issue and is taking action? It seems that despite concerns being raised consistently throughout the summer, Ministers have been asleep at the wheel.

**Stephen Morgan:** I stress that vaccination remains the only effective long-term option for disease control, and we will continue to work with keepers of susceptible animals to discuss vaccine options with their vets in order to protect animals and reduce the impact of disease. I thank the shadow Minister for his questions, and we absolutely recognise that this is a difficult time for livestock keepers and the veterinary professionals supporting them. DEFRA is working closely with livestock keepers and the industry to facilitate access to vaccinations and ensure timely information. That has included webinars, engagement events attended by 1,000 farmers, disease alerts, regular updates on gov.uk and Animal and Plant Health Agency channels, and welfare support.

I stress that the Government have acted quickly to secure increased vaccine supply. Vaccination remains the only effective long-term option for disease control, and we will continue to engage with all keepers of susceptible animals to discuss vaccine options with them. On testing capacity at the Pirbright Institute and the APHA, we have stepped up capacity for testing and work closely with industry on such issues. We will continue to work with keepers of animals to ensure that the sector is supported, and I will continue to engage with the National Sheep Association, the National Farmers' Union and others on the issues at hand.

**Terry Jermy** (South West Norfolk) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his response and his engagement with the farming community over the summer, which I know has been appreciated. Bluetongue is currently a huge concern for farmers in Norfolk, and resilience is so low that any one issue risks being the straw that breaks the camel's back. We now have the farming profitability review and the farming road map, but will the Minister talk more about work that the Government are doing to improve resilience in the farming community?

**Stephen Morgan:** I thank my hon. Friend, who is a real champion for the farming community in his constituency. He recently met more than 100 farmers across his patch, and I look forward to working with him this autumn on the challenges and issues that the farming community in his constituency continues to face. He is absolutely right: our road map sets out a 25-year plan to support the farming community to build resilience, confidence and a productive sector for the future, and I know he will do everything he can to ensure that that becomes reality in his constituency.

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

**Sarah Dyke** (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): As climate change extends the range of disease-carrying midges, confirmed bluetongue cases have surged to nearly 800 nationally, with thousands more suspected. Somerset and Devon are among the worst affected areas, and vets in Glastonbury and Somerton tell me that their vaccine waiting lists are now as long as their arm. Farmers face mounting costs when transporting fallen stock and paying for vaccines, and all the while they deal with the devastation of their livestock being put at risk. Farmers cannot be expected to shoulder an ever-growing share of the cost of controlling a disease that threatens our national food security, and the Government must recognise the serious financial pressure that the outbreak is placing on farmers, who are already struggling after years of neglect. What steps is the Minister taking to accelerate the vaccination roll-out, support affected farmers with financial assistance, and remove barriers to surveillance?

**Stephen Morgan:** I thank the hon. Member for her questions. It was a pleasure to be in the south-west in August to hear directly from farmers about some of the challenges they are facing, including farmers in the south-west affected by the bluetongue virus. I absolutely recognise the challenges it has brought them this summer, on top of a whole set of other challenges.

I must stress the importance of vaccination. That is why we have worked really closely with industry to increase the vaccine supply coming into the country. We are also working closely with the Pirbright Institute to ensure that there is extra testing capacity. We recognise the significant impact bluetongue is having on farmers. We are reviewing our processes to help expedite the confirmation of disease and we are considering what further support may be made available to farmers in the future.

**Ben Goldsborough** (South Norfolk) (Lab): The date 27 August 2024 will stick with me for a very long time, because it brought the first case of bluetongue in South Norfolk. Will the Minister say specifically what action is being taken to increase APHA capacity, but also to improve mapping accounting for both confirmed and suspected cases of the disease?

**Stephen Morgan:** As I mentioned earlier, we have increased capacity at the Pirbright Institute and are working closely with the APHA on capacity issues. I am very happy to write to my hon. Friend on the specifics. I know he is a real champion on these issues and will continue to hold my feet to the fire on any action the Government can take.

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

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I remind the House of my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and also that my wife is a practising veterinary surgeon.

What is happening was predictable because it was predicted. The Government were warned by the National Audit Office in June last year that they were unprepared for outbreaks of this sort. Will the Minister tell us what actions were taken by the Department following that? The priority for the moment must be getting a better vaccine supply and faster testing turnarounds, but then there are questions that need to be answered about the lack of a proper awareness campaign earlier in the midge season, because we will be coming back to this.

Why is better information not available for vets and farmers? I vaccinated my stock last year. I could not even find out this year whether that was going to be sufficient, or whether vaccination would need to be done again. The Minister is right about the protection we get from vaccination. The second most important thing is reliable information.

**Stephen Morgan:** I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for his contribution. He is absolutely right that this is a serious issue that needs serious consideration. I mentioned that DEFRA has tried and tested approaches to dealing with outbreaks. There are always lessons that we can learn. I will certainly look very closely at what the report tells us and I will listen very closely to what the Select Committee may say on these issues in due course.

On communication, there is always more that we can do. We have had popular webinars and have been putting information on the gov.uk website. There has been information from the APHA as well. I also want to praise the contribution the National Farmers' Union has made to ensure that farmers are engaged on these issues and are getting the right support at the right time.

**Josh Newbury** (Cannock Chase) (Lab): Bluetongue is causing misery in my county of Staffordshire, which has seen the biggest growth in cases in our region. The more vociferous spread and longer season due to the heat this summer underlines the urgent need for disease outbreak preparedness to be a key plank of Britain's adaptation to climate change. Is the Minister confident that the increased uptake we will hopefully see can be fulfilled? Is he willing to meet livestock farmers in my constituency to discuss the many challenges they have faced this summer?

**Stephen Morgan:** My hon. Friend is a real champion on farming issues and I look forward to visiting his constituency in due course to understand the challenges and opportunities farmers there are facing. I engage regularly with the livestock sector, and visited the National Sheep Association event in July. I am very happy to hear his views and concerns, and to meet the sector to understand any opportunities and challenges that continue to exist.

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Bluetongue is causing considerable concern among livestock farmers in Scotland and the Scottish Borders, with cases increasing and restrictions affecting livestock movements at a critical time of year. Indeed, the important Kelso ram sales are due to take place next week in

my constituency. Given the substantial movement of sheep and cattle across the Scotland-England border, what discussions is the Minister having with the Scottish Government to ensure that vaccination, testing and movement rules are properly co-ordinated across Great Britain and do not create unnecessary barriers for farmers?

**Stephen Morgan:** I can assure the hon. Member that officials are working closely with the devolved nations. Indeed, I am in regular contact with my equivalents in the other nations to make sure we keep a close eye on the outbreak and do everything we can cross-border to provide support with any challenges and concerns.

**Perran Moon** (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): I thank the Minister for visiting Cornwall last month to talk to some of our farmers about their concerns. As of Tuesday, there were 117 cases in Cornwall, and—as has been mentioned—a further 2,500 are under investigation nationally. My farmers have raised their concerns about the length of time it is taking to get test results back. Can the Minister reassure my farmers that their test results will be delivered in a timely manner?

**Stephen Morgan:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question—I know that this issue really matters to him, based on the feedback and concerns he has received from his farmers. It was a real pleasure to be with the Prime Minister last month to announce further measures to support our farming community down in the south-west. On my hon. Friend's broader points about capacity issues at Pirbright and testing, I will certainly take away the specific questions he has raised, but I can assure him today from the Dispatch Box that there is increased capacity to assist with those issues.

**John Cooper** (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): The midges that spread bluetongue are no respecters of the border, or of the fact that devolved issues are sent to Holyrood for consideration in Scotland. As we have heard, there are difficulties with cross-border movement—it is a huge issue—and I have also been told that in the initial stages of this outbreak, the Animal and Plant Health Agency reacted in Scotland with all the alacrity of a tranquilised sloth. The Minister has warm words about talking with his equivalent in Scotland, but we need action on the ground; there are real difficulties now, particularly with these sales coming along.

**Stephen Morgan:** There was a very helpful briefing for parliamentarians in August, led by my colleague Baroness Hayman, and we are very happy to replicate that so that we fully understand the cross-border issues. However, I can assure the hon. Member from the Dispatch Box that we continue to work across Governments to ensure our farmers are protected, wherever in the United Kingdom they live.

**Josh Fenton-Glynn** (Calder Valley) (Lab): I welcome the new Minister to his role, and thank our DEFRA Parliamentary Private Secretaries for their typically diligent work in briefing us ahead of this urgent question. While taking part in the NFU's excellent food and farming fellowship, I have seen how precarious profit margins are for our livestock farmers, both in Calder Valley and beyond. What steps are we going to take to support farmers managing the costs of bluetongue, including vet bills, vaccinations and fallen stock disposal?

**Stephen Morgan:** DEFRA is considering a whole range of measures to support the farming community, including supporting vaccination availability and expanding testing capacity, as I mentioned earlier. We will continue to evaluate measures, including the possibility of further financial support. That is an incredibly important issue, which the Department is considering, and we will certainly respond to my hon. Friend in due course with further detail.

**Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD):** While we are in the middle of this outbreak, a lot of vets and farmers have made a couple of technical suggestions that could help us to deal with it. Obviously, we want to roll out the vaccinations as soon as possible and test as quickly as possible. First, under the specified animal pathogens order, bluetongue is classified in such a way that very few labs can continue testing at the moment. Not only is that slowing down the diagnosis of bluetongue, but we cannot test for other causes of abortion that farmers regularly need to test for. Secondly, for those practices and wholesalers that have managed to secure vaccines from abroad, a lot of their labels will be in Spanish, Polish or German. Should English-labelled product become available, can we ensure that they will not have to discard the previous perfectly good product, as that would be a huge financial loss?

**Stephen Morgan:** I thank the hon. Member for his question—he brings to the House real expertise on these issues, given his background in veterinary science. I pay tribute to all vets across the country who are supporting farmers at this difficult time. The hon. Member has been corresponding with the Department on various issues related to bluetongue for quite some time, and I am very grateful for the expertise he has been feeding into DEFRA policy. I will take away the specific points he has raised, look into those matters and get back to him.

**Ms Julie Minns (Carlisle) (Lab):** Can I add to what my neighbour across the border, the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (John Cooper), has said about the friction we already experience with cross-border trade? Over the summer, I visited the country's largest sheep auction, which is in my constituency, and that trades right across the border. With the introduction of the zone in the south-west of Scotland, the restrictions on trade that still exist and what the auction house has to go through to be able to trade cattle and sheep from Scotland are now frankly somewhat meaningless. Can I please urge the Government to work at pace with the Scottish Government to get frictionless trade across the Scottish border?

**Stephen Morgan:** It was a real pleasure to visit Scotland over the recess to talk to Scottish farmers about some of the issues and challenges that they face. Indeed, some of those cross-border issues are live to the issues that my hon. Friend describes. I am happy to work with her on those issues, so that we can find solutions as appropriate.

**Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con):** May I welcome the Minister to his position? Farmers in Somerset and Devon are gravely concerned by this outbreak, as they are among the worst affected areas in the country. I am afraid that the Government and his Department have

been asleep. He talks about increasing testing capacity, yet this Government have cut the money available for testing by 74% over the past 12 months. There are now reports that it is taking weeks for vaccines to reach the farmers and vets who need them. Can the Minister outline what the Government are doing to ensure that those supplies reach those who so desperately need them?

**Stephen Morgan:** The hon. Member will have been listening carefully to what I said about increased capacity at the APHA and what we have been doing to work with industry to increase vaccine supply. I must stress the importance of vaccination and ensuring that farmers are kept informed of progress that the Government are making. The best way that they can do that is by looking at the regular updates on gov.uk, on social media and at the disease alert services. There are weekly email updates to livestock keepers, and I encourage him to ensure that his constituents are receiving those emails.

**Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab/Co-op):** I welcome the Minister's actions over the summer. First, may I put on record my empathy and thanks to farmers and vets around the country who are dealing with this desperate situation on top of an already horrible year with harvests, the weather and other challenges facing the farming community? I spoke to a farmer in my constituency in Cambridgeshire before this urgent question this morning, and we are looking across the border to Norfolk and other challenges there. There is a question around access to vaccines and the speed of testing, and I urge the Minister to speed that up, but to be honest, there is a bigger issue here. It is not a question of the immediate response, although that is important. For far too long, DEFRA has been unprepared for the resilience we need to face biosecurity threats in this country. We have had a decade of cuts. Frankly, it is not about what has happened this year, but about what we inherited and how DEFRA's budgets have been prioritised by lots of previous Governments. Can he reassure me that as we face a changing climate, which makes these situations more likely, the machinery of government in DEFRA will be up to the job in preparing for these challenges, so that farmers are supported in years to come when we face these risks?

**Stephen Morgan:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his efforts and enthusiasm during his time as a DEFRA PPS. It is one of the best jobs in government. He makes a number of valid points from his expertise working closely in the Department. I will certainly take away the messages I have heard from him today. My message to farmers in his community is simple: remain vigilant, monitor your animals closely and take up the vaccine. I will certainly take away the concerns that he has raised to make sure that the Government are doing everything we possibly can.

**Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD):** Livestock farmers in North Shropshire, as everywhere else across the country, have had a torrid year. Drought has impacted their ability to feed their livestock, dairy farmers are selling milk at far less than the cost of production, and now they have the added concern of bluetongue bringing a horrendous end to a horrendous year. They have been caught unawares, and the Department has clearly been unprepared for something that could have easily been predicted. What support is the Minister putting in

[Helen Morgan]

place for those farmers now? More importantly, what steps will be taken for this time next year, so that we do not find ourselves again trying to get on top of an epidemic that could have been prevented?

**Stephen Morgan:** As I mentioned, DEFRA has long-standing arrangements in place to support outbreaks. There are always lessons that we can learn from outbreaks, but we are working closely with industry, farmers, the NFU and others. We recognise the impact that bluetongue is having on farmers after a very difficult summer, and we are looking at everything we can do to support them with the outbreak going forward.

**Johanna Baxter** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his place, and I am pleased to hear him promote vaccine uptake. Can he say a little more about the discussions he is having with the Scottish Government to ensure that farmers and livestock keepers in Scotland are getting the vaccines they need? Given the pressure on the veterinary sector, can he assure the House that the reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 is getting the attention that it deserves? That will support not only our veterinary surgeons and all those who work in the sector, but consumers.

**Stephen Morgan:** My hon. Friend will know that my colleague in the other place, Baroness Hayman, leads on a number of the areas that she describes, but I will certainly take those messages back to her. As I mentioned earlier, I am very keen to work with the devolved nations on the issues that we face in the farming community, and I look forward to working with my hon. Friend on any issues and concerns that she has going forward.

**David Reed** (Exmouth and Exeter East) (Con): Livestock farmers in Devon are facing this bluetongue outbreak at an already difficult time. They are meeting unexpected vaccination and fallen stock costs following a summer of drought, while changes to agricultural property relief and business property relief are adding to concerns about farm finances and succession. Does the Minister recognise that the financial impact of bluetongue cannot be considered in isolation, and what assessment has he made of the cumulative pressures on farm cash flow this year?

**Stephen Morgan:** As I mentioned earlier, it was good to be in the south-west to talk to farmers directly about their asks of Government. We have put in place a number of actions following their asks, and we will continue to work closely with the NFU and others to understand what more they might need. I absolutely recognise the pressures that livestock keepers are under, including financial pressures and indeed wellbeing pressures. There is support available for the sector, but I will certainly take the hon. Gentleman's views and concerns back to the Department.

**Seamus Logan** (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): Perhaps in contrast to some other Members, I want to commend the Minister for the interest that he has shown in the issues affecting Scottish farmers, not least in my constituency and the north-east in general. I also want to commend the excellent collaborative

work in which he is engaging with the Scottish Government. I was encouraged to hear him say in response to various Members from across the House that he is looking at potential additional financial support, because there will be extra costs for farmers next year. I had the pleasure of an excellent "coolcation" in Kinlochbervie in the highlands, and I can assure the Minister that it was a bumper season for midges this year—next year will be even more so. If he is looking at additional financial support, will he please consider the Barnett consequential for Scotland?

**Stephen Morgan:** It was a real pleasure to visit the hon. Gentleman's constituency during recess, and I thank him for that opportunity. I will take away the issues that he describes. Midges do not respect boundaries, so it is really important that we work across boundaries on these issues and make sure that, where possible, we can have a co-ordinated approach.

**Rebecca Smith** (South West Devon) (Con): As my hon. Friend the Member for Exmouth and Exeter East (David Reed) has already alluded to, Devon has a huge issue with bluetongue cases. In fact, of the 795 cases, 334—by far the highest number across the country—are in Devon, and one of those is new this week. I am sure that the Minister will remember that in a previous Westminster Hall debate on financing farming, I invited him to visit Dartmoor. That was ostensibly about livestock numbers, hill ponies and the future of farming on Dartmoor, but given this bluetongue outbreak, the invitation seems even more important now, because Dartmoor is a key farming part of Devon. I have invited the Minister three times and not yet had a response, so I would like to extend my invitation again. My farmers in South West Devon, including those in Dartmoor, would very much welcome a visit, and I would be grateful if he could respond to the letters that I have sent him over the last few months.

**Stephen Morgan:** The hon. Member knows from my face-to-face conversations with her that I am very keen to visit Dartmoor, and I am sure we can make that possible as soon as the diary allows.

**Edward Morello** (West Dorset) (LD): Last week I was at the Melpash agricultural show, and I extend an invitation to the Minister to join me at next year's show. Farmers there raised all the issues that have been mentioned already—testing time, vaccination availability and disposal costs—but one thing that they also raised is frustration with the fact that the Government map of bluetongue is woefully out of date, possibly by as much as a three-month lag. We know that bluetongue is in Dorset. The map shows one confirmed case, but one farmer told me that they know of at least five in the immediate area. The map does not show suspected cases, and it does not show where testing is being undertaken. The problem is that that is causing other farmers to delay doing anything, because they think it is not in their area yet. Will the Minister please do something to speed up the updating of the map, and ensure that it shows suspected cases and where testing is under way?

**Stephen Morgan:** I mentioned at the outset the importance of communication with the livestock sector, and that has included webinars, engagement events,

disease alerts and information on gov.uk. I will take away the hon. Member's specific point about the map. I thank him for flagging it with me today so that we can look into those issues.

**David Mundell** (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): May I once again restate the cross-border issue? Longtown in the constituency of the hon. Member for Carlisle (Ms Minns) is one of the most important markets for livestock in the south of Scotland. Can the Minister confirm specifically that he is addressing the cross-border issues that NFU Scotland has raised, including the requirement relating to vaccination, testing and the return of animals to Scotland; the compatibility and recognition of vaccination records across the border; and the arrangements for animals that cannot meet vaccination requirements within the prescribed timescales?

**Stephen Morgan:** I met NFU Scotland on my visit to Aberdeenshire in August. I will write to the right hon. Member on the specific actions he describes and will ensure that he receives a robust response.

**Ben Maguire** (North Cornwall) (LD): My North Cornwall farmers have had the summer from hell. Bluetongue virus has decimated their herds, and that is on top of a crushing drought. One farmer has told me that he has lost 40 of his sheep to bluetongue, with no vaccine available when he needed it most. Seeing their animals suffer is hard enough without the huge associated costs of disposing of fallen livestock, compounded by the financial loss of the animals themselves. Will the Minister back my call in my letter to him back on 3 August, and supported by the NFU, for urgent financial assistance for farmers facing these extraordinary disposal costs?

**Stephen Morgan:** As I have mentioned, DEFRA is considering a whole range of options to support the farming community, including supporting vaccination availability and expanding testing capacity. We will continue to evaluate measures including the possibility of financial support. We do recognise that this is an incredibly challenging time for those in the livestock community, and we will do what we can to support them.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his positive answers, which I think we should be encouraged by. Although Northern Ireland thankfully has no reported cases of bluetongue, the Ulster Farmers' Union—I declare an interest as a member—has issued an urgent warning that vaccine supplies are under severe pressure in GB, with some major manufacturers completely out of stock. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland has rightly moved to a general licence to allow our farmers to vaccinate, but they cannot protect their herds if they cannot access the physical vaccine vials. Will the Minister assure this House that the Government are working directly with pharmaceutical manufacturers to guarantee security of supply, and will he commit to working closely with the Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure that our family farms are not left at the back of the queue for those vital BTV-3 vaccine supplies, as the midges' active season continues and gets even worse.

**Stephen Morgan:** Yes and yes.

## Business of the House

**Mr Speaker:** The reshuffles have left in place the old guard—the old team—so let us start off with the shadow Leader of the House, Jesse Norman.

11.48 am

**Jesse Norman** (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): Will the Leader of the House give the House the forthcoming business?

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Alan Campbell):** The business for the week commencing 7 September will include:

MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER—Remaining stages of the Health Bill (day one).

TUESDAY 8 SEPTEMBER—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Health Bill.

WEDNESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER—Second Reading of the Civil Aviation (Consumer Protection and Regulatory Reform) Bill [*Lords*].

THURSDAY 10 SEPTEMBER—Second Reading of the Social Housing Bill [*Lords*].

FRIDAY 11 SEPTEMBER—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 14 September will include:

MONDAY 14 SEPTEMBER—All stages of the Sovereign Grant Bill, followed by a general debate, subject to be confirmed.

TUESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER—General debate on the potential merits of a full ban on fracking, followed by general debate on World Sepsis Awareness Month. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

The House will rise for the conference recess at the conclusion of business on Tuesday 15 September and return on Monday 12 October.

**Jesse Norman:** The past few weeks have brought news of the deaths of Dolly Parton, Tim Curry and Wendell Berry. I am sure that many colleagues will share my sense of shock and sadness at the loss of those extraordinary figures, but also give great thanks for their lives.

Truly, we live in a world of change. Rather unexpectedly, we have a new Government, a new Prime Minister and a reshuffle on the Treasury Bench and among the Opposition. Amid all that risk and uncertainty, I am delighted to say that there has been one beacon of stability, one oasis of calm and one single unmoving axel at the still centre of our politics: I refer, of course, to the Leader of the House and myself. Each of us has emerged phoenix-like, blinking but resolute from the ashes of political reconstruction. I rather fear that, given our longevity and at least the level of banter on the Government side of the Dispatch Box, we will be seen over time as the Morecambe and Wise, or perhaps the two Ronnies, of British politics. I will not invite the House to say which of us is which, but I will simply say to you, Mr Speaker, and to all Members returning from recess, it is hello from me and it is hello from him.

Now to more serious matters. I invite the Leader of the House to clarify where the Government stand on defence spending, given the different briefings and public challenges that the Government and the Prime Minister have received over the past two weeks.

[Jesse Norman]

I also have two specific questions, the first of which is about restoration and renewal. The Government have had since February to table a motion on this topic. In view of the new Prime Minister's spending priorities, it now seems highly unlikely that the ruinously expensive current plans will be put to the House before the end of this year. Seven months have already passed with no action. Will the Government now recognise the delay and use it to give the R and R team time to develop a sane and far less costly alternative?

My second question is about an issue at the very heart of the new Government: the status and functions of No. 10 North. As the House knows well, in our system of Government, a Prime Minister may have political power but No. 10 is not a spending Department and it does not possess independent fiscal authority, yet the new Prime Minister has insisted again and again that No. 10 North will not just be a paper exercise. You see the difficulty, Mr Speaker.

Will No. 10 North have real spending powers of its own? If the answer is yes, then this will be a new kind of cross-departmental Ministry—perhaps a territorial Ministry, like a regional Government but with no defined scope or mandate. We will need to see the legal instruments delegating Treasury authority and functions to it. After all, in this scenario the Chancellor of the Exchequer will not be fully in charge of the public finances. We will have to have new forms of accountability to this House, with a No. 10 North Select Committee and Question Time, so that Members can press the First Secretary of State, or perhaps the Prime Minister, as the ultimately responsible Minister, should the spending decisions that No. 10 North takes turn out as they plan or, indeed, as they do not plan.

However, if the answer is no, and No. 10 North will not have spending power of its own, then ultimately the Treasury and the Chancellor will continue to sign off on its public spending and on any taxing matters. Decentralisation is really important, but No. 10 North will not be a means of decentralisation in this scenario; it will be just another layer of Government. It does not feel like the Government have thought this issue through at all, so I would be grateful for answers to these questions, both now from the Leader of the House and in writing from the First Secretary of State.

**Sir Alan Campbell:** Let me begin by saying that I am sure the thoughts of the whole House are with the people of Nepal and all those affected by the recent devastating flash floods, including the loved ones of 36 missing British nationals. As the Prime Minister said to the House on Tuesday, we will do everything we can to support British nationals impacted in the region and we are working closely with the Nepalese authorities.

This summer has seen a significant number of wildfires that have affected many people. I pay tribute to the emergency services who have been on the frontline of tackling the blazes. I also pay tribute to and thank the farmers who have been brave in their work to protect their livelihoods and their whole communities. I put on record our thanks to them.

I also pay tribute to the two police officers who lost their lives in Cleveland, PC Blades and PC Clough. They devoted their lives to the noblest form of public

service: protecting their fellow citizens. Policing is not just a profession, but a calling answered only by those who are willing to place themselves in harm's way to protect us all. I think also of their colleagues in uniform, not just in Cleveland but across policing, who have lost friends, colleagues and fellow members of the policing family.

As the shadow Leader of the House said, we recently lost a great number of great people from across the world, not least in sport and entertainment, including Billy Boston, one of the greatest and most popular rugby league players of all time—I know that you were a great admirer, Mr Speaker—and Keven Keegan, a football legend who played for Liverpool, Newcastle and England, and who went on to manage the national side. Along with the shadow Leader of the House, I also pay tribute to Dolly Parton. Beyond her legacy as the queen of country music, she will also be remembered through the work of her Imagination Library, which has provided 7 million books to children in the UK, and helped children across the world discover a love of reading.

Earlier this week, the House heard from the new Prime Minister. His Administration will oversee the rewiring of the British state—I will get on to the specifics that the right hon. Gentleman raised in a moment—the rebuilding of the resilience of our communities, and the reindustrialisation of our regions. Later this year, our 10-year plan for Britain will set out plans for stronger public control over those essentials, making them work for people and places once again.

I am pleased—as you are, Mr Speaker—that the shadow Leader of the House survived the reshuffle, and I welcome him back to his place. He was generous in his offer to run my campaign to continue in my role, which was a successful campaign on his part. I was ready to reciprocate, but that proved unnecessary. I am not sure that I am pleased with the way he described us, but I am genuinely pleased that he has remained in post. We do have our political differences, which is an obvious thing to say, but we share a deep respect for this place, and I look forward to working with him going forward. I am not sure about his suggestion that we are either Morecambe and Wise or the Two Ronnies—I think he flatters himself about his sense of humour with that—but we shall see.

There is no confusion, as the shadow Leader of the House suggests, about defence spending. The Prime Minister set out clearly what our position is, and we will have a Budget in the not-too-distant future that will set out what those proposals are. The Prime Minister faced this House on Tuesday for three hours and 20 minutes and then came back to do Prime Minister's questions yesterday, so there was no shortage of an opportunity for the Opposition to find out exactly what this Government are going to do.

On R and R, the shadow Leader of the House knows, as we have talked about it before, that a set of proposals has been put forward. We have thought deeply about the best time to bring them to the House—he should not assume that he will have to wait that much longer for this House to be given the opportunity to make a decision. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman on one thing, which is that the decision has been delayed for too long. As a result, there are costs to that delay, which we are paying whether the House decides to do something about it for the long term or not. I do not agree that the

answer is another delay while we go back and look at it again. We have been around that track so many times, which explains why we have got to this place.

On that subject, it is odd when a member of the shadow Cabinet leaves to run for office in London—to begin his support for London—yet criticises the Government, when the Opposition are actually whipped against the restoration of this place, which is the iconic building in London. It is part of a UNESCO world heritage site. This is work that is long overdue, and it will create jobs and opportunities not only in London but throughout the regions of our country. The Opposition cannot have it both ways.

As the Prime Minister has said, it is important that we pursue and indeed go further on the devolution agenda, and setting up No. 10 North will be the biggest transfer of power and decision making out of Whitehall in a generation. I can assure Members that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be in charge of the nation's finances, and he will set out his proposals; having said that, it is important that we get decisions made closer to where those affected will feel the effects.

I do have some agreement with the shadow Leader of the House on his point about scrutiny by this House. There is an issue, for instance, around how mayors are scrutinised. As power and decision making are transferred away, it raises the issue of how this House will continue to be able to provide that scrutiny. I will take that issue away and think about it more.

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall and Bloxwich) (Lab): May I ask the Leader of the House if we can have a debate in Government time on the best use of public money? Some £50 million has been allocated for a free school—against Government policy and against the evidence. Some £38 million has been drawn down by Oak academy trust, which was set up under covid, so it is not clear why it is needed now, and which distorts the publishing market. There is also the contentious transaction involving Walsall College and the closure of Walsall Leather Museum—none of this benefits my constituents, who do not want any of this. Could we have a debate on the best use of public money?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** My right hon. Friend is a great champion of her local community. We have previously talked about the issue of schools in her area. This Government are committed to empowering local leaders to take action and spend money where communities require it, and they are the best judge of how that money should be spent. I will ensure that the relevant Minister has heard her contribution. She may wish to seek a Westminster Hall debate to raise this issue, which I know has been going on for quite some time; alternatively, if she would like to meet a Minister, I will help her to arrange that.

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

**Bobby Dean** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I also welcome the Leader of the House back to his place. I believe this makes him the longest continuously serving member of the Labour Front Bench at 20 years, which is a remarkable achievement. I will not go into what I was doing 20 years ago—I am sure he has no interest in what I studied for my GCSEs.

One of the stories that caught my eye over the summer was the sale of British success story easyJet to a US private equity-backed investor. The sale will create worry about jobs, fares and routes across Europe, as well as worry for the British economy, as we are now going to see profits move overseas. Acquisitions in and of themselves are not a bad thing—sometimes they are a sign of positivity for British business—but what is worrying is the trend. We are starting to see British businesses bought out by overseas investors again and again, and we are seeing people leave the London stock exchange at an alarming rate. This is starting to become a problem for the resilience of the UK economy. Tate & Lyle, the famous sugar manufacturer, was also sold to an overseas investor this summer, and three London-listed companies decided to leave the London stock exchange just this week.

If the Government share my concern about this, they have many levers available to them to address the issue; they could look at stock market regulation, competition regulation and taxation. I believe that the time has come for us to have a proper debate in this House about this matter so that we can properly look into the details of those levers, see which are the correct ones to use and get a ministerial response on this matter. Will the Leader of the House organise for a debate about the future of UK businesses and the alarming trend of them being sold to overseas investors?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** The Government do not comment on individual firms' commercial decisions, but I do understand that some of the decisions the hon. Gentleman mentions will cause concern to employees and, in the case of easyJet, to travellers too. We are working to reform UK capital markets to make it easier for companies to raise capital, go public and grow. We do have some of the most innovative businesses in the world, and the most talented leaders and entrepreneurs of any nation, and we continue to work closely with business groups and industry leaders to understand the pressures facing industry and to develop measures to support it, including the measures the hon. Gentleman mentioned. There will be an opportunity to debate these matters up to and around the Budget, but the Liberal Democrats can also ask for one of their Opposition days, on which they might wish to choose this as a topic; it is entirely up to them.

**Jon Trickett** (Normanton and Hemsworth) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his place once again. Comments by a recently elected Reform councillor in my area have caused great offence, as he attacked, in quite a horrible way, women who have abortions. It not acceptable that people should use their platforms in that way. Of course, there are different points of view about abortion, but may I encourage the Leader of the House to reaffirm the consensus in our country that it is perfectly legal, reasonable and responsible for women to pursue that course of action? Does he think there may be an opportunity in the future where we could continue to reaffirm the views of all of us? Finally, will he say that it is not appropriate for people to use an elected position to make others feel deeply uncomfortable about personal choices—often painful ones—that they have made?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I am happy to reaffirm the Government's view on these matters. In terms of comments by a particular councillor, these people's views—not

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least Reform councillors’—often become clearer, more noticeable and even more abhorrent once they are elected and we see their true nature. They do not represent the view of right-minded people. Councillors are there to represent the whole community, not just to represent those who may share their abhorrent views.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I call the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the Backbench Business debates for Tuesday 15 September. The business in Westminster Hall that the Backbench Business Committee has agreed will include: on Tuesday 8 September, a debate on the safety of the Jewish community; on Thursday 10 September, debates on reform of the vascular sector and on the contribution of fathers and positive male role models to families and society; and on Tuesday 15 September, a debate on building safety and remediation of residential buildings. When we come back following the conference recess—we are planning ahead—on Tuesday 13 October there will be a debate on the future of the UK coach industry, and on Thursday 15 October there will be debates on support for unpaid carers and on progress towards a smoke-free UK.

I gently ask the Leader of the House to consider what time will be made available in the Chamber for the Backbench Business Committee during the week that we come back. Hopefully, he will be able to announce that next week. That week is Baby Loss Awareness Week. He will recall that the last debate we had on that had protected time, but it was held on a Monday when we came back and started very late in the day. Individuals bravely gave their stories late into the night, which I think we all agree was unacceptable. We would like to programme that debate for the Thursday we come back, if that is possible; obviously, we understand the constraints on the Government.

May I also ask the Leader of the House to use his good offices? The Backbench Business Committee consists of eight members, but we are holding a Labour vacancy following the promotion of the hon. Member for Harlow (Chris Vince), who has not been replaced. I am also aware that two of our members may be taking other parliamentary duties. Indeed, our Liberal Democrat member, the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr Dillon), has not been able to attend because of accidental damage to his leg, which has caused him great difficulty. We have a quorum of four, so that gives me real concern about our ability to meet and make decisions. May I gently ask that the appropriate things are done?

Young people go back to school in the not-too-distant future. It is welcome that those on low incomes will receive free school meals, so during term time there is not an issue, but there is a problem regarding what happens during the school holidays, on which the leader of Harrow council has written to me and to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Previously, under arrangements for Harrow council and, I suspect, many other local authorities across the country, the provision of those free school meals has continued. However, we understand that the rules and regulations around this have changed under the crisis and resilience fund; allegedly,

local authorities will now have to decide individually who gets support and who does not. To me and probably most Members of the House, that does not seem acceptable. Provision should be made on a basis such that children who potentially could go hungry over Christmas are not in that position. Could the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made on the Floor of the House next week setting out the position, to ensure that children of parents who are low paid are able to secure their necessary food?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his work and the work of his Committee; I will take away what he says about vacancies on that Committee and make sure that we fill them as quickly as possible, so that he can depend upon having at least a quorum at his meetings. I also thank him for updating the House on the future debate topics. He will know that I refer to that baby loss debate quite a lot, because I recall that situation very well. He will also know that I was extremely concerned about it and have tried since to do everything that we can to ensure that does not happen again, and indeed that other similar topics are given a proper time and a proper place for debate. I will take that point away and see whether we can make sure that happens.

On the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises about children in his patch, he will know that as they return to school, they return with help from this Government. Their parents were helped with the cost of uniforms, free school meals have been extended and there has been help for travel costs. The Government are always looking to help families with cost of living issues. I will take the hon. Gentleman's question away, because I have heard those concerns from my constituency as well: what happens during term time is great, but what happens for some families outside term time? I will refer the matter to colleagues to see what further help we can provide.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Let us speed up business questions a little bit, so everybody can get in.

**Josh Newbury** (Cannock Chase) (Lab): *The BMJ* has reported that £406 million allocated by universities to NHS trusts in England between 2020 and 2023 for medical student training remains unaccounted for, and some trusts admit that they do not know how that money was spent at all. That is a huge failure on the part of the Conservative party, which also presided over sluggish growth in medical school places and a service-wide workforce crisis. Given the seriousness of those findings, will the Leader of the House grant a debate on transparency and accountability in NHS training, so that we can be confident that all the money set aside to train the world-leading doctors of tomorrow will be spent properly?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** The Government are fixing the problem; we introduced the Medical Training (Prioritisation) Act 2026, and it has had an impact. Competition ratios have halved, prioritised doctors have filled 98% of roles and in some specialities, such as general practice, all posts have been filled by prioritised doctors. However, my hon. Friend is right to continue to raise and campaign on these matters, and I urge him to apply for a Westminster Hall debate so that he can hear directly from Ministers.

**David Mundell** (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): I welcome the Leader of the House back to his place. I very much supported his traditionalism when I saw that he did not engage in any vulgar hugging of the Prime Minister on his appointment.

Can we have a debate in Government time on the operation of the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency? My constituent Fiona Reid advises me that her daughter has sought a practical driving test in Dumfries and Galloway and has not been able to secure one before the end of January. She has also tried to get an appointment in Carlisle and has not been able to do so. For young people in rural areas like mine, driving is not a luxury—it is an important part of being able to get a job and of social interaction. Could we have that debate and get an improvement in that service?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** As ever, the right hon. Gentleman raises an important issue for his rural constituents. We have taken measures to improve the situation, stamping out the resale of tests, limiting changes to bookings and locations to stop bots, and doubling the number of permanent examiner trainers, but there is still, in some areas, a great deal of work to be done. I will make sure that the Transport Secretary hears his specific concerns and urge the Minister to write to him.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend back to his post, but I must say to him that not all the rewiring of the new Government is welcome. I understand that the Cabinet Office intends to move responsibility for the Infected Blood Compensation Authority to a Minister in the Lords. We all have constituents who are raising serious concerns about that process, and we want to be able to come to this House and hold to account the Minister responsible for that agency. I urge my right hon. Friend to take the matter up with the Cabinet Office—and, if the Government do intend to make that change, can we have a statement?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I will try to reassure my hon. Friend: even though ministerial responsibility might change, there will still be departmental and ministerial responsibility for such really important matters in this place. We will continue to have an opportunity to question, and to request statements from, Ministers who are accountable to this House.

**Tessa Munt** (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): Like others, one of my constituents inherited responsibility for a retirement property on the death of the resident. It has been on the market since 2022, incurring annual costs of about £14,000. It has a falling sale value, and there is ground rent, service charges, council tax and an exit fee. The landlord forbids subletting, even though it is renting out its own properties on the same site, and there is an over-55 residency restriction, so neither the beneficiaries nor their adult children, who are struggling to get on to the property ladder, can live in the property. Would the Leader of the House ask his ministerial colleagues to look at the protections for families trapped by retirement housing leases, including the cost elements I referred to—the huge service charges on empty properties and empty-home council tax—and age restrictions on occupancy?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I will draw to the attention of the relevant Minister the points that the hon. Lady makes, and make sure that they get back to her on those important matters.

**Ms Julie Minns** (Carlisle) (Lab): Inspired by the experience of club member Liam Burns, Carlisle golf club members have raised a whopping £54,000 for Prostate Cancer UK in their Big Golf Race. Liam himself is atop of the individual leaderboard, and the club has raised £20,000 more than the second-placed club. Will the Leader of the House please join me in congratulating Liam Burns and all the members of Carlisle golf club on a truly amazing round?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I will indeed join my hon. Friend in congratulating Liam Burns and everyone associated with the Big Golf Race, and thank them for raising so much money for such a worthy cause.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): It is 55 days till the Budget. Given the market's reaction to the Prime Minister's statement on Tuesday, and given that our gilt rates are higher than those of our peers in the G7, could we have a debate on the implications of higher taxes for growth? Given that the Prime Minister says that he will stick to the previous Prime Minister's borrowing rules, I think the country is very concerned that we are at grave risk of higher taxes, which will compound the problem that he is trying to fix.

**Sir Alan Campbell:** The right hon. Gentleman will have to wait for the Budget for some of the reassurances that he seeks, but I would gently point out to him—and he should know this, given the jobs he did in government—that there are international pressures, such as concerns about inflation, and competition around the world for money to invest in things like artificial intelligence. The difference between this Government and others in comparable situations is that the rates he talks about are the direct result of the Liz Truss Budget. Businesses and households are still living with that, and with higher mortgage rates than are necessary.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): This summer, wildfires raged across south Wales and other parts of the UK. On one day alone, our emergency services received 1,000 telephone calls. Our South Wales fire and rescue service worked tirelessly alongside firefighters from across the UK. The Royal Logistics Corps, councils, Welsh Water staff, farmers and residents all gave a helping hand in Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney. Ahead of the national wildfire summit, will the Government please provide a statement on support for areas such as the south Wales valleys, and on the steps being taken to improve preparedness and reduce the risk of fires in the future?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I join my hon. Friend in thanking everyone involved in tackling the fires—the emergency services, the farmers and local residents. The Government are spending around £100 million to strengthen the country's response to wildfires and extreme weather, and, as he points out, we will chair the wildfire summit in the autumn to consider how national response capabilities

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can be strengthened across the UK. I am sure that Ministers will continue to update the House on any further developments.

**Bradley Thomas** (Bromsgrove) (Con): Far too many communities across the country are blighted by Travellers and Gypsies who seek to circumvent the planning system and build without first seeking permission. I have two instances of that in my patch, in Dodford and Hagley. Does the Leader of the House agree that there should not be a two-tier approach in the planning system, and will he allow for a debate in Government time on strengthening the planning system, so that councils get the powers that they need to resolve this issue? Will he also stress to his colleague the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government that she should not have removed local councils' powers to prevent such development on the grounds of environmental damage?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** Residents would not expect a two-tier system, as the hon. Gentleman is right to point out. There is a statement following business questions on housing. I do not know whether the point that he raises will be in scope of that, but he may want to raise it directly with the Minister.

**Callum Anderson** (Buckingham and Bletchley) (Lab): Over the summer recess, I had the pleasure of visiting the Florence Nightingale Hospice Charity shop in Winslow, which celebrated 25 years in the town. In that time, hard-working volunteers and local people have helped raise over £1.5 million for the hospice. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking and congratulating local people on this achievement, and might he consider making Government time for a general debate on how we can deliver a secure future for our hospice sector, especially as hospices provide such compassionate care at the most difficult times?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I certainly join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Florence Nightingale Hospice Charity shop on its 25th anniversary, and I thank all the volunteers for their dedicated service. We are committed to supporting the hospice sector and have provided £125 million of capital funding as a boost to it. I would encourage my hon. Friend to apply for a Westminster Hall debate on the subject, because there is agreement across the House on the importance of hospices and the need to consider what more can be done to support them.

**Dr Danny Chambers** (Winchester) (LD): I spent the summer visiting all the villages in the rural areas outside Winchester, and the common theme that came up was speed limits, and the speed at which traffic goes through small villages; people sometimes go through at 60 mph. All these villages, including Littleton, Crawley, Hambledon and Droxford, want to be able to decide whether to have a 30 mile per hour speed limit in their village, yet Hampshire county council will not even consider that. Those villages that have self-funded traffic-curb measures do not have permission to implement them. Will the Minister consider granting a debate on how, through the local government and devolution reforms, we can empower local communities to set the speed limit in their village?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** We are very much in favour of local communities having more power over the decisions that affect them most. The Government did introduce a road safety strategy last year, but this comes down to local authorities. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's local authority has heard what he has said today and responds positively to residents in the areas he mentioned. If it does not, he might want to apply for a Westminster Hall debate in which to raise the matter further and see what more the Government could do to help him.

**Leigh Ingham** (Stafford) (Lab): I know that the Leader of the House agrees with me that pubs are an important part of British culture, especially in towns and rural villages. They often act as crucial community hubs. The Oxleathers pub in my constituency of Stafford, Eccleshall and the villages is the only pub from the west midlands to be shortlisted in the Pub Aid pub hero awards. I welcome the Government's recent announcement of business rates cuts to pubs and hospitality venues, so would the Leader of the House agree to a debate on the importance of Government support for pubs, especially in rural towns and villages?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** My hon. Friend is a real champion for her area, and I pay tribute to her for that. I absolutely join her in congratulating the Oxleathers pub on being shortlisted for the Pub Aid community pub hero award. Pubs bring our local communities together. I encourage her to seek a Westminster Hall debate, because I know that pubs are of importance to Members across the House.

**Douglas Lumsden** (Aberdeen South) (Con): During recess, I had the pleasure of visiting the Counselling House charity in my constituency, which is doing excellent work providing mental health counselling to young people and families, free at the point of use. That is against a backdrop of savage cuts from the SNP-run Aberdeen city council. Could we have a debate in Government time on the important issue of young people's mental health, and how we can move it on to a more sustainable footing?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** The hon. Gentleman will know that this is a really important matter for the Government, and we are making progress in all sorts of ways, but I accept that there is further progress to be made. He may wish to apply for either a Backbench Business or Westminster Hall debate, though the Government do update the House when necessary on these matters. On services not being properly funded by the SNP Government, I repeat what I have said before: the SNP Government have had the best settlement ever, and it is just not appropriate for them to not fund services of such critical importance to his constituents.

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): I have several constituents who are retired civil servants and are still waiting to receive their pension statements and their pensions. This is causing a lot of worry, distress and, in some cases, financial hardship. What is deeply concerning is that when this is raised with Capita, it is pretty laid-back about it; frankly, it shows little empathy and no urgency in trying to resolve the matter. Can I press the Leader of the House for a Government statement setting out what concrete steps the Government will take to address this—in my view, Capita should be

relieved of these responsibilities—and, importantly, to ensure that my constituents can begin to receive their pensions? Many have given tens of years of service to this country; they deserve to be paid and treated with respect.

**Sir Alan Campbell:** My hon. Friend will know from the support across the House on these matters that the service levels following the move to Capita have been completely unacceptable. The Government's priority has been to stabilise service and give former civil servants, who rightly need to be treated better, the service that they deserve. I understand the strong feeling about this. She might want to raise the matter again at Cabinet Office questions next week. The Government and the Department are not being shy in coming forward with statements to the House about what remains a very difficult issue.

**Robbie Moore** (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): In the Worth valley, we are on the cusp of getting our household waste and recycling centre reopened at Sugden End. The wait has caused huge concern, an increase in fly-tipping, and long waits at Royd Ings Avenue in Keighley. But we are yet to hear anything about another household waste and recycling centre that was also closed under Labour-run Bradford council in 2024, and we are still waiting for a solution in Ilkley. Could we have a debate about the importance of household waste and recycling, and taxpayers getting a decent service from their local authority?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** Recycling and fly-tipping are important matters for local residents, and the hon. Gentleman is right to raise concerns on behalf of his constituents. He might want to seek a Westminster Hall debate on the subject, so that he can hear from the relevant Minister about what the Government's approach is. We are doing stuff on fly-tipping, but there is more to be done.

**Adam Jogee** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Last weekend, people from across Newcastle-under-Lyme and further afield came together for the Newcastle-under-Lyme jazz festival 2026. My wife and I enjoyed several acts. It was a brilliant date night spread over three days for Mrs Jogee and me. Despite the liquid sunshine, it was especially good to see all that our town has to offer. Will the Leader of the House join me in paying tribute to Newcastle-under-Lyme business improvement district, all the businesses involved, the artists who performed, and all those local people who turned up, and will he come and see us next year? I will get the first round in at one of our brilliant pubs.

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I am happy to congratulate everybody involved in the Newcastle-under-Lyme jazz festival—the organisers, businesses and everyone else. It is a great boost for towns and cities when festivals such as this are held. I look forward to it being a success in the future, and I will think about my hon. Friend's invite very carefully.

**Ben Maguire** (North Cornwall) (LD): Since my election, I have been campaigning for a new GP surgery building in the fast-growing town of Bodmin, which is set to receive more than 3,000 new homes by 2030. The current building is already running at around 160% capacity,

yet the clear and urgent need is not being met by our local integrated care board, which is dragging its heels on the extra costs that must be met to get shovels into the ground. As we know from discussions about restoration in this place, further delays mean that build costs go up. Will the Leader of the House assist me in securing an urgent meeting with the relevant Health Minister, so that we can help bridge this funding gap and finally deliver the new GP building?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about where necessary house building happens, and the Government are aware of the importance of getting infrastructure in place—we made a recent welcome announcement about more diagnostic centres for local areas. There is a statement after this one and the Housing Minister will be there, so the hon. Gentleman may wish to raise those matters directly with him.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): My constituent Danielle lost her husband Chris in a road traffic collision in 2024. She was left studying to become a nurse with three children to care for and found the bereavement support payment system to be wholly inadequate to give her the support that she needed. Will the Leader of the House ask the relevant Minister from the Department of Work and Pensions to write to me about this matter, and may we have a debate on it, please?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** Let me pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's work and the diligent way in which he stands up for his constituents. He raises a concerning matter, and I will get the relevant Minister to write to him.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Sporting a new look, David Reed.

**David Reed** (Exmouth and Exeter East) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. We all know the Prime Minister is a strong supporter of devolution and we understand that big changes are now under way in Devon. Before Devon embarks on one of the biggest changes to local government in a generation, local people deserve to know what the new mayor would do, what their mandate would be, how much it would all cost, and how they would work with the new unitary authority. When we have asked the Government those questions, we have received very little information. Will the Leader of the House please ask the Minister responsible to meet Devon MPs to discuss this in detail?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I will indeed, because it is important that we recognise that not all of the country is covered by devolution in the way that the Prime Minister has set out. It is important that no area is left behind, and I will seek to arrange that meeting.

**Samantha Dixon** (Chester North and Neston) (Lab): I am beyond pleased that Chester North and Neston will be hosting this year's world town crier tournament at the end of this month. I am sure that with the talent, showmanship and sheer vocal power of this year's contestants, who hail from 15 UK towns and eight nations, audiences will be able to hear their cries of "Oyez!" from our city's Roman walls and beyond. Will the Leader of the House join me in raising his voice to wish all 25 contestants the best of luck?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** Let me pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who did a fantastic job as a Minister and is a great champion of her fine city. I join in with her excitement in welcoming the world town crier tournament. Her question is exceptionally timely given that one of the earliest surviving records of town criers in the UK is, in fact, part of the Bayeux tapestry, which was brought home yesterday to such fanfare. I wish all the contestants in her competition the very best of luck.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Is the Leader of the House not going to attempt to town cry now?

**Aphra Brandreth** (Chester South and Eddisbury) (Con): I share a love of poetry with my dad, which is why I was delighted to host an event yesterday to spread the word about a free initiative that he is involved in, and I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for dropping in. Poetry Together brings children and older people together to perform and share poetry. At a time when loneliness and social isolation affects people across generations, simple initiatives such as that can give people of different ages a reason to meet, talk and form connections that might otherwise never happen. With World Poetry Day just a few weeks away, may we have a debate on the role of intergenerational projects in tackling loneliness? May I also encourage the Leader of the House and Members across the House to get schools and older people's groups across their constituencies involved in the initiative?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** It seems like a timely opportunity for the hon. Member to seek a debate on those matters, given what is coming up. I pay tribute to her and her father for the initiative and the work that they are doing. It is so important that we have ways of tackling inclusion and loneliness, and I wish them all the very best in that. Let me remind her very gently that the new Prime Minister has confessed to being a poetry addict as well.

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab): Further to the earlier request from my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova), may I push the Government for a debate on the progress of their measures to tackle the ongoing failure of Capita to effectively administer civil service pensions? May I also urge the Government to publish the advice of Grant Thornton on a secondary recovery plan now that Capita's own internal deadline for sorting it out has also passed? The matter has been raised by my constituents, by people across the country and by the Public and Commercial Services Union, and it would be great to see some progress.

**Sir Alan Campbell:** As I said to our hon. Friend before, the Government take this very seriously. Cabinet Office questions are next Thursday, so my hon. Friend might want to raise the matter there. I sense the feeling across the House. The Government have updated the House on developments, but let me go away and see if another update is required.

**Vikki Slade** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): When the power fails, the electricity supplier provides generators; when the water fails, the supplier provides water; but when the data switches off, silence. My community of Bloxworth went without for over a week

before Openreach even bothered to reach out. They could not access their GPs or important business and personal calls. Data is now critical infrastructure, like power and water, and in the event of conflict, we know that interference with data is more likely than boots on the ground. May we have a ministerial statement or a debate in the House on the resilience of our critical information infrastructure?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I hope that Openreach has heard what the hon. Lady has said. I agree absolutely on the importance of data in our modern lives. The Government take the matter very seriously, as they do the matter of resilience, and they are doing some in-depth work on how we can improve the situation. At the appropriate time, I am sure they will want to bring forward any further proposals to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Dr Peter Prinsley, you are not in your normal seat.

**Dr Peter Prinsley** (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. This morning I met Julie, the mother of Heather, whose tragic death was featured in Channel 4's "Dirty Business". She is an incredible campaigner. With all the debates and discussions about the terrible state of the water companies, does the Leader of the House agree with Julie and with me that public health must be this House's top priority?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** Yes, I do. On clean water, I will not rehearse all the arguments about how we have got to this situation, which has been a national disgrace, but I reassure my hon. Friend that water is a top priority for both the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary and the Prime Minister.

**Sarah Bool** (South Northamptonshire) (Con): The transplant world cup is taking place between 13 and 18 September in Frankfurt. All the players have had a transplant, be that organ, stem cell or bone marrow. My constituent Philip Taylor is the goalkeeper coach for the England team. The team is hoping for a triple victory, because they have already won the transplant football Euros and the transplant football four nations. Will the Leader of the House wish the team luck in their endeavour and reiterate how important donations and transplants are to saving lives and to living a fruitful one thereafter?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I congratulate the hon. Lady on her new role in the shadow Administration, and I reiterate how important transplants are. I hope that people listening to this have heard what the hon. Lady has said. I wish the England team all the very best and congratulate them on their success so far. I wish them luck in the upcoming games, and should they win the tournament, maybe there could be some lessons for the England national team to learn from that.

**Navendu Mishra** (Stockport) (Lab): Residents in my constituency, particularly in Portwood and Edgeley, are increasingly concerned about the overconcentration of houses in multiple occupation. Too many communities have been left feeling powerless as family homes are lost and local services come under strain, with increased traffic congestion and parking pressures. Local authorities need stronger planning and licensing powers, alongside

adequate funding, to manage the concentration of HMOs and protect the character of residential neighbourhoods. Will the Leader of the House allow time for a debate on further powers and resources to help councils regulate HMOs effectively and mitigate their impact on local communities?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** As my hon. Friend points out, local authorities have planning powers to limit the proliferation of HMOs. He might want to raise the matter in a statement that is about to take place. Local authorities have powers, but I encourage them to use those powers. We keep regulations under review, but it is not always a case of more power being needed but rather of the powers that exist being used better by local authorities, including that of my hon. Friend. The matter concerns Members across the House, so it seems that a Westminster Hall debate would be an appropriate opportunity to discuss it further.

**Sarah Dyke** (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): I was pleased to support Georgie Newbery from Common Farm Flowers in Charlton Musgrove, also representing Flowers from the Farm, to secure a dedicated standard industrial classification code for flower farming, which was launched at the Chelsea Flower Show earlier this year. It recognises the contribution of flower farms in creating jobs, driving rural growth and enhancing biodiversity, but full implementation will not happen until 2031. Can the Leader of the House help me secure a meeting with the relevant Minister to discuss how SIC codes are reviewed and how we can accelerate the roll-out for flower farming and other horticultural sectors?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I agree with the hon. Lady about the importance of flower farmers and horticulture, not least because of the job opportunities, so I will help to arrange that meeting.

**Jon Pearce** (High Peak) (Lab): This Saturday marks International Day of Charity. In High Peak, we are incredibly lucky to have so many charities and volunteers supporting our communities, from Connex Community Support in Buxton and the New Mills volunteer centre to Little Cherubs Community in Chapel-en-le-Frith. On Friday, I will be hosting an event to say thank you to all those amazing charities. Will the Leader of the House allow for a debate in Government time on valuing volunteering and charities and how we can better support them?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I certainly join my hon. Friend in celebrating the important work of local charities. As I have often said on these occasions, charities and community organisations are the golden thread that runs through our communities. I encourage him to seek a Westminster Hall debate so that he, other Members and, indeed, Ministers can say thank you to the local volunteers and charities who do such important work.

**Sir Ashley Fox** (Bridgwater) (Con): My residents feel badly let down by Royal Mail. Across the summer, many residents have not had a delivery for three or more weeks. Some constituents have been to the sorting office to collect time-sensitive post to be told that there are still sacks of mail waiting to be sorted and that there is nothing for them to collect. Can we have a debate in Government time on how this Government will hold Royal Mail to account for the licence it holds?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** We have been clear that Royal Mail's service is unacceptable, as the hon. Gentleman points out. Constituents expect a well-run postal service, and the Business and Trade Committee has called in Royal Mail to talk about its performance. I hope, because I know that Royal Mail listens to these sessions, that it has heard what he said, and the Government stand ready in future to ensure that we get the service from Royal Mail that the hon. Gentleman seeks.

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): Thousands of my constituents in Bedford and Kempston have signed petitions following the loss of the 7, 10, 53 and 53A bus routes and cuts to the 3, 4, 5 and 8. For many older and vulnerable residents, these services are lifelines, and many now feel isolated and abandoned. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on how Government can support councils and communities to use the powers and funding that this Government have provided them with to develop locally led solutions, such as a community interest model, to restore these vital services?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** There has been a £3 billion boost to bus services for millions of people across the country. The Government have capped bus fares at £2 from 2027, and the Buses Services Act 2025 will let local leaders take back control of those services. I hope that local leaders will take advantage of that because, as my hon. Friend knows, the Prime Minister is particularly interested in good bus services because he realises that interconnectivity is so important to people, particularly for getting to work.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Each week I usually bring an individual religious persecution issue, but this week I wish to bring forward a collective request. Will the Leader of the House ask the Foreign Secretary to make a statement on the disturbing findings of the Pew Research Centre's latest report on the worsening state of global freedom of religion or belief across the world, and what steps the Government of this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland are taking to uphold the freedom of religion or belief as an intrinsic and non-negotiable human right in their foreign policy?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** It is good to see the hon. Gentleman back in his place and good to see him in these sessions, of which he is a consistent attendee, and I thank him for that. As ever, he raises a very serious issue. Last year, we launched our freedom of religion and belief strategy, focusing on our efforts to drive positive change. We continue to raise our concerns directly with countries where violations occur and work with international partners to defend this fundamental human right. I will ensure that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office hears his concerns and will see if he can get the update he seeks.

**Dr Allison Gardner** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I have been supporting the excellent North Staffordshire Pensioners' Convention in its campaign for an older persons' commissioner who would champion later-life issues. This is also a recommendation by the Work and Pensions Committee in its report on "Pensioner Poverty" and in the report by the all-party parliamentary group for ageing and older people on older people's rights. Would the Leader of the House make time in Government time for a debate on the need for an older persons' commissioner in England?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** Given Mr Speaker's introduction at the beginning of this session, I think that I may well be a candidate, either to be a commissioner for older persons or, indeed, the beneficiary of having such a commissioner. It is an interesting idea. There is an important campaign for a such a commissioner in England, and I encourage my hon. Friend to seek a Westminster Hall debate to further develop her arguments and hear directly from Ministers.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Can we have a statement on the closure of post offices? When York's Crown post office was closed after 138 years and moved into WH Smith, we were given assurances that it was a long-term solution. Now we have Modella Capital private equity buying out WH Smith, we have seen the closure of our WH Smith branch on the high street and of 150 branches across the country, meaning that we will lose our post office once again. Can we have a statement to ensure that we secure the jobs, but also the services for my residents and businesses? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

**Sir Alan Campbell:** My hon. Friend will have heard from the murmurs behind me that that is not just a matter for her constituency; it is a matter for others, too. It is an important point, and she is right to raise it. The Government's priority is to maintain the current size of the Post Office network and ensure that communities continue to have access to post office services. I will ensure that the relevant Minister hears what she has said and writes to her with an update on what further steps can be taken.

**Chris Bloore** (Redditch) (Lab): With Redditch suffering the worst mental health illness rates in Worcestershire, and with child referrals doubling over the last five years, I am sure that the Leader of the House will join me in welcoming the Government's intention to spend £343 million on opening 100 community walk-in mental health centres and 59 emergency mental health centres in our hospitals. Would the Leader of the House add his weight to my campaign to ensure that our local integrated care board ensures that the money goes where it is needed most, which means a centre in Redditch?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising such an important matter. The Government have recruited almost 8,700 mental health workers and are dedicated to ensuring that communities can access mental health support when they need it. On the application for his constituency, all I can say is that I will raise the points he has raised today and highlight his campaign with the relevant Health Minister.

**Warinder Juss** (Wolverhampton West) (Lab): I had the opportunity to visit the Women and Families Resource Centre in my constituency, which last year delivered well over 6,000 essential items to support over 1,000 vulnerable children and women facing poverty, trauma and social isolation. Will the Leader of the House please join me in commending the centre for the vital support it provides to disadvantaged and deprived communities in Wolverhampton? Can he also reassure the charities in my constituency that this Government will continue to invest in early intervention and preventive grassroots support services, so families can have the stability they need to build secure, independent futures?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I certainly join my hon. Friend in commending the outstanding work of the Women and Families Resource Centre in Wolverhampton West, delivering essential items to support more than 1,000 vulnerable women and children. It is a testament to the extraordinary dedication of its staff and volunteers. He is entirely right about the critical importance of early intervention and preventive support, and I will be happy to raise these matters with Ministers on his behalf to remind them—though they do not need any reminding—of the importance of this issue.

**Mr Jonathan Brash** (Hartlepool) (Lab): At the start of the summer, two heroic men tragically lost their lives trying to save children in the sea at Seaton Carew beach in Hartlepool. Wayne Taylor and Ian Pascoe were recovered from the water by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, but despite urgent medical treatment at the scene, tragically both men died. They were heroes. Their courage, selflessness and instinct to protect children in danger represent the very best of our communities. Will the Leader of the House join me in paying tribute to Wayne and Ian, extend the deepest condolences of this House to their families and loved ones, and recognise the bravery of the RNLI and all those who put themselves in harm's way to save others? Will he urge his ministerial colleagues to ensure that coastal communities such as mine have the resources and lifesaving equipment needed to keep people safe?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I absolutely join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to Wayne and Ian, and I offer the heartfelt condolences of the House to their families and loved ones. RNLI volunteers tirelessly provide a critical service in coastal towns and villages across the United Kingdom, including in my constituency. I will ask that Ministers write to my hon. Friend regarding resources for lifesaving services going forward.

**Johanna Baxter** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): On Saturday evening, for the fifth year running, the Art Department in my constituency launched the Big Art Show. It is one of the largest visual art exhibitions in the United Kingdom; more than 1,000 works are on display in a variety of mediums. It is a testament to our cultural heritage and the work of the Art Department in encouraging the creative participation of people of all ages and abilities that more than 50% of the works come from Paisley, Renfrewshire and the Greater Glasgow area. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Steven Thomson, the creative director of the Art Department, and his whole team on putting the show together? If my right hon. Friend—or you, Madam Deputy Speaker—happens to be in the west of Scotland during the show, which lasts for the next couple of months, he would be welcome to come to see it.

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Art Department team and their creative director, Steven Thomson, on what is clearly an extremely successful project. Should I find myself in Scotland, or indeed should we find ourselves in Scotland, Madam Deputy Speaker—I do not know why we would, but there we are—it would be my pleasure to see the incredible work at first hand.

**Liz Twist** (Blaydon and Consett) (Lab): Here we are back from recess, when I had a great time meeting people and businesses across Blaydon and Consett—from Thomas Swan & Co in Consett, which celebrated its centenary, to independent local breweries such as the Thirsty Moose in Ryton and volunteers at the Just Love project in Leadgate. Will the Leader of the House join me in celebrating their hard work, and can we have a debate in Government time on supporting regional manufacturing, high streets and community champions?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** Recess truly is an opportunity for all Members to engage even further with constituents and see the fantastic work that they do in local communities. The Government are committed to supporting local businesses and high streets. Later this year, we will bring forward the high streets strategy, and our Pride in Place programme is giving up to £5.8 billion over 10 years to support 284 towns. I join my hon. Friend in congratulating businesses in her community; I recognise the names and places very well since it was the land of my birth. I encourage her to apply for what I am sure would be a popular Westminster Hall debate, so that others can also praise the fantastic work of similar businesses and organisations in their constituencies.

**Perran Moon** (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): In Cornwall, the percentage of adults seen by a dentist within the past two years has fallen to just 29%. Cornwall is one of the worst dentistry deserts in the UK, and the lack of access to dentists is now having a profound effect on the health and wellbeing of the Cornish people. Will the Leader of the House arrange for me to meet the relevant Health and Social Care Minister to discuss an urgent plan to deliver the dental care that the duchy deserves?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** The Government are committed to reforming the dental contract so that we can recruit more dentists and make sure that they work in the NHS for our communities, but I will reach out to the relevant Minister to help arrange a meeting with my hon. Friend on this important matter, particularly because there is a plan to see how these matters can be taken forward.

**Mrs Elsie Blundell** (Heywood and Middleton North) (Lab): Functional neurological disorder, or FND, can be debilitating for those affected; symptoms include limb weakness, tremors and chronic pain. Owing to historical commissioning arrangements in my constituency, physiotherapy for FND is not available easily for my constituents. Will the Leader of the House speak to how the Department of Health and Social Care seeks to improve access for FND patients, and bring an end to what has become a postcode lottery for people with such conditions?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** Functional neurological disorder can have a significant impact on the lives of those affected, as my hon. Friend says, and the Government recognise that access to appropriate support can vary between areas. Integrated care boards are responsible for commissioning services that meet the needs of their local populations and for ensuring that providers deliver services, but I will raise my hon. Friend's specific concerns with Health Ministers. Perhaps she can meet the relevant Minister to see what further can be done.

**Euan Stainbank** (Falkirk) (Lab): Following years of closures of community spaces, places of worship have become increasingly precious to communities across my constituency, especially across the Braes villages. The SNP learned 20 months ago that it was responsible for support grants for places of worship, but has only now delivered a paltry scheme, with seemingly half the resource proportionately as that committed to the scheme down here, top-sliced from the already significantly reduced Historic Environment Scotland budget. Will the Leader of the House support a debate on the importance of places of worship to our communities?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** As my hon. Friend points out, in England we have launched the places of worship renewal fund. I am pleased that the SNP has finally listened and opened its own scheme, but as my hon. Friend says, it is a rather disappointing scheme. I have already said today, and I have said it previously, that the Scottish Government have had the biggest funding settlement since devolution, and they should be using it for what matters most to the people of Scotland. Scotland's heritage is of such importance to the nation, and I hope that the Scottish Government have heard what my hon. Friend has said today.

**David Williams** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Last month, a devastating wildfire ripped through Sandyford and Goldenhill in my constituency. Four homes were completely lost and 13 properties and gardens were badly damaged. Six of our heroic firefighters ended up in hospital having battled with exceptionally difficult conditions. Will the Leader of the House join me in paying tribute to our Staffordshire fire and rescue service, Goldenhill community centre, the Goldenhill working men's club, the local residents association, local businesses and the volunteers who all rallied around to help their fellow residents?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I am sure the whole House will join me in sending our most heartfelt thanks and best wishes to those six brave firefighters. I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to Staffordshire fire and rescue service and all the community organisations that have come together to look out for one another. It really is the best of community in very challenging times.

**Jessica Toale** (Bournemouth West) (Lab): I recently met my constituent Jan, whose daughter Ami died aged 29 of sudden cardiac arrest. I will be joining Ami's friend, Keyleigh, this weekend on a sponsored walk from Hengistbury Head to Bournemouth to help raise awareness of the condition. Will the Leader of the House ensure that Health Ministers give due consideration to the need to raise awareness about sudden cardiac arrest in young people, so that we can better understand the warning signs and save more lives?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** My hon. Friend raises a very serious matter. The UK National Screening Committee has just run a public consultation on evidence relating to screening for cardiac conditions associated with sudden cardiac death in young people. It is important that we increase the number of people in the country with valuable lifesaving knowledge of CPR, and we are extending that to all NHS staff. I will make sure that the relevant Health Minister is aware of my hon. Friend's concerns, and I wish her well in her efforts to raise not just funds but awareness.

**Kirsteen Sullivan** (Bathgate and Linlithgow) (Lab/Co-op): Walk for Jock is our Linlithgow banner charity. It was founded in 2012 in loving memory of John Paterson, who died from cancer at the age of 47. Tomorrow, 15 hikers will set off on the 96-mile West Highland Way, as part of community fundraising that has raised more than £250,000 since it started. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating John's brother, Davie, as well as the volunteers, walkers and committee members on their remarkable fundraising effort and wish them a safe journey as they undertake their five-day hike?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I certainly join my hon. Friend in wishing all those taking part in Walk for Jock a safe journey in what must be a remarkably beautiful part of the country. Davie's efforts to keep the memory of his brother John alive are truly admirable. I congratulate everyone involved on their incredible fundraising work and I wish them well.

**Tracy Gilbert** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): Too often, single mothers come to me for help because they are being failed by the Child Maintenance Service. I therefore welcome the Government's commitment in the tackling child poverty strategy to bring forward legislation to overhaul the CMS. Can the Leader of the House advise me on what progress has been made on that legislation, and may I urge him to ensure that it is brought forward as quickly as possible?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** My hon. Friend is right to raise this important matter, and I know that it will resonate across the House. We recognise that some parents' experience of the Child Maintenance Service does not meet the standards that they and we expect, which is why we are committed to reforming the system. As she said, legislation will be brought forward when parliamentary time allows. In the meantime, we continue to take forward work on wider reform and improving outcomes for separated families.

**Jayne Kirkham** (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): Over the recess, two serious incidents happened in Truro in my constituency—one led to a death, and one involved a very large knife. Neighbourhood policing in my constituency has been decimated, more recently due to sickness and officers being continually seconded to other duties. Will the Leader of the House take my concerns to colleagues in the Home Office about the allocation of neighbourhood policing in Truro and Falmouth and the regulations on the size of knives in food establishments?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** We are committed to delivering 13,000 additional neighbourhood policing personnel by the end of the Parliament, with more than 3,000 neighbourhood police officers now in frontline positions. Devon and Cornwall police have been allocated over £8 million for 2026-27, but I recognise my hon. Friend's concerns and the fact that many forces still face very challenging conditions. I am happy to take forward what she said about funding powers and also knives, but should she wish to have a meeting with the Minister for Policing and Crime to make that point herself, I will help her to arrange one.

**David Pinto-Duschinsky** (Hendon) (Lab): On Christmas day last year, residents of Beaufort Park in Colindale in my constituency received an unwanted gift: their freeholders, the Berkeley Group, doubled their ground rent to £800, clearly trying to squeeze leaseholders for every penny before the Government rightly introduce the ground rent cap. It is simply unacceptable. I have written to the executive chair of the Berkeley Group and asked to meet so that we can discuss this rise, but either I have been fobbed off or my letters have gone unanswered. This clearly shows why the Government's reforms and change to leasehold is so important. Will the Leader of the House join me in calling on Berkeley Homes to meet me, and will he allow for a debate in Government time so that we can discuss how to hold unresponsive freeholders to account?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** My hon. Friend has been a relentless campaigner on the matter of ground rents, and I pay tribute to him for that. As the Prime Minister confirmed earlier this week, the Government intend to bring forward legislation to reform this unfair system. It is not right that Members are ignored by organisations when they raise matters of interest to their constituents; that is a discourtesy to them, and it is also a discourtesy to this House. I hope that Berkeley Homes has heard what he has said and will up its game.

**Chris Kane** (Stirling and Strathallan) (Lab): The city of Stirling football hall of fame was launched last week, with local legends Billy Bremner, Alex Smith, Duncan Ferguson, Jimmy Ryan and Jimmy Bone its first inductees. Their names will now be etched on the new wall of fame at Forthbank stadium. Will the Leader of the House join me in recognising our inaugural inductees, congratulate the Scottish Football Supporters Association for this initiative and make time for a debate on the remarkable contribution that Scotland has made to the beautiful game, not just through our footballers but through the tartan army, whose exploits at this summer's world cup once again showed the very best of Scotland to the world?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I do not recognise all the names that will be going into the hall of fame, but I recognise some of them, and they were remarkable individuals and fantastic and pretty tough footballers. Their names are to be etched on a wall of fame, and rightly so. I pay tribute to all of them and to Scottish football—the organisers and the clubs but also the supporters, who are very much part of the success of football north of the border—and wish them well in the future.

**Jim Dickson** (Dartford) (Lab): Southfleet is a beautiful village in the south-east corner of my constituency. It is set in quiet Kent country lanes. It has a 700-year-old church and a history of over 1,000 years, but it is also the entirely inappropriate site for a proposed new data centre, which will take up 90 acres of a 145-acre site next to the village. I recognise as much as anyone the role of data centres in supporting our online activities, which we need to continue our day-to-day lives, but we must ensure that data centres are placed in the right part of this country. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the placement of nationally important infrastructure, including data centres, so that we in this place might discuss the siting of those data centres?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight the importance of data centres, and it is important that they are in the right locations. I will raise his concerns with Ministers, but it seems to me that it would be appropriate for him to raise them directly with Ministers, through either an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate, so that he can speak up for his constituents.

**Amanda Martin** (Portsmouth North) (Lab): This week I was devastated to learn that Alan Knight, a true Pompey goalkeeping legend, died aged 65 following a battle with prostate cancer. I had the privilege of meeting Alan many times over the years through my work as an MP, as a member of the Pompey Supporters' Trust board, as a lifelong Pompey fan and at my own nan's funeral. He gave 801 appearances in blue and a lifetime giving back to Portsmouth long after he hung up his gloves. He was a strong union man and was awarded an MBE for his services to football as a learning rep for the Professional Footballers' Association. Following his diagnosis, he helped raise awareness and thousands of pounds for prostate cancer charities, helping many people in Portsmouth and beyond. Will my right hon. Friend join me in sharing my and Portsmouth's condolences with Alan's family and friends at this incredibly sad time and honour this Portsmouth giant?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** I am honoured to do as my hon. Friend says. I am sure the House will join me in sending our condolences to the family and friends of Alan Knight. He will be fondly remembered not just for his exceptional charity work but also, of course, for his football career. Let me stray slightly more widely than that, Madam Deputy Speaker. The football community can be rightly proud of the way in which it has highlighted issues around prostate cancer. I want to pay tribute not just to Alan but to the wider football community.

**Fleur Anderson** (Putney) (Lab): The impact of flights going over my constituency is enormous—one goes over every 90 seconds—so lots of Putney residents got involved in the Government's consultation on the Heathrow expansion national policy statement during the summer, which closed on Monday. The consultation being held in the summer was concerning, because it limited public participation. Will the Leader of the House provide Government time for a debate on the Heathrow expansion proposals, before decisions are made, so that we can raise constituents' concerns and inform Ministers' decisions?

**Sir Alan Campbell:** It is important that the concerns of both my hon. Friend and local residents are heard, which is why the consultation took place. The 10-week consultation has now closed. We are looking at the responses, and I am sure that once those responses have been looked at and digested, there will be an opportunity for the Government to bring this matter forward for scrutiny and debate in the House. If she wishes to pre-empt that in any way, through an Adjournment or Westminster Hall debate, I am sure that she would find others who wanted to take part.

## Building Homes and Renewing Communities

1.8 pm

**The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Angela Rayner):** The Prime Minister has this week set out our plan to bring back hope, after a decade of decline. Today I want to update the House on the first steps that my Department is taking to rise to these new challenges.

We know that the sense of decline that people feel runs deep. The causes are not straightforward, and it did not happen overnight, but the most visible sign of it—a constant reminder of political and economic failure—is the state of our high streets: shuttered-up shops reminding us of what once was, and organised crime too often out there, visible, in the open. Decades of deregulation and austerity for local government and the recent cost of living crisis all share the blame. Every part of Government has a role to play in getting our high streets booming again, so in response we are rebuilding the local state, giving councils new powers over their high streets and putting them back in control of their town and city centres.

Local leaders know their high streets best and are best placed to bring them back to life, so in the months ahead we will support councils to block new bookies, vape shops and so-called casinos, and we will double the length of closure orders from six to 12 months, so that police have longer to investigate dodgy shops. We will improve high street shopfronts by setting clearer expectations for their design and appearance. That is alongside our Pride in Place programme, which is giving local communities £6 billion to improve their areas.

Everyone who has walked down their high street will have spotted another glaring signal of state failure: people sleeping rough. In 2026, in the world's fifth richest economy, everyone should have a roof over their head. That is who we are as a country. This is a kind, caring nation where people take pride in looking out for each other, and that is why we will end rough sleeping in our country. When I visited Changing Lives in Newcastle over the summer, I met the incredible Sabrina Cohen-Hatton. Today Sabrina is chief fire officer for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, but as a teenager she experienced homelessness. Sabrina is an absolute inspiration and shows that if people are given the right support that they need, they can transform their lives.

By Christmas this year, everyone sleeping rough will be offered a route off the streets. We have set aside £442 million for a new rough sleeping programme to meet that milestone, while investing in accommodation and support to end it for good. That takes our total investment in homelessness and rough sleeping services to more than £4 billion over the next three years. We know that the reasons people sleep rough are complex. For example, eight out of 10 rough sleepers have a mental health vulnerability. Our plans are more than just accommodation; it is a whole-system approach that will also include access to health, substance or employment support. Women who are homeless are not always visibly sleeping rough, so we are specifically asking services to meet women where they are, to ensure that they get the support they need.

[Angela Rayner]

Rough sleeping is just the worst symptom of an underlying crisis that we are determined to tackle. For too long, Britain has not built the homes that we need. We are getting Britain building, with council housing at the centre of our plans. The failure to build council homes to replace those that were sold off is one of the major causes of the housing crisis that we inherited at the last election. Last month I met families in Kidbrooke who told me that when they moved into their new social homes, it took so much stress away. One resident told me that they had come from a place with mould on the walls and mice on the floor, and that finding out that they were moving into a new home was like winning the lottery.

Last week I announced the first wave of our allocations for the social and affordable homes programme. That is more than 70,000 homes, nearly two-thirds of which will be for social rent. We also announced new support for councils to rebuild their capacity, including a further £46 million over three years, and an expansion of the Pathways to Planning programme. This follows our new national planning policy framework, which will unlock thousands of homes around train stations, and our announcement of new housing and planning powers for mayors, who can now call in planning applications for strategic sites, and grant up-front permission to build for the benefit of local people. We are also giving them greater say over how national housing funding is spent in their areas, with Homes England investment now focused on their priorities.

Solving the housing crisis is not just a moral cause, it is an economic necessity. Every shovel in the ground means new investment, new jobs and growth in every postcode. We must also put power in every postcode. The legacies of political choices in the 1980s and the decades since, the centralisation of political power, privatisation of economic wealth, and de-industrialisation all contributed to the loss of control that so many people feel today. The future of our country relies on us building a new economic and political settlement that serves those we represent.

That starts with the largest ever transfer of power and funding out to every region of England. For the first time, mayors will receive a share of income tax revenues, meaning that they can invest in what matters most locally. They will also be given new powers to bring rail and bus services under local control, run 16-to-19 funding and employment support, and back local industries and businesses to create new jobs. Where power is devolved, resources will be devolved too. That will end the begging-bowl culture of the past and pave the way for a new era of devolution. In the months ahead we will make sure that every area benefits, by supporting areas without a mayor to establish new strategic authorities.

Finally, I want to take a moment to thank all of those involved in the response to the wildfires this summer, including the firefighters, who showed immense bravery battling the flames. I saw the horrendous damage in Stourbridge at first hand, and the level of emotional turmoil was devastating. I will never forget meeting a woman on Quarry Park Road whose neighbour was widowed less than a year ago; she had lost her home and all her possessions too. During the fires we made

emergency funding available, and this autumn the Prime Minister will chair a wildfire summit to discuss what more we can do to improve our resilience. The wildfires and extreme heat show the threat that we face from the climate crisis. We must treat this as an emergency in itself.

The steps we are taking are only the start. In the months ahead, we will take through the Representation of the People Bill, giving 16 and 17-year-olds the vote and protecting our elections from foreign interference; we will speed up building safety remediation and end the feudal leasehold system; and we will work with local leaders as we fix the foundations of local government. The Prime Minister has promised a new political and economic model and, together, we are shaping it.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I call the shadow Secretary of State.

1.17 pm

**Katie Lam (Weald of Kent) (Con):** I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of her statement. It is a pleasure to see her again so soon. I join her in thanking those involved in the response to this summer's wildfires, and applauding their remarkable courage.

The Secretary of State is right to note that for far too many people across the country the sense of decline runs deep. In far too many places, organised criminals have taken over the high street, and in far too many cases, a place to sleep is something that people cannot take for granted. The stories I have been told by constituents who have experienced rough sleeping or unsafe housing remain some of the most challenging and profound I have heard since coming to this place.

Although the Secretary of State talks about a new political and economic model, I am afraid that what we have heard today is a recipe for more of the same. While her focus on the scourge of organised crime on the high street is welcome, I am concerned that she addresses a symptom of the problem but not the underlying cause. While many bookies, vape shops and high street casinos are clearly legitimate, their cash intensiveness and lower overhead costs make them particularly attractive as fronts for money laundering. However, if those businesses are closed, criminals will simply find other types of high street businesses through which to launder money. What conversations is the Secretary of State having with her Home Office colleagues on dealing with organised crime?

The right hon. Lady talks about the devolution of power and resources to local people, but what she really means is more politicians being given the power to increase the size of the state and raise taxes, but never to let people keep more of their own money or to interfere less in their lives. Will she confirm whether any tax raising powers devolved to mayors will be accompanied by powers to reduce tax—and if not, why not?

Similarly, while the right hon. Lady is right to recognise the vital importance of addressing the housing affordability crisis, the answer cannot be spending ever more taxpayers' money. Instead, the state must stop making it so difficult and so expensive to get new houses built in the places where people want to live. A greater supply of homes in those places will mean lower costs for everybody, particularly those who are renting and those looking to get on the housing ladder. In London, where our housing crisis is most acute, Labour has been in power for over a decade. Under Sadiq Khan, housing starts fell to their lowest

level ever in 2024-25. Construction began on just 4,000 homes across our capital. Can the Secretary of State explain why Labour's London mayor has failed to get to grips with this problem? Will the changes she proposes actually solve the housing crisis in the capital? If not, it is a little difficult to understand why she is introducing them.

Finally, on homelessness and rough sleeping, we share the Government's ambition to end rough sleeping, but it is impossible to ignore the fact that the new Prime Minister promised to do exactly that in his 2017 manifesto for the Greater Manchester mayoralty. His pledge was to end rough sleeping within three years. In fact, rough sleeping in Greater Manchester has increased every year since 2021, including in 2024-25 when the Labour party was also in power nationally. Can the Secretary of State therefore explain why the Prime Minister failed to solve rough sleeping in Greater Manchester, bearing in mind that it increased when both the local authority and the national Government were run by the Labour party? Can she explain why anybody should believe that he will be able to do so nationally?

**Angela Rayner:** I welcome the hon. Member to her place, and I look forward to facing her across the Dispatch Box in the months to come. She comes with a good, strong track record: I believe her grandparents met while they were delivering leaflets for the Labour party—so that's a good start! I welcome her tone, in particular her agreement on supporting those who helped us over the summer with the wildfires. I look forward to working with her constructively, especially as we move towards the summit in the autumn; I will keep her informed.

Some of the challenges we face are of long standing. It would be remiss of me not to gently remind the Conservatives that their austerity measures hollowed out our local services and that the decline in our high streets started on their watch, but the hon. Lady is absolutely right to highlight the challenges our high streets face—that is why we have a strategy. We have made announcements to make sure that we tackle organised crime, giving the police more powers and more funding, with a £30 million boost to police and Trading Standards activity as well as strengthened closure orders and a new high streets organised crime unit. We are tackling the issues that the Conservative party failed to tackle.

The Prime Minister has been really clear about ensuring that we work with local leaders and that they are able to do the things that will help them in their local communities, so they can really start to tackle some of the issues. On tax-raising powers and the reduction of tax—again, that is an ongoing dialogue. The hon. Lady will have seen the statement from the whole of Cabinet and the work we are doing through the National Economic Council to work with mayors and local leaders so we can take those issues forward.

I was bemused by the hon. Lady saying that the state has made it hard to build. The Conservatives missed every single housing target they set, and they scrapped targets completely after pressure from their own Back Benchers. We have brought in new powers and updated the national planning policy framework. We are giving more powers to mayors, we have brought in mandatory housing targets and mandatory housing plans, and we are working with local areas to deliver the housing we

need. We have been very up front about that, but we have also been really clear that infrastructure, wildlife and nature have to be taken into account. I will not take lectures from those in the party opposite, when they created a housing crisis where millions of families were locked out of home ownership.

Specifically on London, the city has built significant amounts of council housing, but the hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise the challenges that London faces. When we look at the number of children in temporary accommodation, it is clear that London has an acute need. We recognise that and have provided support through the allocation of money through the social and affordable housing programme. We also recognise the success that the Mayor of London has had in ramping up housing supply where it is needed.

Finally, let me turn to what happened in Greater Manchester under our new Prime Minister. The numbers actually fell originally—as a Greater Manchester MP, I saw that—but because there was not a national programme, the numbers then went up as more people came to Greater Manchester. We want to roll out a programme, working with local leaders and mayors, so we can offer that support. I hope the hon. Member will work with us, because I remember that this used to be a target for the Conservatives: they wanted to end rough sleeping, but then they scrapped the target. I hope they can work with us on this renewed effort, in the spirit of how the Prime Minister wants to work, to ensure that we can roll out a programme nationally where everyone who is rough sleeping has an option of safety and an option to come in.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for very timely and welcome statement. Let me point to a good development in Grimsby—a really good example of town centre housebuilding that is working with local housing associations. The partnership is between Keepmoat and Ongo northern Lincolnshire housing association, and it will provide a mix of private accommodation and social housing. She will find in her mailbox a letter from the leader of the Labour group, Emma Clough, who has written to her to raise the issue of town centre houses, and in particular empty homes in town centres, to ask whether the Government will be looking to put in place additional measures to support local authorities to tackle the scourge of empty homes, which number nearly 2,000 across Grimsby.

**Angela Rayner:** My hon. Friend has been a great champion for Grimsby for a very long time—I think we both originally came here together in 2015—and I congratulate her on her work. She is absolutely right to praise the housing associations coming together to build the homes that people desperately need. I will look at that letter, which she is absolutely right to highlight. I will bring forward proposals on how we are working with councils to deal with the empty homes situation.

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

**Gideon Amos** (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on her appointment. I look forward to our exchanges, and to working with her and her team.

[Gideon Amos]

There are millions fewer council houses than there used to be, yet the need for social housing has only increased, not least given the scourge of poor-quality temporary accommodation for too many children. The Shared Health Foundation has found that in the last six years, temporary accommodation has been noted by the coroner as a contributory factor in the deaths of 104 children.

In Taunton and Wellington and elsewhere, all that people see are unprecedented plans for private housing that many will not be able to afford. Councils have been instructed by Whitehall to consent to homes for 180,000 people in Somerset over the next 15 years—a 25% increase in the pace of growth, never seen in the county's history. What we need instead is a truly ambitious programme of council and social housing—not the Government's reannouncement that 60% of its 300,000 programme will be social housing and not the 18,000 per year, but the Lib Dem policy of 150,000 social homes a year.

I recognise that the statement confirms around 46,000 social homes over 10 years, with further tranches to come, but will the Housing Secretary and the new Prime Minister, who has said a lot about social housing, raise the target from 18,000 a year or not? Will the Government raise their £3.9 billion funding to our proposed £6 billion? If they will not do that, will they write off some of the councils' housing revenue account debt so that councils such as Somerset can build the 600 council houses that they would build if they could?

**Angela Rayner:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this issue, which is one that the Prime Minister feels incredibly passionate about. He has committed to delivering the biggest council house building programme since the post-war boom ended in the early 1980s, and although I recognise the challenges, I also want to celebrate the fact that last year, councils built the most council houses since records began in 1991. However, we want to see that ramp up with the money we are investing to help councils, as I outlined earlier.

We have already taken measures, as Members can see from the legislation that is going through at the moment—it has been through the other place—to tighten up the right to buy and make sure that councils keep full receipts. We are supporting that programme, and we should recognise the significance of the £10 billion of investment that was announced last month. This is about making sure that we get that money out the door so that we can build those homes, and the planning reforms we have introduced are about making sure that people have a say about those homes, but also about having clarity, so that the homes and the infrastructure around them are built.

The hon. Gentleman is right to mention the number of children in temporary accommodation. I still think it is absolutely awful that those children are in those circumstances, and that is why we want to tackle social housing in particular.

**Mr Jonathan Brash** (Hartlepool) (Lab): Our councils are the front door to our democracy, and after years of damage, too many people have lost faith in what lies behind it. Does the Secretary of State agree that rebuilding

strong, trusted local government must be central to rebuilding trust in politics? On the issue of high streets, will she meet me to discuss how existing tools such as high-street rental auctions can be made simpler and easier for councils to use, so that communities such as Hartlepool can bring empty shops back into use?

**Angela Rayner:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight the role of local government. I came from a local government background, and then represented local government workers across the board for many years as a Unison rep, so I am slightly biased about what local government does. We should think about what has happened to local government—the pressures that are on our local councils at the moment, and have been on them since 2010, and how they have had to evolve with those pressures and challenges. I absolutely commend local councils and their representatives for the work they are doing. That is why this Government have given more funding to councils and have freed up some of the itty-bitty pots, to try to make it easier for councils to do the work they want to do.

Turning to auctions, we have also been making sure that we can support councils in implementing the plan that we want to put in place for our high streets, so that more powers are in place and we can safeguard community assets. The high-street rental auction powers will also bring closed-down pubs and properties back into use.

**Mr Gagan Mohindra** (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State back to the Front Bench; the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee looks forward to scrutinising her in due course. As she will be aware, South West Hertfordshire has beautiful green-belt land, and she will have seen press reports about unauthorised clearance of sites over the last bank holiday weekend. While some of these clearances may be legal and lawful, my constituents consistently have concerns about the lack of information, and worry that when bulldozers and tree-clearing equipment turns up on a Saturday morning, council officers are not available until the following Tuesday, after the bank holiday weekend. What more can the Secretary of State and her Department do to make sure that my residents do not have that fear?

**Angela Rayner:** I thank the hon. Member for raising this issue, which Ministers and myself were discussing only yesterday. I will make sure that he gets an update on that. It is deeply concerning that over the bank holiday weekend, some try to do things that they know are not okay and are completely unacceptable. We are cracking down on illegal Traveller sites, and it is important that we do. Our new planning rules explicitly tackle any potential environmental damage and transport impacts, making it harder for people to get retrospective permission. However, I will contact the hon. Member about that specific case, because I know it has caused great concern to people in his area.

**Alan Strickland** (Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor) (Lab): I strongly welcome the investment in social housing. What more can the Department do to make sure that the necessary social infrastructure comes with those new homes—the school places, doctors and dentists that we have struggled to secure in my constituency to support new homes, and that we need around the country?

**Angela Rayner:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight this issue, which I was acutely aware of, because I do not like it when this debate becomes about people who are opposed to new homes versus those who are not; actually, most of the time, people are concerned about the infrastructure that comes with those new homes. The reforms we have made through the national planning policy framework and the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 put provisions in place to make sure that when those homes are built, there is local input into the planning process, but also, critically, that the infrastructure is there, so that local people can see that those homes enhance their area. That will alleviate some of the genuine concerns that people raise.

**Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Secretary of State accept that there is an intimate link between local government reform and the successful carrying-out of major house building programmes? One of the reasons I warmly welcome her return to office is the failure of her predecessor, the right hon. Member for Streatham and Croydon North (Steve Reed), either to confirm or deny on 16 July the report in *The Times* on 18 June that senior civil servants and lawyers in three separate Departments had been overruled when they advised him not to make local government reorganisation decisions merely at the behest of Labour-led councils. Will the Secretary of State undertake to look at this issue again, particularly in the light of the number of boundary changes involved, and given that her colleague, the hon. Member for Oldham West, Chadderton and Royton (Jim McMahon)—now mercifully back in action—had originally promised that boundary changes would be rare exceptions, and that particularly strong reasons would have to be put forward in justification?

**Angela Rayner:** Without straying too much into that area, I will just say to the right hon. Member that my principle with local government reform is that it is about the best services for the people in a local area. That is the only way that we get buy-in from people to deliver that, including through our local representatives—local councillors, many of whom are doing a fantastic job of addressing the challenges that local government faces. To me, local government reform is about making sure that areas can deliver on things like transport, education and health in a way that is best for those people. I will look into the issues that the right hon. Member has raised.

**Rachel Blake** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): It is really great to hear from the Secretary of State today. Members across this Chamber will know about the harm that damp and mould does to children and their families. It is absolutely right that we have brought in Awaab's law, for which there was real cross-party support, but what are we doing to monitor its impact? How should housing associations and social landlords be regulated to make sure that they are enacting Awaab's law and are on top of the timelines in it?

**Angela Rayner:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question, as well as for the visit we made together, on which we met that wonderful young mother who had been to hell and back. What was a dream of home ownership turned into hell. Her experience is one that many people up and down the country have also experienced, and that visit is still very much at the forefront of my mind as we

take things forward. Of course, Awaab and his family were from Greater Manchester—it was a tragic case of a young person losing their life because of the conditions they lived in. We are absolutely clear that we have to take Awaab's law forward; we have carried out a process of test and learn as part of that, and phase 2 is now being implemented to make sure we are continually, robustly proving that those laws are in place and will deliver what we expect them to.

**Ian Roome** (North Devon) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for saying that closure orders will be extended to combat dodgy shops on our high streets. In my constituency, the police have fought a running battle against shops with secret compartments selling counterfeit cigarettes. However, having talked to my local trading standards office in Devon, it is clear to me that those offices do not have nearly enough personnel to investigate suspicious businesses. Will the Secretary of State's Department make sure that the funding given to local councils to do this is ringfenced for the purpose of recruiting more trading standards officers?

**Angela Rayner:** I thank the hon. Member for raising this important issue. I can appreciate that it has been acute in North Devon, but it is coming up across the whole of England. That is why we are strengthening the orders, and I thank him for acknowledging that. We have, as I mentioned, invested £30 million to boost police and trading standards activity, with thousands of businesses expected to face raids, closures and cash seizures. I hope he will be in touch with his local police and trading standards office to see how they are implementing this in his North Devon constituency.

**Ms Abena Oppong-Asare** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement, and in particular for outlining what her Government are doing on wildfires. As Minister, I oversaw the emergency alerts and the creation of the risk vulnerability tool. What work are the Government doing to strengthen the resilience plan, so that we can be better prepared for the future? Will she share with us the lessons learned from the emergency alert issued on 14 August?

**Angela Rayner:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work she has been doing. We are making almost £1.95 billion available to stand-alone fire and rescue authorities in England through the local government finance settlement. That can be used for training and preparation, and prevention based on local risks. We are making wildfire advice more visible, including through social media, during high-risk periods. We have the "Fire Kills" campaign, and the education platform led by the National Fire Chiefs Council. I have mentioned the wildfire summit, which will consider how we can go further.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): An estimated 1.4 million consented homes in England remain unbuilt. Why will the Secretary of State not concentrate on getting those homes built before demanding that councils surrender more green-belt and greenfield land? Otherwise, developers just cherry-pick the most profitable sites, instead of building the homes for which they have already been given permission.

**Angela Rayner:** My simple answer is that we are doing that. It is why we strengthened the national planning policy framework. As I have said, this is not

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just about one lever; a number of factors need to be considered. We have been doing that, and that includes having mandatory housing targets and plans for local areas. We are strengthening, we are pushing, and we are making sure that we fix the mess that the previous Government left us.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): It was a pleasure to join my right hon. Friend at Greenwich council's development of 435 council properties in my constituency for the launch of the social and affordable housing programme. Some 70,000 homes are planned, and that is welcome and overdue. However, my constituency and ones like it have a lot of sports grounds, and as we push for more land, the temptation is for owners of those grounds to lock the gates, in the hope that they will make a windfall from developing those sites. Will my right hon. Friend reassure my constituents that that will not be allowed under the programme to build the housing that we need?

**Angela Rayner:** It was a great pleasure to visit the site with my hon. Friend. I outlined in my opening statement something that touched me, which is how people spoke about getting a home and the conditions they had before. They literally said it was like winning the lottery—it was life-changing. As I outlined to the shadow Secretary of State earlier, I think about those children affected, especially those impacted by the acute housing crisis that London faces. I congratulate the Mayor of London and London councils working to deal with that. We announced the funding grant to help London with the particular problem it has had. My hon. Friend is right to raise the subject of protection of spaces. That is what we have done through strengthening the national planning policy framework. The Housing Minister would be happy to chat more with my hon. Friend about that—I am sure they already do, as they are neighbours—but it is important that we continue that work, too.

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): The Secretary of State mentioned mandatory housing targets. Under Labour's targets, in south Essex—from Grays across to Shoeburyness—we are expected to accommodate more than 100,000 houses. That is 7% of the Government's entire 1.5 million target in one half of one county alone. That is despite the fact that our medical infrastructure, our sewage capacity and in particular our roads—the A13 and the A127 are maxed out as it is—simply cannot cope, even now. [Interruption.] Labour Members can chunter all they want. Why is Labour so determined to cover south Essex in concrete and gridlock our roads, purely for ideological reasons?

**Angela Rayner:** We can look at it another way: I am confident that the right hon. Member and local councillors can work in partnership with us to recognise the acute housing need within his local area and to deliver, with well-connected local transport, the homes that are so desperately needed. His Government failed to deliver them, and I am sure his inbox is full of people who need those homes. We will work with his local leaders to deliver the homes and infrastructure that people in his constituency desperately need.

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss the St Andrews estate in Bedford, where local residents and children walking to Great Ouse primary academy are being put at risk by dangerous driving and parking on estate roads that require traffic safety measures, but have remained unadopted for around eight years. What action will she take to address the wider problems of developers and local authorities passing responsibilities between themselves, leaving estate residents waiting years for roads to be completed and adopted?

**Angela Rayner:** I am sure that the residents of St Andrews estate are frustrated, but I commend the work of my hon. Friend in highlighting this issue. It is not acceptable for roads to be left unadopted for years and for people to be left in those circumstances. I am happy to arrange a meeting with the relevant Minister to look at how we can support him in his endeavour to deal with this matter.

**Vikki Slade** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): Communities such as Wimborne, Merley and Bearwood have doubled in size in the past few years, with no extra roads—[Interruption.] It is not funny. The people there have no extra roads, no water treatment plants, no new GPs, and the remaining areas of green belt specifically designated to separate them have disappeared. Their communities are being forced to build thousands more—it is 7,000 a year in Dorset, similar to Essex—but they are not selling. These houses are lying empty, which means that the community infrastructure is not being built, and we have empty homes everywhere. The local population cannot afford them. The social housing providers do not want them, because they are built under old standards. We run the risk of them being filled with holidaymakers. We need a review of this huge housing target, so that it is based on need in the local community, with a requirement for the infrastructure to come first. Can the Secretary of State please help?

**Angela Rayner:** I can honestly feel the hon. Member's frustration. One of the issues that I picked up when I first became Secretary of State, as I outlined earlier, is that it is not about opposition to new housing, but frustration because of the infrastructure not being there, the form of the houses built and how local people cannot afford them. I have complete sympathy with what the hon. Member is saying. That is why we have been making changes to the national planning policy framework and to how we do building consents, so that we can get these houses built where they are accessible to local people and where developments are contributing to the wider local community, including with services. I am happy to speak to her about the specifics. If there are empty houses that local people cannot get and the infrastructure is not there, I can fully appreciate why people would be frustrated.

**Deirdre Costigan** (Ealing Southall) (Lab): The Secretary of State is right to say that the reasons people sleep rough are complex, and Ealing Southall is almost unique in that many of our rough sleepers do not have the right to stay or work in the country, so the council cannot legally help them off the streets. Will she meet me to find ways of making it easier for this group of rough sleepers to reconnect with family abroad and return home with dignity?

**Angela Rayner:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this issue: we have to do more to make sure that people who have exercised all their appeals and want to return home can do so. I will work with my colleagues in the Home Office to look at how we can tackle that issue, alongside the package that we are putting in place over the winter.

**Robbie Moore** (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): Silsden in my constituency is being inundated by a huge number of housing developments. In the last few years, we have had seven different housing developers all building houses, with no focus whatsoever on improving infrastructure or services. It is getting to the stage that Silsden cannot cope. It gets worse than that, because the section 106 money that is collected, which Bradford council negotiated with the housing developer under the last Labour administration, is not being spent on mitigating the negative implications of the housing developments, and the council has no local plan in place. We are seeing a lot of speculative development coming down the line, and it is simply not good enough. I have to say to the Secretary of State that this was all overseen by the last Labour administration at Bradford council.

What in today's announcement from the Secretary of State will deliver something positive for my constituents, and something that addresses the key issue of infrastructure and service improvement when house building does happen?

**Angela Rayner:** I thank the hon. Member for raising this issue. We have strengthened the role of infrastructure within the national planning policy framework. The announcement is about making sure that local areas can deliver on local plans, and I have been very clear on that as the Secretary of State. I can hear his frustration about section 106 money, and there are legitimate reasons why it is sometimes delayed, but it is an area that I have focused on since returning to this post. I have focused on that with the Housing Minister, and I am due to be in touch again with local authorities to ensure that the money is going out the door and that right-to-buy receipts, which we have strengthened for councils, are going out the door in order to create the homes and infrastructure that local areas desperately need.

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): The Secretary of State knows my constituency well, and she knows that I have been campaigning for several years to regenerate Wythenshawe civic centre. Thanks to this Government, we are about to cut the turf on building 2,000 new homes within the decade, and phase one starts with building 800 social homes in the next few weeks. Is the Secretary of State prepared to don her best Doc Martens, pop out of No. 10 North and cut the ceremonial piece of turf?

**Angela Rayner:** That's a tough question! My hon. Friend knows full well that my mum's side of the family are from Wythenshawe, so I know the civic centre very well. I used to spend many a weekend at Woodhouse Park social club—unfortunately no longer there—but I can see the civic pride across the whole of Wythenshawe. I am not the most famous person whose family are from Wythenshawe—we all know a famous footballer who has done incredible work in that area—but never mind. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work that he is

doing. Those 2,000 homes are desperately needed in the local area. I have fond memories of growing up around there, and I would be absolutely honoured to come back.

**Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): The Secretary of State failed to recommit to the 1.5 million new homes pledge in Labour's manifesto. She also failed to mention the almost £5 billion that was provided to the Mayor of London by the previous Conservative Government and the fact that this Labour Government have been forced to cut the mayor's housing target, given his poor record of delivery here in London. One way that the Secretary of State can help improve London's family housing crisis is by giving local councils more powers to stop bad HMOs. They are destroying family housing in communities across the capital, particularly in outer London. Will she commit to that today?

**Angela Rayner:** I disagree with the hon. Member on what is happening in London. Half of all council homes built in 2024-25 were in London, showing what can be achieved through devolution and the London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, who has been doing a fantastic job. That is why I have confidence that the social and affordable housing programme will give more investment to London so that it can deal with the acute situation it faces.

On HMOs, I will take no lectures from the Conservatives, who left us in a very difficult situation. The issue is under review, and we are working with local authorities and mayors to make sure that planning circumstances do not create situations that cause tensions through HMOs.

**Nesil Caliskan** (Barking) (Lab): I warmly welcome the Secretary of State to her place. Local GPs in my constituency serve 20% more patients than the national average, and it is particularly bad at Barking Riverside, where there is new development. Unlike Conservative Members, I strongly support new homes being built, because my constituents feel the pain of the housing crisis. However, the fact that we do not have enough GPs, schools and other crucial infrastructure means that they are being let down. May I press the Secretary of State to give us further assurances that as this Government deliver the homes that this country and my constituency need, GPs are also delivered?

**Angela Rayner:** There is a theme developing here, and I think it comes from years of not having enough infrastructure. People are rightly concerned about that. I mentioned earlier that there is a lot of opposition to our planning reforms and the mandatory housing targets that we have set as a Government. I hear it loud and clear, and I want my hon. Friend's constituents, my constituents and everyone else's constituents to know that I am acutely aware that the infrastructure that people desperately need must come alongside the housing. I do not think they are nimbys; they raise genuine concerns, and I have heard them loud and clear. That is why we have strengthened the national planning policy framework, particularly on GPs.

I am sure that my colleagues in Health have heard my hon. Friend, but I will make sure that there is a nod to what is happening in her area. I want to reassure the

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House that I am acutely aware that if we are going to ramp up house building, which we absolutely must do—our constituents expect it—that has to be done in a way that ensures that local people are involved in the process and that the infrastructure is there too.

**Manuela Perteghella** (Stratford-on-Avon) (LD): The south Warwickshire local plan requires more than 27,000 new homes to be allocated to Stratford-on-Avon district under the standard method, and my constituents support the delivery of truly affordable homes and social rent. However, these homes are not going to be affordable for local people, and housing growth continues to outpace investment in transport, schools, GPs, and drainage and sewage infrastructure. Will the Secretary of State review the mandatory targets to ensure that local housing need rather than a centralised formula determines housing allocations in rural areas? Can she also guarantee that the infrastructure will keep pace with development instead of lagging years behind, if it is delivered at all?

**Angela Rayner:** The local target is based on housing stock and affordability. I appreciate the hon. Lady's comments on affordable housing, and I take her back to what the Prime Minister has said about needing more social housing—I am sure that she appreciates that this is an issue. We will make sure that we lean towards that and build the houses that people need so that local people can get access to the homes that are built in their area, and the infrastructure is an important part of that.

The hon. Lady mentions water drainage and water supply. We have not built a reservoir for decades, and this Government are now taking action to make sure that we build reservoirs and the critical infrastructure that we need to deliver for the housing that we need.

**Anna Dixon** (Shipley) (Lab): I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend back in her role, and I am really pleased that the Government have committed to fast-track developments close to transport hubs. It is a fantastic opportunity to build housing around Shipley station, which is close to the recently refurbished Shipley market. High-quality and affordable housing would help increase footfall and bring regeneration to the high street. Will the Secretary of State join me and the West Yorkshire Mayor, Tracy Brabin, on a visit to Shipley to see the opportunity for herself, and will she help to accelerate house building in Shipley?

**Angela Rayner:** I often visit the West Yorkshire Mayor and her geographical area, and Shipley is a great place. It is a really good drive from my house in Manchester to Shipley—I would recommend it to anyone. I always jump at the chance to go to the area, and I congratulate the West Yorkshire Mayor, my hon. Friend and her local leaders on the work that they are doing to deliver the homes that people desperately need.

**Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): How does the Secretary of State square what she said in the statement about wanting to

“put power in every postcode”

with the reality of what her Government are doing to Buckinghamshire? They have increased our housing target by 43%—while letting London off some of its target—but if we had power locally, we would categorically not choose to build. They have also been telling Buckinghamshire council that if it turns down too many planning applications and actually supports the residents of Buckinghamshire, it will have its planning powers taken away. That is not putting power into every postcode; that is central diktat, isn't it?

**Angela Rayner:** I disagree with how the hon. Member has framed that question. Housing targets are based on housing stock and affordability, and local plans are mandatory—which his party removed—so we are actually strengthening this, and being more strategic and clear about where houses and the infrastructure that people need should go. I urge him to engage in that process, look at the key changes to the national planning policy framework and use them to benefit his constituents.

**Jessica Toale** (Bournemouth West) (Lab): Over the conference recess, my team and I are taking over a shop in Bournemouth town centre and filling it with a range of community and cultural uses that showcase our amazing local organisations. Meanwhile spaces have a range of benefits for our high streets. They give small businesses and charities a chance, fill persistently empty shops and create better collaboration between councils, landlords and tenants. However, they often require councils to use the powers at their disposal, particularly on rates relief and the bit of capital investment for persistently neglected units. I really welcome the measures announced over the summer to improve high streets, but can the Secretary of State tell me how meanwhile spaces fit into the Government's high streets strategy?

**Angela Rayner:** I think this is really important, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work that Bournemouth is doing, which sounds absolutely fantastic. These are exactly the sorts of projects we want, as opposed to vape shops, betting shops and other elements. This is about what do we do with that space, and the measures that we have outlined—on the community right to buy, high street rental auctions, giving local places practical powers and cutting business rates, as we announced over the summer—are about making sure that local areas can use that space. We are bringing forward a high streets strategy, and I hope she will engage with my Department about what she can contribute, because she has clearly demonstrated that she can do so in her local area.

**Ben Obese-Jecty** (Huntingdon) (Con): As the Secretary of State will be aware, we are still awaiting a local government reorganisation decision in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. To that extent, as I laid out in my Westminster Hall debate on Monday, I very much back a Huntingdonshire unitary authority, because of the opportunities for growth it will afford the region, including the delivery of the Ministry of Defence's Project Fairfax, which I had the opportunity to discuss with her Housing Minister earlier this year. Before she makes her final decision, could I invite her to speak to Huntingdonshire district council to clarify any of the decisions about which her predecessor required clarification before he could make a decision? Will she also assure my constituents

that the area involved in any such decision will be coterminous with the current district authority boundaries, so that we do not lose any more time in disaggregating functions, because we have already lost two months ahead of the elections next May?

**Angela Rayner:** I thank the hon. Member for raising this important issue for his area. As he outlined, my colleagues the Housing Minister responded to him earlier this week, and I know he said there would be an outcome by the end of October. The hon. Member has done his job well in representing his constituents by raising the issue with me as the Secretary of State today, and I have noted it.

**Perran Moon** (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): I really welcome the Prime Minister's commitment this week to work on Cornish devolution, but the Housing Minister—and he did not make up the rules—has told me that the population of Cornwall is too small to be granted a strategic place partnership, despite the fact that our population is greater than that of Iceland, Malta and Barbados. Our lack of social housing is one of the greatest blockers to regeneration in Cornwall, so we are very keen to take up a strategic place partnership. Is there a chance that I could get a meeting with the Housing Minister or somebody from MHCLG to discuss our desire to have a strategic place partnership?

**Angela Rayner:** They may be small in number but they are definitely mighty—that is my observation about my hon. Friend and his Cornish colleagues. I will absolutely get the Housing Minister to meet him to see what more we could do. I know that my hon. Friend and his colleagues have raised concerns about the devolution agenda and how to ensure there is devolution for Cornwall and that it fits with them. I will make sure he gets a meeting with the relevant Minister.

**Bradley Thomas** (Bromsgrove) (Con): The Government appear to be very inconsistent in their approach to local government reorganisation. Worcestershire is being split into two, Gloucestershire is being kept whole and the boundary of Leicester city council is expanding outwards into the surrounding areas. Can the Secretary of State rule out further expansion of Birmingham city council into the surrounding areas, including Worcestershire?

**Angela Rayner:** In response to an earlier question on local government reorganisation, I said that my principle is that it should benefit the people and the services of the local area. I do not want to comment on specific local areas at the moment—I need to look at that—but the principle should be to ensure that this is not done to people and that local leaders are part of the process. This is about making sure that services deliver for the people in their local area.

**Leigh Ingham** (Stafford) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State back to her place. I agree with her comment that the situation we are facing on high streets is not something we have created recently, but has been inherited after years of austerity. Particularly in Stafford, we welcome many of the high street initiatives taking place such as on vape shops and—this is a bit of a throwback one—the high street rental auctions, which are great. Could I have a meeting with her, because my local

authority is really keen to pursue this, but with LGR going through and some stretched personnel situations with LGR and previously with austerity, it is finding the administration of this a little overwhelming? It would be great if we could get this in Stafford, perhaps with a little bit more support for such councils.

**Angela Rayner:** I commend my hon. Friend for her work in representing those in Stafford, and I appreciate that there is a lot going on at the moment. I really want her to be involved in the high streets strategy that we are bringing forward, and I will make sure that my Department is in contact with her so that she is fully engaged, and her local area can play a full role in shaping the future and is heavily involved in the process.

**Steve Darling** (Torbay) (LD): The Secretary of State is quite right to highlight the link between mental health illness and street homelessness. Sadly, over the 30 years I have served the people of Torbay, I have seen it quadruple, and it feels to me that street homeless people are just the tip of the iceberg in relation to the homelessness we see in our communities. Will she give me some assurance that in a community such mine in Torbay, where social rented housing is at only 7% compared with the national average of 18%, will be targeted with additional support for additional affordable and social rented housing?

**Angela Rayner:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. He is a champion in knowing and recognising the challenges that his local area faces. We announced £442 million of support for tackling rough sleeping this winter, and that is based on a formula that recognises the challenges that local areas face. I will get my Department to contact him so that he can understand the effect of that, and he can shape what comes forward in his area. He is absolutely right to recognise that the programme has to have settled accommodation as well as intensive wraparound support to help people leave rough sleeping behind. We have to learn the lessons of what happened in Greater Manchester and how it was able to achieve great outcomes for people. As I mentioned in my statement, when I have met people whose lives have been transformed by it, I can understand why the Prime Minister says he wants us to make sure this happens nationally.

**Andrew Pakes** (Peterborough) (Lab/Co-op): One of the most inspiring housing projects I have ever seen is Coin Street, a housing and worker co-operative a few moments' walk from this House on the banks of the thriving Thames in London. It does not just build houses; it builds homes and communities and gives pride back to working people in the heart of London. The same spirit of pride runs through the Pride in Place funding that Peterborough has received and the ambitions of this Government with devolution. Can my right hon. Friend put on record her support for the co-operative and mutual ideals as part of our devolution agenda, and as part of our mission to rebuild communities in our country?

**Angela Rayner:** I thank my hon. Friend for recognising some of the fantastic work being done by the co-operative movement. Is our Prime Minister the first ever Labour and Co-operative Prime Minister? I do not want to mislead the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I think he

[Angela Rayner]

might be—he is definitely a Labour and Co-operative Prime Minister and I think he is the first. Coin Street is the type of development that can happen when homes are built with a sense of community. Our Pride in Place work is about rejuvenating our local areas. In Tameside, in my local area, I have seen people going through difficult times. There have been some difficult times for our nation and our country recently, whether because of the covid pandemic, the austerity years or what has been happening locally, but people have come together. Pride in Place has allowed us to look not just at how we can stop the flow of some of the challenges, but at how we can work together as a community to tackle them together, and I am incredibly proud of that work.

**Alison Hume** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): May I welcome the Government's decisive action over the summer to tackle wildfires, particularly by placing a temporary ban on disposable barbecues? Last year a huge wildfire caused massive damage to the North York moors near Whitby. The farming community played a vital role in supporting firefighters, but they are still out of pocket over a year later, having suffered significant losses. Will my right hon. Friend look at introducing grant schemes to help those affected by wildfires, similar to the ones available for major flooding events?

**Angela Rayner:** I am sorry to hear about the situation in the North York moors and the circumstances surrounding the funding package. We are working closely with fire and rescue services to ensure that support is targeted at those facing the greatest operational pressures, and we will set out further details in due course. The current focus is about ensuring that the support reaches the areas that need it most urgently, but I will take back what my hon. Friend says. As I said, the Prime Minister is looking forward to the wildfire summit this autumn, so hopefully we can make progress there.

**Antonia Bance** (Tipton and Wednesbury) (Lab): Isn't it great to see our right hon. Friend back in her place? It was also great to see the first allocations of the social and affordable housing programme last month, and we

desperately need our share in Tipton, Wednesbury and Coseley, including at the Friar Park development of 650 new homes. Will she support the campaign that I have been running with our West Midlands Mayor to get Sandwell council and Homes England to help local people, who have been stuck on waiting lists for years, by raising the proportion of social housing in the Friar Park development to 50%?

**Angela Rayner:** I would not want to be on the wrong side of a campaign led by my formidable hon. Friend. She is a formidable campaigner, so I reckon she has got all power to her elbow. Having the West Midlands Mayor on side makes me confident that their campaign will come through. She is right to raise not only the social and affordable homes programme and the announcement of the £10 billion in funding, but the work that we are doing on mayoral planning and housing devolution. That will give more power to their elbow and I am confident that they will win through.

**Peter Swallow** (Bracknell) (Lab): I welcome the £39 billion of investment in the social and affordable homes programme that this Government are making, but my right hon. Friend will know that for every social home we build, when a social housing provider disposes of another home, not only are we losing a valuable home that could support residents in Bracknell Forest and across the country, but we also need to replace that home. That is why I am calling on the Government to go further than currently envisaged in the Social Housing Bill to clamp down on disposals. Will she continue to look at that with the Housing Minister, so that we can do everything we can to protect the social homes we already have as well as building more?

**Angela Rayner:** May I put on record my thanks to Ministers, including the Housing Minister, who during my time of absence have seen the Social Housing Bill go through this place and the other place? Measures have been strengthened significantly and we will start to see, for the first time, that more council housing is being built than being lost. That is welcome—it has not happened for a long time. I am sure that the Housing Minister has heard everything my hon. Friend raised, but I know that is his intention and it is definitely mine.

## **Sporting Events Bill [Lords]**

### *Second Reading*

2.15 pm

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Just over 14 years ago, we lifted the curtain on the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic games. It did not disappoint: 29 gold medals, super Saturday, Usain Bolt winning medal after medal—sporting moments that will remain with us for the rest of our lives. But London 2012 did more than that. It told our national story on the world stage, and it sent a clear message to future British athletes that there should be no ceiling to their ambition.

Fourteen years on from London 2012, I still meet athletes who talk about that moment as the moment that changed their lives forever: when they were inspired, when they saw something, and when they thought, “I can do that.” That is why major events matter. They bring world-leading athletes and competitors to our shores. They show children across the country where ambition and talent can lead them. Perhaps not all of those children will go on to be the Mo Farahs and Jess Ennis of their generation, but they will, because of the power of sport, go on to live richer, larger lives.

If done right, these events leave lasting legacies, they help to fund grassroots projects and they break down the barriers to opportunity, and we should not be shy about saying that here in the UK, we are really, really good at delivering them. From the women’s rugby world cup, to the Commonwealth games in Glasgow, to the European athletics championships in Birmingham, time and again we have welcomed the best of the best and put on an incredible show.

Our Government are not going to stop there. Over the next few years, we will host the 2028 Euros and the Tour de France grand départ, but I want us to go further, I want us to be bolder and I want us to be bigger. I want us to harness the power of major events, to build social cohesion, bring people together, spread opportunity and deliver long-lasting change to communities whose contribution has not been seen or valued for far too long.

Alongside our bid for the FIFA 2035 women’s world cup, I am delighted that we have submitted a bid to host the world athletics championships in 2029. We are also clear that this Government would love to see the Ryder cup return to the UK, and we are continuing to explore at pace a bid for an Olympic and Paralympic games in the north of England for the first time.

**James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab):** I am the MP for Rushcliffe, where we have Nottingham Forest’s City Ground and Trent Bridge, the world-renowned cricket venue. We also have the National Water Sports Centre, which is one of three locations in England with a 2 km rowing lake, but it has lacked investment over many years. For us to be able to bid for a northern Olympics, we are likely to need that type of venue to be within our collective offer, so will the Secretary of State meet me and the Mayor of the East Midlands, Claire Ward, to look at the investment that needs to go into that site via UK Sport?

**Lisa Nandy:** I would be very happy to offer my hon. Friend a meeting with the relevant Minister and officials to discuss that specific site. He is absolutely right to say this is precisely the reason that this Government believe in major events: because of the lasting legacy they have for our country and our communities. As we go on to explore the Olympic bid in the north of England, we are really clear that with that has to come the world-class infrastructure that we deserve, which includes not just sporting infrastructure but transport infrastructure as well.

If we are successful in our bids to host those events, I give my commitment that we will use every one of them to their full potential, not just to drive growth but to deliver change and to enrich people’s lives. We will learn from exceptional mayors like Steve Rotherham, who has not only launched a major events strategy to showcase Liverpool, but is deliberately anchoring major events and urban regeneration in some of the historically most deprived neighbourhoods in his city region.

I want major events not only to inspire and light up the world but to be a powerful lever for change in areas that have been neglected for far too long. But to do that, we need to ensure that we are in the best possible position to tap into the opportunities that exist, and that is what the Bill is for and what it will achieve. The Bill will provide a framework for delivering major events, sending a clear message to event organisers across the world that the UK is serious about being a world leader in major sporting events.

As well as providing important commercial protections, the Bill will tackle ticket touting for qualifying events, complementing the Government’s broader legislation on secondary ticketing. For too long, fans have been locked out, priced out and ripped off. Under the provisions set out in the Bill, event organisers will maintain control of ticket distribution, helping more people to access tickets at face value, and protect against price gouging, which has harmed sporting events for too long.

**Jim Dickson (Dartford) (Lab):** I thank the Secretary of State for the points she is making about ticket touting. I have the good fortune this Saturday to be travelling with the Crystal Palace faithful to Craven Cottage in search of our first three points of the season. I paid £30 for my ticket—as a Crystal Palace season ticket holder; even a cursory glance on the internet shows me that the equivalent tickets are on sale for £130, £140 and £150. It is totally wrong that this practice continues; is it not right that the Government are seeking to tackle and clamp down on the issue?

**Lisa Nandy:** This is a matter that commands support across the whole House. I think we all believe that these events—whether football or live music—belong to the fans, and that it is completely unacceptable that touting has been allowed to happen in plain sight for too long. Let me take a moment to reassure the House on this point. Members will know that the Government introduced draft legislation in this session; we did so to ensure that the legislation was watertight, robust and would work, and that it was subject to the full scrutiny of both Houses. We do not intend to delay that legislation. The Prime Minister feels particularly passionate about this issue, and we will give the legislation the priority it deserves.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): It is great that sport is going to be protected from the ticket touts, but as the Secretary of State said, all that music and live entertainment is getting is a draft Bill, which seems very much like a delaying tactic—putting it in the long grass. Will she give a guarantee that we will see that Bill, and that it will be introduced over this next Session of Parliament?

**Lisa Nandy:** It is my intention that we introduce the Bill as soon as possible, and we may be in a position to do better than the hon. Gentleman suggests. I will update the House shortly, but I have heard the strength of feeling on all sides of the House about this issue and I share it. The Government intend to treat this piece of legislation as a priority to ensure that we get it on to the statute book without delay.

**Peter Swallow** (Bracknell) (Lab): The Secretary of State is being incredibly generous in giving way. She is right to pay tribute to the spirit of the 2012 Olympic games. I was a teenager at the time, I am afraid to say, and it changed my life; being able to go to some of those events was transformative. It did not turn me into a world-class athlete, it has to be said, but it nevertheless gave me a sense of pride in my country.

I share the Secretary of State's ambition for us to bid for future events—hopefully future football world cups as well as future Olympics. However, the Secretary of State will also know that many were concerned by some of the scenes at the world cup this summer—not on the pitch, but in relation to ticket sales and the high price of tickets. Can she assure the House that, if this Government bid for events, we will always prioritise making them as accessible as possible as part of those bids?

**Lisa Nandy:** I hope I can reassure my hon. Friend on that. We have the immense privilege of hosting the Euros in 2028, and I have been pleased to work alongside the various sporting bodies, which have given an assurance that they will not be using dynamic ticket pricing for that event. We will always do everything we can to ensure that football remains for its fans. He will know that one of the first things the Minister for Sport and I did was to introduce the Football Governance Act 2025 in order to protect football clubs from owners who prey on them. We will not hesitate to pull every lever we can to put fans first. I thank my hon. Friend for his advocacy on behalf of fans in his constituency; they will really appreciate it.

This Bill will also introduce provision to manage transport and traffic in relation to a sporting event in England, as well as bespoke funding powers for events in either England, Scotland or Northern Ireland. That will remove the current piecemeal reliance on powers from across multiple other Acts and enable us to fund related activities beyond the sporting event itself.

Finally, I want to touch on the issue of including domestic events in the Bill's provisions—a concern regularly raised in the other place. I reassure the House that we have heard those concerns loud and clear. We recognise that there is a real opportunity here for some of our incredible domestic events. We will therefore seek to address that issue throughout the passage of the Bill, and I look forward to working with Members from across the House to achieve that.

The Bill is a clear signal that this Government are serious about major events and about harnessing the power of sport and culture to change our country, and the lives of the people in it, for the better. Driven by a new enhanced Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Britain will rebuild its sense of self-confidence and go out to deliver extraordinary major sporting events that light up not just our towns, villages and cities, but the world. This Bill is about ensuring that we are ready for those global moments, and that when the world comes calling, this country will stand ready. For that reason, I commend it to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I call the shadow Secretary of State.

2.27 pm

**Rebecca Paul** (Reigate) (Con): Sport occupies a special place in this country. We all know the power that it has to bring communities together, inspire millions of people to take part, and provide some of those increasingly rare occasions when the whole country seems to stop and watch the same thing. Britain can also take enormous pride in its place in the sporting world. There is no doubt that we excel across the board, and the patriotism that such events can generate is truly wonderful.

We are home to Wimbledon, the Open, the British Grand Prix and the London marathon. We have successfully hosted Olympic and Paralympic games, Commonwealth games, world cups and European championships—and we do it exceptionally well. Those events are part of our national culture. They create memories that last for generations, inspire children to pick up a racket, a football or a pair of running shoes, and showcase the very best of Britain to audiences around the world.

By way of example, take the London Olympics and Paralympics, which the Secretary of State has just mentioned—we obviously share some similar memories. I think it is fair to say that, before it started, there was a bit of grumbling about the disruption, cost, impact and even the logo, as some Members may remember. But once it started, the overwhelming pride that we all felt in our home nation, our capital and our sportsmen and women was something that I am sure none of us will forget. It was a truly momentous, once-in-a-lifetime event that made me so proud to be British. Those of us—including me—who worked in London at that time, certainly enjoyed the instruction to try to work at home during that busy period.

These big sporting events are not only sources of pride and joy for millions. Taken as a whole, sport is also a roaring economic engine. The Government's latest estimates suggest that the wider sport sector directly contributed £63.2 billion to the UK economy in 2024 and accounted for 1.3 million jobs.

Major sporting events alone can generate considerable returns for our country. In 2023, investment of £10.8 million from UK Sport and Government supported 16 major sporting events, which generated an estimated £373 million for our economy. The Birmingham Commonwealth games is a particularly striking example, with research finding that the games contributed almost £1.2 billion to the overall UK economy, as well as nearly £80 million in social value.

Those are very substantial numbers. They represent money being spent in hotels, restaurants and pubs, business for suppliers, employment in event management, broadcasting and security, and visitors coming to parts of the country they might otherwise never have visited.

**Sarah Bool** (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I welcome the shadow Secretary of State to her place. I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. On the point about economic benefit, I am the Member of Parliament for Silverstone, and the grand prix has given a huge boost to the economy in our area; it is vital part of our economy, but it is on the annual calendar only because of the hard work of the team to keep it there; there is no guarantee that we will have it every year. I very much welcome the Secretary of State's looking at widening the definition of "major events" to capture Silverstone, because it is so valuable to our sporting calendar; it is absolutely vital.

**Rebecca Paul:** I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. She is passionate about Silverstone, and she is absolutely right in all the points she makes. We must never be complacent about it; we must strengthen and build on all the great sporting events that we have in this country.

Sport also strengthens Britain's reputation overseas. Few countries combine our extraordinary sporting heritage, wonderful venues, broadcasting expertise, enthusiastic crowds and experience of putting on major events that the whole world wants to see. It is therefore very much in our national interest to ensure that the United Kingdom remains one of the best places in the world to host these big events.

That is the context in which the Opposition approach the Bill. We support its underlying objective and will support its Second Reading. It absolutely makes sense, and it is in this country's interests, to create a standing legislative framework of this kind.

When the United Kingdom bids to host a major international sporting event, the governing body will commonly require host country guarantees covering matters such as ticketing, commercial rights, advertising and transport. Historically, Parliament has often had to legislate specifically for individual events. There is an obvious inefficiency in recreating substantially similar provisions every time Britain secures another major tournament. If we know that certain protections are repeatedly required, it is reasonable to place a common framework on the statute book that can be tailored to the needs of individual events. This should make Britain a more competitive prospective host and give international sporting organisations greater confidence that the protections they require will be available.

That confidence is vital, as international competition to host major sport is fierce. Countries across the world understand the prestige that these events bring, the visitors they attract and the economic activity they generate. We cannot simply assume that Britain will continue to win the rights to host them if we become less accommodating than our competitors. We need to make the strongest possible case for the UK, and part of that is demonstrating that when we make commitments as a host nation, we have the legal framework to deliver them quickly and effectively.

With that objective in mind, there is much in the detail of the Bill's proposed framework that we support. It is right that organisers should have effective tools to prevent professional ticket touts from exploiting supporters; it is right that genuine sponsors, who may invest very significant sums in making an event possible, should receive reasonable protection against businesses falsely passing themselves off as official partners; and it is plainly sensible to have the capacity to make temporary transport and traffic arrangements when hundreds of thousands of additional spectators may be moving around a city or region.

**James Naish:** The Secretary of State moved on from this quickly earlier. I wanted to talk specifically about transport arrangements, as in my constituency, we have three international venues in very close proximity, and it can be extremely difficult for the residents who live in that area. Would the shadow Secretary of State agree that it is extremely important that local councils have the power to enforce the transport plans that are put in place, so that the residents in the areas hosting these major sporting events can live alongside those venues?

**Rebecca Paul:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. It is really important that we explore this in more detail in Committee. This obviously requires a bit of balance. We need to consider both sides of the matter to get to the right place. This is a great starting position, and hopefully we will have a lot more detailed discussions as the Bill moves through the House, assuming it passes Second Reading, which it looks likely to do.

We are not concerned about the concept of the Bill, and colleagues in the other place approached it in exactly the same spirit: they supported the principle, while working constructively to improve the legislation. I want to acknowledge the important work undertaken in the other place to ensure that the framework is of benefit to not only major one-off international tournaments, but the great recurring sporting events already woven into British national life, which the Culture Secretary mentioned. As originally drafted, the Bill risked producing the rather peculiar result that an international tournament visiting Britain for the first time might qualify for these protections, while Wimbledon, the Open, the London marathon or the British grand prix might not. That was a significant gap, and Opposition peers, including Baroness Evans and Lord Parkinson, worked closely with colleagues across the House, and with the sporting sector, to address it.

The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, the England and Wales Cricket Board, the Football Association, the London marathon, Silverstone, the R&A, the Rugby Football League, the Rugby Football Union, the Sport and Recreation Alliance and UK Athletics were among those supporting a widening of the framework to include repeat events. These great recurring events are not simply fixtures in our sporting calendar, but strategic national assets. They attract international audiences, support thousands of jobs, generate significant economic value and serve to showcase Britain around the world. We should therefore always seek to maximise the opportunities and returns that they bring.

As originally drafted, the Bill was principally aimed at major one-off or infrequent international events, but amendments made in the Lords widened that framework,

[Rebecca Paul]

so that our great recurring UK sporting events of national or international importance, such as Wimbledon, the Open, the London marathon or the British grand prix, can also ask to benefit from its protections. That does not mean that every protection in the Bill will now automatically apply to every one of those events every year, but where a major recurring event can demonstrate a genuine need for one or more parts of the framework, it can ask the Government to apply them. Ministers must then agree, and any use of the framework will remain subject to parliamentary approval. Baroness Evans put the principle neatly when she described the Lords' approach as providing opportunity, not obligation. It is a sensible and proportionate approach, and I welcome the assurances that have been given that the final legislation will deliver that objective and allow our great recurring events to benefit from the framework.

I understand that there may be some technical tidying required as the Bill proceeds through this House, and we will engage constructively with the Government on that work to ensure that the Bill does what is intended. The sporting sector has worked hard to secure this change. I was hopeful that the Culture Secretary could reassure the House today that the Government remain committed to delivering it in full and to preserving the substance of what was achieved in the Lords, and I believe we have heard that from her today. I thank her for that.

There are inevitably some further areas that we will want to examine as the Bill enters Committee stage. That is not because we oppose the powers themselves, but because a permanent legislative framework needs to strike the right balance between giving organisers the protections they require and avoiding unnecessary burdens on those affected.

The first such area is the impact on existing businesses. One of the central reasons why we want major sporting events in Britain is the economic activity that they generate. We want visitors filling hotels, restaurants and pubs, we want local businesses benefiting from increased footfall, and we want traders to share in the opportunities created when tens or hundreds of thousands of people arrive in an area. There will plainly be occasions when crowd safety, security or legitimate commercial arrangements mean that some restrictions are necessary, but the Government's own impact assessment assumes that a substantial proportion of street traders in affected areas may be unable to trade while restrictions operate. Colleagues in the other place pressed Ministers on that point and secured a useful change, requiring existing trading licences to be taken into account. The Government also committed to work with organisers and local authorities to consider alternative arrangements when an existing trader cannot remain in their usual location. In Committee, we will want to ensure that the practical arrangements around notice, authorisations and treatment of existing businesses are fair and proportionate.

The same principle applies to advertising. We support action against genuine ambush marketing. Official sponsors make substantial investments in major sport and are entitled to protection. At the same time, the framework should operate sensibly for existing advertisers and should distinguish between falsely claiming an official

association with an event and legitimate commercial activity, such as a company truthfully promoting an athlete whom it genuinely sponsors.

In the Lords, Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay raised the concerns of the Advertising Association. The Government undertook further engagement with the industry, which we welcome. It would be useful to have an update from the Culture Secretary on how those discussions have progressed. Again, that strikes me as exactly the kind of detailed matter that could be worked through constructively in Committee.

Finally, clause 25 gives the Government a broad standing power to provide financial assistance in connection with sporting events. There is a certain lack of clarity about what the criteria and eligibility for such payments would be. I ask, again, that that be considered further in Committee.

We all want Britain to remain one of the finest places in the world to host major sport. We all want to attract new world cups, European championships and other global events, as that is good for the sporting sector, our economy, the country and our people. We are fortunate that Britain starts from a position of considerable strength, with its world-class venues, experienced organisers, passionate spectators, internationally recognised events and a sporting heritage that few countries can match. Now we must capitalise and further build on those strengths to fully unleash the sector's potential. The Bill can meaningfully contribute to that.

Our task now is to preserve the improvements made to the Bill in the other place, so that we deliver on the intention of ensuring that our great recurring events are properly covered. The Opposition support the principle of the Bill and the ambition behind it, and we will support its Second Reading while working constructively with the Government to improve and clarify it further as it proceeds through the House.

2.41 pm

**Jim Dickson** (Dartford) (Lab): Major sporting events are something that we do very well as a country—I think everybody in the House is agreed on that—and making it more straightforward for us to host them is vital. I therefore really welcome the Bill. I need to declare at the outset that I am a member of the England Supporters Travel Club—formerly the England Football Supporters Club—and a season ticket holder at the home of quality football in south London that is Crystal Palace. I, and many of my constituents—a lot of them are Dartford football club supporters, but there are supporters of many other clubs as well—are united in hugely looking forward to Euro 2028 being hosted across England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. Hopefully, home advantage will enable England to go one further than they did in 2024.

Hosting major sporting events like the Euros and the recent women's rugby world cup and cricket world cup has the potential to inspire the next generation of young athletes. Anything that we can do to increase physical activity across society—most of all in our young people—is important, and supports the efforts of our 10-year plan to create a healthier society.

I am really pleased that sporting legacy and inclusion of our young people in sporting activity is a core part of the Government's objectives in attracting major sporting

events. The nation's most vivid memories are often sporting ones. I was privileged to be in the stadium when Jess Ennis won her 2012 heptathlon gold, and I was there—apologies to Scottish colleagues—to witness that goal by Paul Gascoigne against the auld enemy in Euro '96. It is not just about the memories; these events help to illustrate why the UK remains such a well placed country to host international sporting events. We have a range of excellent, large, atmospheric stadiums, a vibrant hospitality sector, and brilliant fans, while also being a transport hub that much of the world can easily travel to.

The British public embrace major sporting events. Take the excellent and record breaking crowds for last year's women's rugby world cup as an example. Last month, there was mostly a full stadium for Birmingham's European athletics championships, mentioned by the Secretary of State. May I give a big shout out to Dartford Harriers' Emily Newnham for winning a brilliant silver medal in the 400 metres hurdles?

The British public want us to bid for international events. It is wonderful to hear that the Olympics is a target for the Government in the next decade. We should also be targeting another men's football world cup in the late 2030s or in the 2040s, alongside our bid to host the women's football world cup. Of course, I hugely welcome London's bid to bring the world athletics championships back to the UK in 2029.

I pay tribute to the efforts of the England team at the recent world cup tournament in Mexico, the USA and Canada; the team took us as close to repeating the 1966 triumph as we have got in my lifetime. It was a great world cup; however, there is no doubt that many ordinary fans were priced out of attending. As a member of the aforementioned England Supporters Travel Club, I saw the comments on our Facebook page over the summer—many loyal fans simply could not afford to go.

On extortionate ticket prices, ticket touts selling football tickets at inflated prices outside grounds or online remains far too prevalent. Despite the efforts of football clubs—as an example, I can attest to what Crystal Palace has been doing, ensuring that any spare tickets can be bought only by club members—tickets for just about any premier league match can still be found at an inflated price on StubHub, Viagogo and some other platforms, as well as from illegal touts. We have to address that. I am pleased that the Government are doing that.

It was noticeable that in July it was reported that more than £1.2 million in assets were seized and 432 lifetime bans issued as part of joint work between Liverpool FC and Merseyside police to investigate ticket touting, but a change in the law is still needed. That is why the measures in the Bill are so welcome. It is long overdue that we create a criminal offence for the unauthorised resale of tickets for a sporting event. I hope that we will see more joint working between the police and sports clubs, building on these new powers, to ensure that more tickets are within fans' reach. I look forward to more major events being held in this country, and more opportunities for us as a country, as these sporting events inspire a new generation.

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

2.46 pm

**Anna Sabine** (Frome and East Somerset) (LD): Trying to speak in Parliament after developing vocal cord paralysis feels like a major sporting event. Let us see how I get on.

In the last 15 years, we have seen four separate acts of Parliament passed to deliver four separate events. Each of those Bills essentially repeated the same core provisions from scratch through bespoke legislation. This Bill is therefore a welcome change that will make it easier for the Government to deliver major events. But, for the Lib Dems, there are a few areas where we think the Bill could be taken further.

First, on the scope of the Bill, I am glad that the Government accepted a Liberal Democrat amendment in the other place so that the legislation now applies to world-famous domestic events that happen every year in the UK, but that was not the only area where the Bill's scope did not go far enough. The Bill is also limited by applying only to sporting events. Major sporting events bring in hundreds of millions of pounds to the economy, but the music industry is in a different ballpark. In 2024, music contributed a record £8 billion to the UK's economy, and last year 24.7 million music tourists attended live events. The reality is that music and cultural events are large international events. They face the same issues the sporting events do, but they are not covered by the Bill.

Simply, the problems that the Bill aims to address do not stop with sports. Let us look at Eurovision 2023: a major international event that saw organisers having to improvise ticketing and trading arrangements locally rather than relying on a national framework that would have provided a clear and easy solution to the problems that arise from organising large events. If the Bill's framework is good enough for sport, why cannot the Government extend it to other music and cultural events?

I hugely welcome the fact that the Bill takes action on the outrageous ticket sales practices that we have seen in recent years, and I understand that the Government promise further ticket touting reforms later—but when the harm is happening now, and we have the legislative architecture available, why are we delaying action? How many people across this House, how many of our constituents, must pay extortionate prices to see their favourite artists and bands before the Government decide that change needs to happen?

It is not only ticket prices that are blocking fans from watching their favourite sports teams, however. For a long time, public service broadcasters pioneered free-to-air coverage, but sporting events that have always been free-to-air are increasingly being locked behind a paywall. Just a few months ago we saw the implications of that, with fans locked out of watching the champions league final.

The Lib Dems support free-to-air sports on all occasions, and especially when events such as those provided for in this Bill are paid for by the public. Currently, the Bill makes no promises that public money means public access to sports on TV. My colleagues in the other place tabled an amendment to make free-to-air coverage a condition of financial assistance through this Bill, and I intend to push for that again.

One final area that I will be pushing on in Committee is grassroots support. Big events should never hollow out local businesses or grassroots sports and culture.

[Anna Sabine]

The Lib Dems therefore seek clarification from the Government that commercial deals under the frameworks of this Bill will treat small and medium-sized enterprises fairly and ensure that grassroots organisations see a tangible benefit from large sporting events in the UK.

For the Lib Dems, this Bill is not simply about making international events easier to host; it is an opportunity to make them more accessible, more affordable and more enjoyable for the very people who make British sporting and other culture what it is. That is what I will be pushing for as this Bill passes through this House.

2.50 pm

**Imogen Walker** (Hamilton and Clyde Valley) (Lab): We are a nation of sports fans, and for good reason: from a kickabout in the local park to the great tournaments, getting together to watch or play sport brings joy to millions. When Scotland went to the world cup this summer, football even united the Scottish MPs on the Government side of the Chamber with hon. Members on the Opposition side—and that is quite the achievement.

At home, we were so proud that Lewis Ferguson, from the town of Quarter, a former Hamilton Accies player, was part of the squad. He took our hopes and dreams with him to the States and he did us proud. Evi Mackie, from Lanark, represented Scotland at the Commonwealth games—another local talent to make it to the international stage on the back of her hard work and determination, and with the support of the brilliant Lanark Amateur Swimming Club. Those incredible athletes have not only done Lanark, Hamilton and Scotland proud, but shown the way for the next generation of athletes, who deserve the chance to compete at every level.

The provision in this Bill for the Scottish Government to fund sporting events really matters. Our pride in our nations, our teams and our sportspeople cuts across political boundaries—a power sport has that is rarely seen elsewhere. When the Hamilton Accies ran into difficulties that threatened their very future, the fans made it clear what the club meant to them. One young fan, just 18 years old, wrote to me:

“I was introduced to the club by my father...and I have been forever indebted to him for making me an ‘Accies Man’. He gave me a platform to develop relationships with others, take in live sport, and to help me understand the true meaning of joy when those victories occurred or goals hit the back of the net.

I believe the club has a massively positive impact on the mental health of many people, man and woman, every week. Win, lose or draw, the club gives people a place they can go and get away from the stresses of employment, unemployment, addiction, financial stresses, grief and general loneliness.”

That puts it very well, I think. It was fans like that who came together to show their love for the club, overcame all the odds and, after several months at another ground, brought the Accies home this season to Douglas Park.

Sport is universal and it cuts across divides. Lewis and Evi show that we do not need to be from a big city to reach the top, and that the talent we have in Hamilton and Clyde Valley is world-class. But let me be clear: young people do not train day in, day out to make a profit for ticket touts. They have dedicated their lives to pursuing a dream—a dream that gives people hope,

inspiration and something to believe in—not to buy some crook another Merc. This Bill is important, cracking down on ticket touts and building on the UK’s track record of hosting major events, bringing people together and supporting local economies. That is how we will inspire and support the next generation and make sure that their hard work leaves a legacy and keeps dreams alive.

2.53 pm

**Nigel Huddleston** (Droitwich and Evesham) (Con): I refer hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

I have particularly enjoyed today’s reminiscing about London 2012. I remember Super Saturday very well, because I was watching the beach volleyball, which was just up the road, of course, at Horse Guards Parade. I think that was the third time I went to the beach volleyball—for some reason that attracted me quite a lot—and there were a lot of good events going on. Unlike the hon. Member for Bracknell (Peter Swallow), though, I was very much not a teenager at the time.

I will take this opportunity to reiterate something I said this morning by welcoming the shadow Secretary of State to her role. This is an incredibly broad, fascinating, but also daunting brief—I think anybody who has been involved in DCMS recognises that—but she will enjoy it, and I wish her the very best of luck. If there is any way that I can support her, she will always have my support.

I would also like to thank my former team: my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French), who is on the Front Bench right now, my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight East (Joe Robertson) and Lord Parkinson. I also thank the broader team, who did such a good job at supporting me and, most importantly, the sectors.

I can see already that there will be a good working relationship between Opposition and Government. In those areas where party politics is not relevant—that is often the case in DCMS matters—that relationship is important. It is not always seen in the Chamber—it is often seen at events or in the corridors—but it is important that there is that dynamic.

I am not going to lay it on too thick, though. I am not going to say that I will ever vote for the Secretary of State or the Minister, but I think that the most important thing to recognise is that Members can be opponents while also being civil to each other, decent and, quite frankly, nice people. People do not always see that in this place. Politics is politics—there will always be areas of disagreement—but a constructive relationship where a constructive relationship is required is vital for British democracy, and long may that continue. I do empathise with the Minister, by the way. I have been there, so I know about the constant disagreements and challenges when it comes to asking the Treasury for money.

Let me stick to the key theme here of co-operation. I support this Bill. The tone today has obviously been one of general co-operation, for the very reasons that many colleagues have already articulated. The UK, rightfully, has a world-renowned global reputation for doing these kinds of international sporting events not only well but superbly well. We are all committed to delivering international sporting events, and we need

even more opportunities to do so, because they do create genuine lasting legacies and inspire the next generation of talent. Sport interest, engagement and participation can have a really positive impact on the nation's wellbeing by inspiring a more active and healthier nation.

It can also lead the way on inclusivity. Think of the amazing achievements in the integrated Commonwealth games, where able-bodied and para-athlete events are held alongside each other. Britain has a proud reputation for not only investing in para-sport and sponsoring para-athletes but broadcasting it on key channels at peak times—something I will come on to again shortly.

Hosting major international sporting events makes huge economic sense for UK plc, as several Members have mentioned today. When done well, they can be profitable, and the multiplier impact on spend, travel, and hospitality venues such as pubs, bars, restaurants and hotels—of course from both domestic and international visitors—can be absolutely huge. We must remember that inbound visitor spend is export revenue. Every year, over a million people come to the UK primarily to watch a premier league game, generating over a billion pounds for the UK economy. That is export revenue, so this Bill is not trivial.

With Government support, we already have major events secured, including the Euros in 2028 as well as the Fifa women's world cup in 2035. When I say Government support, it is important to recognise that I mean multiple Governments, because the nature of the extraordinarily long bidding process timelines often meant that not only do the Government have to commit to them but the Opposition have to commit to them as well. Those who are holding the events that we are bidding into often want to see cross-party support, because there could be a different Government by the time of the next event. I am certainly hoping that that will be the case.

**Lisa Nandy:** Never!

**Nigel Huddleston:** Perhaps then we can turn the tables and see Conservatives benefit from Labour's hard work, rather than the other way around.

**James Naish:** I must say, I think that was the case with the 2012 games, if I am not mistaken, which were won under a Labour Government but delivered under the hon. Gentleman's Government.

The point I wanted to make was about the development of a long-term vision. Certainly in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, we are doing a lot of work on something called the Trent Sports District, which is taking our excellent venues and painting a long-term vision of what they can do for our city and area. That is exactly what he is saying about individual events, so does he agree that using sport as a regeneration and visioning tool is an excellent way to bring everybody together in a cross-party way to secure long-term benefits for an area?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I do indeed agree with the hon. Gentleman. The other point he makes is that, when we do these events, it is often one individual city or one particular location that gets a lot of the focus. There seems to be a trend at the moment, which I quite like, of

having multiple venues and often multiple countries, even when hosting major international events—we saw that this year with the world cup. We have often bid on a four-nations basis, which can be beneficial, and we will continue to do so. That goes back to the point that the economic benefit can be so considerable that it is great if we can spread it outside the M25. It is important that we do that. I do not want to be negative about London—we have amazing sports venues in London—but we always need to think about London-plus, if London is the anchor.

As the former Sport Minister who oversaw the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth games, I am familiar with, and therefore welcome, many of the framework provisions that go deep into the weeds of event organisation on matters such as ticket sales, unauthorised advertising, brand protection, transport logistics and so on. Previously, they had to be considered in discreet Bills for each and every event, which clearly does not make sense. The basic logic for this Bill is therefore sensible.

Although I am broadly supportive of the Bill, there are some changes that we would like to see, along the lines of what the shadow Secretary of State said earlier. In particular, many in the Lords expressed a concern that the definition of “events” used in the Bill initially seemed to cover way too narrow a group. I therefore appreciate the Secretary of State's comments. Indeed, I remember us having a conversation about the matter at Silverstone and how there is some logic to including many of the important domestic events.

As the shadow Secretary of State pointed out, that does not necessarily mean everything all the time, but we can pick and choose elements of the Bill. That always causes complexities in such Bills, because it can cause some challenges, so we probably need to build in some flexibility. I am sure that, later on, as we go through the Bill's stages, we will be able to work that out. There is a clear and strong feeling on behalf of the major domestic sporting events that were mentioned—Wimbledon, the grand prix and so on—that we do right by them and, quite frankly, make it easier for Government in dealing with those things. Again, let us just use a hefty dose of common sense.

There are a couple of other sport-related matters, which I would like to raise, that should be considered in the wider context of the Bill, and I would genuinely appreciate the Minister's views on those in her closing comments. She will be aware of speculation about allowing alcohol sales at football games. The Conservatives introduced an amendment to the Football Governance Act 2025—I say “the Conservatives”, but it was my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, who is sitting on the Front Bench—for a consultation on lifting the alcohol ban in top-tier football. Unfortunately, despite a lot of agreement cross-party, that amendment was shot down by the then Labour Government. Will the Minister now reconsider that, and is the Bill an appropriate vehicle or opportunity for that consideration? For example, would alcohol sales be restricted at some of the events that we talk about in the Bill? Similarly, are the Government reconsidering the 3 pm blackout rule? That is nothing to do with the Bill, but I just wanted to take the opportunity to put the Minister on the spot.

I also want to touch on something that has been mentioned before, which is the listed events regime. Is that being reviewed, particularly in the context of the

[Nigel Huddleston]

events being considered in the Bill? If there is Government support for hosting an event and taxpayers' money is being put into it, there is a reasonable expectation that attendance and viewing of that event should be maximised in-country to maximise the overall benefit and inspiration that these things can provide. Is this therefore a good time to reconsider the listed events regime, particularly for events supported with taxpayers' money and held in the home nations?

BBC Sport's fantastic coverage of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth games achieved record-breaking audiences on TV, streaming and online. I was fortunate, as the Ministers were, to attend the Glasgow Commonwealth games this year. The city and the organisers put on a fantastic show, particularly given the circumstances of how the games came about, which I think most people are familiar with. It was a deliberately smaller-scale event than the Birmingham games, and although the coverage on TNT Sports and Channel 5 was good, it did not get the breadth of coverage and therefore achieve the level of awareness in-country that we would have had, for example, had the BBC or another major broadcaster secured those rights. That raises questions about what the BBC is bidding for and how much it is bidding. That is definitely a debate for another day, though an important one.

I will end there by confirming that I broadly support the Bill and I certainly look forward to engaging constructively with Ministers as it goes through its remaining stages. I hope we will see some amendments supported by all parties.

3.4 pm

**Dame Caroline Dinenage** (Gosport) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Droitwich and Evesham (Nigel Huddleston) in welcoming our hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Rebecca Paul) to her role—I know that she will be excellent. I also want to pay tribute to him as her predecessor. He was an exceptional Minister and shadow Secretary of State. He has always been an exceptional champion for the sectors that DCMS represents, and I know that he will be a formidable and quite terrifying Back Bencher as well, so it was a pleasure to hear from him.

At the risk of universal agreement breaking out from all corners of the room, I too widely support the Bill. Sport is one of our country's greatest strengths and most successful worldwide exports. Major sporting occasions represent such a huge source of national pride and inspiration, as the Secretary of State said. They are a massive driver of tourism, investment and jobs, and when they are done correctly, their legacy can have tentacles that go on forever. We are world class at delivering them.

We know that British athletes and sportsmen are representing us on the world stage with the most phenomenal success. I was exceptionally proud of the UK deaf athletes who claimed 12 medals, including five gold, at the Tokyo 2025 Deaflympics, despite the fact that they received no public funding. They are elite athletes who make our country very proud. I say this as a gentle reminder to the Minister, given that sports is the theme today, to look again at their eligibility for UK Sport funding.

Our strength is reflected not only in our participation and elite performance, but in our ability to host and showcase some of the world's most significant sporting events. This small island gave the world some of our best-loved sports—from football to cricket, lawn tennis to boxing, rugby to snooker. We may not always lead the world as we did in those halcyon days of the 1700s, when the small village of Hambledon in Hampshire, known as the cradle of cricket, took on the rest of the world and won, but iconic British fixtures, from the premier league to Wimbledon, the British grand prix to the grand national, are globally synonymous with their sports. They bring people to our shores, generate economic growth, inspire participation and project the United Kingdom's reputation around the world.

That reputation is under pressure. The gap in soft power between the UK and our competitor nations is closing. Brand Finance has said that the UK has recorded a "sharper-than-average" drop in soft power, and the British Council says that the lead that western nations, including the UK, hold over our competitors is "narrowing". That is why—I gently say to the Front Bench—it is disappointing that the Government's action on soft power has failed to keep pace with their rhetoric. I really welcomed the creation of the UK Soft Power Council, but it cannot even claim to be a talking shop when it has met only four times in the last 18 months and the Culture Secretary, whom I admire enormously and who chairs it, has attended only twice. It needs to put together a coherent strategy, and if it did, major events would play a significant role.

Our DCMS Committee will shortly report back on our recent inquiry into major events. The UK's events sector is an engine for so much growth, but it has received limited attention from the Government until now. They could be doing so much more to unleash its potential and ease some of its constraints, so this Bill is a good place to start to redress that balance. In particular, given that when done well the ratio of investment to return on these kinds of things is so high, it makes sense for the Government to do all they can to attract opportunities to hold all kinds of major events, particularly sporting events.

The Sport and Recreation Alliance told our Committee, as part of our inquiry:

"Dedicated major events legislation would strengthen the UK's global position as a key destination for major sporting events",

so I really support the principle of the Bill. Bespoke legislation for individual events creates uncertainty and is unwieldy and impractical. The framework introduced by this new legislation is welcomed by everybody—organisers, rights holders, sponsors and hosts.

Our noble colleagues in the other place made such important improvements by widening the legislation to include other substantial annual events. To be honest, that is something our Committee would have introduced, had it not already been done—I suppose we should not be at all surprised that amendments proposed by the Paralympic medallist Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson have won that race. As she said, legislation in this area does not come along often, so we must take advantage of the opportunity.

When Parliament has the chance to establish the framework, we should ensure that it is robust enough to support not only the next tournament but the ecosystem

that exists all year. The benefits of the Bill in its amended form—creating offences on ticket touting, ambush marketing, and unauthorised trading and association—will be felt not just by the one-off totemic events, but by the stalwarts. That is why I am so grateful to the Secretary of State for her signal today that the Government do not intend to remove the amendments made in the House of Lords.

Throughout our Committee's inquiry, the evidence we received underlined a few wider concerns. The major events sector does not always feel recognised as a strategic national asset. Particularly organisers outside the world of sport often feel excluded from national planning and policymaking. The flower shows, cultural festivals, music festivals and military tattoos attract tourists, create jobs and bring people together, yet many witnesses told us that they do not feel recognised in the same way as their sporting counterparts. Across the board, the events sector is asking for better co-ordination and the removal of barriers that prevent it from reaching its economic potential. Witness after witness called for better cross-Government working, clearer points of contact, streamlined approvals and a more coherent long-term strategy.

I appreciate that the Bill aims to make the United Kingdom more competitive in winning bids to host international sporting events, but it does not do much to alleviate the concerns that we have heard from other event organisers across the country about things such as the weight of bureaucracy, the cost of policing and the integration of events with transport plans, to name just a few. During the passage of the Bill in the other place, I was grateful to hear that the Government have promised a major events strategy, which we welcome. We hope that the Government will lean heavily on the conclusions and recommendations in our Committee's report when it is published.

I want to say one final thing about the contribution of business events. They really should not be forgotten. Conferences, exhibitions and trade fairs generate huge economic value for the UK and bring in massive inward investment. More than a million conferences and business meetings take place in the UK every year, generating £33.6 billion for the UK economy. Given its firepower, it is almost laughable that there is not an industrial strategy for the sector alone. The business events sector means business. We will shortly be releasing a stand-alone report on the topic, which I hope the Government are minded to take note of.

In conclusion, this Bill is a welcome step. It has the potential to strengthen the UK's ability to compete for and host major sporting events. It provides a more consistent framework and reflects the importance of sport to our economies, communities and international standing, but it needs to be the starting point of the conversation. For those reasons, I support the Bill's objectives, welcome the improvements made in the other place and encourage the Government to see it as the beginning of a wider and more ambitious vision for the future.

3.13 pm

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Without wanting to make this some sort of grand, "Kumbaya" and "let's all hold hands" moment, I also very much support the Bill. I am pretty certain that the Secretary of State will secure the necessary legislative consent

motion from the Scottish Parliament, given the devolved nature of so much of what is included. She will get very few opportunities to have such buy-in from everybody here, so I hope she enjoys that moment. I can say with a great deal of confidence that it will not last all that long.

It is surely in everybody's interests to create a legislative approach that can better equip the UK to attract and deliver the biggest international sporting events. We are fortunate in the UK because we have a great global reputation for being able to produce those events. We have put on some stunning sporting events throughout the decades, and we will be able to build on that with this legislation. This Bill will hopefully bolster that reputation and ensure that we are one of the top contenders for major international sporting events in the future.

**Alan Gemmell** (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): Will the hon. Member give way?

**Pete Wishart:** The hon. Gentleman just came into the Chamber, but given that we probably have the necessary time, I will give way to him.

**Alan Gemmell:** It was very nice to hear the hon. Member being so positive about the UK, and I wanted to underscore that. I also wanted to say, as a former diplomat, that it was great to see the role that these events play in our soft power. I wonder if he might comment on how important these events are for Scotland and the whole UK in promoting who we are in the world.

**Pete Wishart:** Absolutely—I think we all appreciate the efforts that are being made to ensure that all parts of the United Kingdom are promoted adequately. I am sure that, like me, the hon. Gentleman will be watching very carefully to see that Scotland gets promoted in events in the future.

I think it is fair to say that nothing enthuses and unites the whole of the UK more than sporting success and seeing people who are representing our nations become prized athletes winning medals. It was great to see that happening in the last few months in both the European championship and the Commonwealth games. We even got to the world cup this year for the first time in 28 years! The tartan army charmed all of Boston and Miami with its usual antics, which thrilled, excited and impressed so many of our American colleagues. Unfortunately, that did not translate to activities on the football field—I will leave it at that—but it was a huge unifying force. The hon. Member for Hamilton and Clyde Valley (Imogen Walker) is quite right that it united all of us, whatever our political persuasion and whatever side of constitutional debates we are on, in support of our national side.

As the Secretary of State referenced, this year Scotland stepped in at the last moment to host the Commonwealth games in Glasgow. I will not go over the reasons for that, but we should all be grateful that Glasgow did what Glasgow does, which is to step in at the last moment. I think we can safely say that Glasgow rescued the Commonwealth games. I think the model that was adopted in Glasgow for what was described as a more scaled-down version of the games will be the blueprint, and I have heard other nations that are interested in bidding in the future saying that they will look closely at that model. The Commonwealth games were an overwhelming success and perfectly showcased Glasgow, while allowing

[Pete Wishart]

Scots and those from the rest of the UK to see at first hand a range of sports that caught the imagination, including sports that we might not normally watch, which is only available with the Commonwealth games.

Where Glasgow stepped up to host the games, the BBC most definitely did not. This was the first Commonwealth games in 72 years that the BBC did not fully cover, and that was because it offered what could only be described as a derisory bid for the rights, which it lost to the subscription service TNT. Because that is a subscription service, people had to pay to watch the games, and many sporting fans lost the opportunity to follow the games. That was so bad.

If we contrast that with the European athletics championships only a few weeks later in Birmingham, the BBC appropriately bid, secured the rights and even went as far as to change its week's scheduling so that people could see the games. In Scotland, we feel that we lost out a little bit there. I hope the Secretary of State will raise that with the BBC, to find out why that was allowed to happen and ensure that it never happens again. Wherever the games are held, the BBC should be covering something as significant and popular as the Commonwealth games.

Although there is no provision in the Bill about broadcasting rights, I support some of the things that have been said about free-to-air coverage of what we call the crown jewels of events. We in Scotland lost free-to-air coverage of the national men's football team's games for something like six years—we went without any opportunity to see those games for free, like everybody else across the United Kingdom, which meant that a lot of fans could not follow our national team. That has now been put right, and we were able to see the Scotland games and qualifiers on the BBC, but we have to ensure that everybody has the right to see the national men's football team qualifying and appearing in major championships.

I want to spend a few minutes focusing on the clauses that relate to ticket touting. For the many of us who care passionately about live music and the whole music fan experience, this Bill feels like a little bit of a disappointment. It is a lost opportunity to ensure that the scourge of ticket touting is tackled right across the sporting and entertainment environment. We are grateful that the Government are tackling ticket touting at sports events, but music fans have been let down by what they see as a lack of action on this issue. Although the Government are prepared to act on behalf of the sports sector, music fans will again have to wait before having their issues properly resolved.

Clauses 5 and 6 are good clauses, and they set out regulations on ticket touting for sporting events. This fast-tracked, heavy-duty legislation goes further than what the live music sector is asking for, as it makes all unauthorised ticket resale a criminal offence for major sporting events, full stop. The Government have rightly recognised the urgency, found parliamentary time and the necessary legislation, and acted decisively to shield sports fans and official sports rights holders—and quite right too, but surely music fans deserve the same attention.

The millions of people who form the backbone of our world-leading £8 billion music industry are to remain exposed to the touts, spivs and profiteers. For music, the

Government have offered the promise of a draft ticket tout ban Bill. But let us be clear: until we see the draft Bill and work starts on it, it is pretty much just an aspiration, and it exposes the issue to a host of pre-legislative scrutiny, consultations, delays, and a long and winding road through this House.

I listened carefully to the Secretary of State's response when I intervened on her, and I think I heard her say that action was going to be imminent, and that we would see something relating to music quickly. I really hope that is the case, because music fans are having to pay through the nose to see their favourite bands, and it is costing something like £145 million a year according to the sector. The UK music industry is asking not for a total ban on resale; it is asking for a resale price cap that prohibits someone from reselling a ticket for more than the original cost, with service fee limits to ensure that the price cap cannot be undermined by inflated fees or hidden charges placed on consumers, and with volume limits to make it unlawful for someone to buy more tickets for an event than one individual is permitted to buy on the primary market.

We have heard the Secretary of State say this before, and the Government roughly support all those endeavours and issues, but now we need to get it done—please. What we have is great for sports—I think everybody welcomes this, and I am sure it will go a long way to ensuring that sports fans are protected—but we need the same type of action and legislation for music fans. I do not want to end on a sour note, although I think the Secretary of State would expect me to say these things to her. I am encouraged by what she has said; as we go forward, let us all work together and get this issue fixed for music too.

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

3.22 pm

**Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I also put on record, because the Secretary of State has not, my delight that my old club, the London Broncos, won silverware at the weekend. London beating the north at their own sport—it was a fantastic sight to watch—[*Interruption.*] The Secretary of State is really enjoying that! But let me start seriously by saying that the Bill is a welcome step in the right direction for major sporting events across the UK. I thank hon. Members from across both Houses for their contributions to the debates on the Bill so far, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Droitwich and Evesham (Nigel Huddleston) for his fantastic championing of DCMS over many years—I know he will continue to do that—and for putting up with me for the past 12 months.

As we all know, major sporting events make a substantial social and economic contribution to our country and, more often than not, the journey from bidding stage to delivery spans across Governments, so it is vital that we get this right and seek to work constructively wherever possible. It is notable that the turquoise goal hangers have not even turned up for this major debate, despite making references in the press about hosting events in the future—it is not the first time that has happened, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In an increasingly competitive international bidding environment, the Bill should help the UK to attract more events and allow those we already stage to be more successful. I am therefore pleased that the Government have accepted some of the amendments made in the other place, particularly by expanding the scope of the Bill to a wider range of major sporting events, including those taking place on a regular basis. The objective of the Bill should be to streamline the bidding and delivery aspects of hosting major sporting events. That is a principle that we can support, because as Conservatives we believe fundamentally that Britain succeeds when the Government get out of the way. I could provide many sporting examples to highlight that point, but in the interests of time I will highlight just three.

First, although football is not without its issues—we have discussed that on many occasions—our domestic football competitions such as the premier league and the English football league continue to lead the world in attracting investment and fans from across the world. We should never apologise for that success, nor forget why British football continues to deliver billions of inward investment and champion our soft power across the world. The success of football across the UK, but particularly in England, also means that we are well placed for future bids with our stadiums and supporting infrastructure such as training bases. The recent example of the Barcelona men's team training at St George's Park highlights again what a fantastic facility it is. It will continue to support new and existing coaches and, I hope, further success on the pitch for England's national teams.

I would also like to put on record my thanks to our football associations for their ongoing leadership work both at home and overseas in very challenging circumstances, as we have sadly seen again this summer with the ongoing FIFA saga. Such diplomatic skills will continue to be vital for any future bids to host competitions, and I thank officials for their ongoing work.

Secondly, I will briefly mention Formula 1, and the commercial vision and leadership that, like the premier league, continues to put the UK at the top of the international podium. Formula 1's success embodies the very best of international competition and sports science, creating fantastic jobs and investment across Britain that stretches far beyond the grand prix weekend, as I saw again on a recent visit to the Formula 1 media centre in Bigger Hill.

The third example is the national lottery, one of the greatest Conservative legacies, which has allowed UK Sport, with the support of lottery players, to transform our athletic success across multiple sports. Gone are the days when a more state-controlled approach to sport saw us languish in the middle tables. This is another area where we will seek to continue to work constructively with the Government to ensure that funding for sport is maximised.

From the premier league to Formula 1, the Open, the London marathon, Wimbledon and beyond, our nation's sporting heritage is rich and continues to lead the world. In fact, I cannot see why events like the British grand prix at Silverstone, the Open or the London marathon were excluded from the remit of the Bill in the first place. These events provide an incredible return on investment for this country, with independent assessments already anticipating that Euro 2028 will generate over

£3.2 billion of social economic benefits for the UK and Ireland between 2028 and 2031. That is the equivalent of approximately £5.74 of benefit for every £1 invested.

It is therefore welcome that the Government have accepted the amendments in the other place to allow the benefits of the Bill and the subsequent framework to be extended to events that already benefit this country. However, as the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Rebecca Paul) set out, and many noble Lords made clear throughout the passage of the Bill in the other place, there are still serious questions that need to be addressed on the Government's approach to major events.

First, why have the Government tabled a Bill to support hosting major sporting events when their own major events strategy, which has been promised, is still unpublished? Does the Minister not see that the Bill should be part of that strategy and that they are at risk of putting the cart before the horse?

Secondly, the Bill fails to address major fiscal and regulatory concerns outlined by organisers of major events. They include proposals by the Home Office to charge for policing services, the implementation of Martyn's law, increasing employment costs, higher business rates and the Care Quality Commission's new regulations.

On CQC regulation, I know the sporting events sector has already had discussions with the Department of Health and Social Care and the CQC on an exemption for those who provide medical services for athletes, performers and officials, but, as we have seen for the past two years, Ministers have failed to grasp the nettle and provide urgent clarity to the sector. Will the Secretary of State or the Minister please now make sure that they or their ministerial colleagues provide confirmation and clarity on the introduction of the exemption as soon as possible, so that major sporting events are not negatively delayed or impacted by unintended consequences?

We have also heard from our constituents about the increased costs for businesses under successive Labour Governments. That is no different for those who host major sporting events. The Prime Minister might be able to afford his Everton season ticket, but there are many out there who will no longer be able to afford to watch their beloved teams thanks to the increased costs being piled on to clubs across the country. We have heard already about the impact of changes to events that are televised on national TV for free. This is an ongoing challenge that sports are facing; it is having direct consequences for fans across the country, whether they seek to watch sport in person or at home.

Not only have the Government saddled organisers with more costs in the form of minimum wage increases, national insurance increases, business rates increases and energy costs; now the Home Office is threatening to increase the cost of policing these kinds of events. A joined-up Government approach would see a guarantee that our major sporting events benefit from policing services in the same way as every other sector of the economy, and ensure that they are not forced to pay again for public services that they have already paid for through high levels of taxation. Will the Secretary of State commit to making sure that no extra police charges will be imposed on sporting events, and to making sure that if the Government proceed in this way, an impact assessment of the ability of those events to swallow such costs is published as soon as possible?

[Mr Louie French]

More broadly, this Government's words on sports are not being matched by their actions, as we have seen and heard today. I hope that the new Prime Minister changes direction on this, because we all know that having a good strategy is one thing—and this Bill will make it easier to deliver such events—but the country will miss out if we do not address some of the sporting cuts that have been made over the past two years, particularly at the grassroots. It is future generations that will miss out on being inspired if we do not host such events. Since this Labour Government came in two years ago, they have cut £57 million from the opening school facilities fund, £127 million a year from the primary school PE and sport premium, £35 million from investment in grassroots cricket, £11 million from the multi-sport grassroots facilities programme, and £25 million in real terms from grassroots sports investment, compared with the previous Conservative Government. This is not a good record, and it is our sports and our grassroots facilities that are paying the price.

While in government, the Conservative party invested more than £1.5 billion in grassroots, school and elite sports, including an unprecedented £400 million investment in grassroots sport and £300 million of emergency funding to support community sports clubs and grassroots organisations. Perhaps the programme we Conservatives should be most proud of is the PE and sport premium; introduced to help inspire a generation after the London Olympics, it was worth £600 million between 2023 and 2025 alone, and has totalled almost £3.5 billion, directly for schools, since we introduced it in 2013. This summer of sport was built on the legacy of the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth games, the 2015 rugby world cup, the 2019 cricket world cup, the 2020 men's Euro final and the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth games, to name just a few of the incredible events that have taken place. However, if the Government continue down this path of not funding sport properly, I am afraid there will be less money for future generations and the future stars we so need. As I have said, I sincerely hope that the Government help this Department to change the direction that we have seen it take over the past two years.

To conclude, this Bill is a welcome move for elite sport and major international events, and we will work constructively to try to improve it as it passes through the Commons. However, this Labour Government must change direction. They must reduce costs for all levels of sport; otherwise, we will lose our seat at the top table of international sport, and the next generation will not benefit from hosting such major, incredible events.

3.32 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock):** I am grateful to all hon. Members across the House who have contributed to today's debate, which has shown cross-party recognition of the importance of major sporting events and their ability to showcase the very best of our country. I will speak about the Bill, its importance and its provisions, and will address some of the wider points raised in the debate.

The UK is an undisputed world leader when it comes to hosting major sporting events, and the benefits of these occasions are felt right across the country. We all fondly remember the London 2012 Olympics, as the Secretary of State and many others have said in this debate. Events such as these bring huge benefits and opportunities. The London Olympics and Paralympics brought £14 billion of trade and investment benefit to the UK, alongside the regeneration of 500 acres of east London, and 400,000 Londoners participated in grassroots sports in the three years following the games. In my area of South Yorkshire, the Olympic legacy park in Sheffield is another testament to the transformative power these international events can have. It stands as the only Olympic legacy park in a city that has not hosted the games.

More recently, the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth games contributed over £1 billion to the UK economy, and events such as the 2025 women's rugby world cup, the 2026 women's cricket world cup and the recent outdoor European athletics championships—it was the first time the UK had hosted the championships—have brought, and will bring, their own legacy benefits. Of course, we note the huge success of the Glasgow Commonwealth games, and the fact that Glasgow really stepped up to host those games at the last minute.

Looking ahead, the grand départ of the Tour de France and the Tour de France Femmes in 2027, and a potential world athletics championships in 2029, will inspire the next generation and bring live sport to communities across the country. Indeed, we expect the Tour de France stages to be the most accessible major sporting event Great Britain has ever hosted, bringing £150 million in economic benefits across the country.

This Government are committed to not only hosting major sporting events, but making sure that the benefits are felt far beyond the field of play. As I have said in this House before, inactivity is the story of inequality, and that is why this Government are investing at least £400 million in community sports facilities across the country over the next four years, and it is why we are determined that major events should support greater grassroots participation. I understand the power of sport to inspire in every postcode. That point was made powerfully by my hon. Friends the Members for Hamilton and Clyde Valley (Imogen Walker), and for Dartford (Jim Dickson).

This legislation will strengthen our ability to bid successfully for major sporting events, and it will ensure that we are ready to create more moments like London 2012 or Birmingham 2022. France and Australia already have similar legislative frameworks, and France's recent success in hosting the Olympic and Paralympic games and the rugby world cup demonstrates the value of having these protections in place. I will briefly run through the Bill's provisions and how they will be enforced, but before I do, it is worth noting that this legislation is only one component of our broader national ambition.

As I recently announced to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, we are developing a major event strategy, to be published in the near future. For the first time, we will have a comprehensive strategy that unites sport, culture, arts and business events under a single strategic framework designed to simplify and drive growth. I recognise the points that the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinéage), has raised, and the work her Committee has done. In particular,

I have heard her calls on business events. Since I appeared in front of her Select Committee, I have convened more than one cross-Government meeting, and I am committed to ensuring that the Government do better in this area.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French), asked why we were, in his words, putting the cart before the horse and not publishing the strategy before this Bill. That is because we have legal deadlines to meet for Euro 2028. If we were not debating this ambitious Bill, we would be debating a Euro 2028 Bill, similar to the one for the Commonwealth games that he took through the House.

**Gordon McKee** (Glasgow South) (Lab): I am privileged to represent Hampden Park in Glasgow, which will be one of the stadiums that hosts Euro 2028. It is a huge opportunity, and it attracts investment, as the Minister has said. Does she agree that when we have these major sporting events, it is important that the right legislation is in place for the communities around the stadium, and that the Government work with the council and police to ensure that there is no antisocial behaviour, littering or other disruption to those communities?

**Stephanie Peacock:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and his point goes to the heart of this Bill. The process should be collaborative and should work for local people. That speaks to the point I was going to come on to make, which is that event-specific regulations—they will set out which provisions will be applied to an event, including information such as the time period and how the provisions apply to the local area—will be subject to parliamentary debate and scrutiny through the statutory instrument process.

Moving on to some of the specifics in the Bill, the ticketing provisions are designed to ensure that tickets can be resold only with the authorisation of the event owner or organiser. This measure will clamp down on ticket touts who seek to exploit sports fans and profiteer from major sporting moments. We saw such legislation work effectively at London 2012, and this Bill will make that the baseline for major sporting events. Where needed, local trading standards authorities and the Competition and Markets Authority will be able to enforce the Bill. While it does not prohibit official reselling of tickets at above face value, we will bring in further legislation in this area. The Secretary of State was clear in her remarks about the draft legislation being there so that we can get this right, but she was also clear that the issue should be a high priority for this Session.

The Bill will introduce time-limited restricted zones around competition venues, fan zones and transport hubs to prevent aggressive ambush marketing and unauthorised street trading. Without those protections, the women's Euros in 2022 faced persistent street trading and unauthorised advertising blimps. In contrast, the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth games used these powers to swiftly resolve more than 50 advertising and trading infringements, protecting official sponsors and keeping spectator routes safe. The Bill will empower local authorities to undertake enforcement at future events.

The Bill ensures that the interests of those with an existing trading licence are taken into account when a determination is made on an application to trade in a restricted zone, but we are absolutely determined to

make sure that the Bill is as strong as possible on protecting small businesses. We will work across the House to make sure that it delivers on that.

The Bill will prohibit unauthorised association. That will prevent businesses from falsely suggesting to the public that they have an official connection with an event in order to gain exposure. Weak controls around unauthorised association make sponsoring an event less appealing and allow businesses to benefit without giving financial support. The Bill sets out controls to prevent that from happening; it gives the power to enforce the provisions to designated enforcers, which are likely to be event owners or organisers. Protections will have been built in to ensure proportionality, and to help ensure that small businesses can once again benefit from major events on their doorstep. It is our intention to make sure that small businesses benefit from major events, and I am very keen to work with Members across the House to deliver this.

**Mr French:** We are willing to work constructively on this issue. Can we also ensure that there is significant flexibility for events such as Wimbledon, just to name one? A lot of residents who live nearby suffer the parking stress that we heard about from colleagues. During such events, people normally hire out driveways, which helps with parking capacity. Will there be enough flexibility in the legislation to allow that kind of thing to carry on?

**Stephanie Peacock:** The hon. Gentleman makes a really important and valid point, and I look forward to continuing the conversation with him in Bill Committee, when we can pick up on that point. I will touch on recurrent events in a moment, but first I will touch briefly on transport.

The Bill enables integrated, cross-boundary transport plans and temporary traffic powers in England for local traffic authorities. My hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (James Naish) raised this important point. I assure him that plans will be collaborative, and will have to work with local people. A good example is the games route network used in Birmingham 2022, which ensured that spectators could move safely and efficiently, while minimising disruption to local residents and businesses.

**Phil Brickell** (Bolton West) (Lab): The Minister will know that Peel Land is hoping to support a bid for the Ryder cup to come to the Hulton Park site in my Bolton West constituency. I have serious reservations about the infrastructure at that site, and many of my constituents have grave concerns, predominantly about road traffic. In particular, the Westhoughton Chequerbent roundabout is chock-a-block with traffic at all times of the day. Will the Minister meet me to hear our concerns, and make sure that any putative bid at a future date addresses the infrastructure concerns that I raised with the Prime Minister earlier in the year, when he was in his previous role as Mayor of Greater Manchester?

**Stephanie Peacock:** My hon. Friend makes a really important point on behalf of the people he represents, and I would be absolutely delighted to meet him to discuss it further.

As the Secretary of State mentioned, we are well aware of the concerns about recurrent domestic events, and we recognise the opportunities available. We will

[Stephanie Peacock]

seek to address this issue during the passage of the Bill, and I welcome the comments from those on the Opposition Front Bench. The hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Sarah Bool) made an important point regarding Silverstone, and I can assure her that both the Secretary of State and I are passionate about it too, having been there with the hon. Member for Droitwich and Evesham (Nigel Huddleston). The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Reigate (Rebecca Paul), made an important point on this issue too, and I welcome the comments from the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Weald of Kent (Katie Lam), about working with us on recurrent events. I look forward to doing that in Committee.

I welcome the fact that the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Frome and East Somerset (Anna Sabine), broadly supports the Bill. I appreciate her point about music events, and she asks why they were not included. The Bill was originally designed for biddable events, which is why music events were not included. Indeed, that is why some of the recurrent events were not initially included. However, we have heard the points made in this House and the other place, and we will work with people to get this right.

The whole of the UK stands to benefit from major sporting events, and we are committed to seeing the reward shared across the four nations. From the inception of the Bill, we have worked closely with devolved partners to ensure that it serves the whole Union, and we will continue to work with each devolved Government to ensure that, where appropriate, legislative consent motions are secured.

I would like to cover some of the broader points, which were mainly put to me by the hon. Member for Droitwich and Evesham. I do not want to overstate it, but I pay tribute to him for all the work that he has done, both on the Opposition Front Bench and as a Minister before that. He put various questions to me, and I will touch briefly on some of them. He mentioned the 3 pm blackout, which exists to protect ticket sales for lower leagues in the football pyramid. As a former Minister for Sport, he will know that it is an issue for the Football Association, but we support the current situation, as we recognise the importance of this for the lower leagues. He raised a point about alcohol, and he is absolutely right. We debated this during the passage of the Football Governance Bill, and there are of course different views. The ban was originally introduced to protect fans, but I recognise the debate that is taking place. It is an issue for the Home Office, so I will reflect the points he makes to the relevant Minister.

Both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart) mentioned the Commonwealth games coverage. Ultimately, the hon. Member for Droitwich and Evesham will know, as a former Minister, that this was a decision for Commonwealth Sport as the rights holder, and there is a balance between accessibility and commercial considerations. I know he was in attendance at the Commonwealth games, and I think that TNT did a very good job of making it accessible. There was also work on radio, with S4C and the BBC, and free-to-air highlights on Channel 5. However,

I do acknowledge the point that the fact the BBC did not cover it means there was not so much wider awareness, but he will appreciate that that issue is independent of Government.

The Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee made a point about deaf athletes and the deaf Olympics. UK Sport has met those involved, as have I as the Minister, and I would like to assure both the Select Committee and the House, as well as anyone watching our proceedings, that we absolutely have not forgotten the issue. I wrote to the Select Committee earlier this year, and this is something that I and the Secretary of State care very much about. I will update both the House and the Select Committee on that issue.

Major sporting events can change lives, transform communities and inspire people to get involved in sport. This Bill will make sure we are ready to secure more of these incredibly important global events and bring their power to communities across the UK. We will champion fans, protect commercial rights and give organisers the reassurance they need to come to our country and cement the UK as a world leader in this space, so I commend this Bill to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

### **SPORTING EVENTS BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME)**

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Sporting Events Bill [Lords]:

#### *Committal*

- (1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

#### *Proceedings in Public Bill Committee*

- (2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 22 October 2026.
- (3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

#### *Consideration and Third Reading*

- (4) Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.
- (5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.
- (6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading.

#### *Other proceedings*

- (7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—  
(*Gen Kitchen.*)

*Question agreed to.*

**SPORTING EVENTS BILL [LORDS] (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 Sporting Events Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred under the Act by the Secretary of State.—(*Gen Kitchen.*)

*Question agreed to.*

**PETITION****Redditch Police and Fire Station**

3.47 pm

**Chris Bloore** (Redditch) (Lab): I am presenting a petition concerning the West Mercia police and crime commissioner's decision to spend £20 million of taxpayers' money on a new police and fire station that, despite that significant investment, has neither a permanent front-counter service nor holding cells. I would like to thank the thousands of residents who have signed this petition, both on paper and online. Their support demonstrates the strength of feeling in our community and sends a clear message that a town the size of Redditch deserves a fit-for-purpose police station.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of Redditch,

Declares that the lack of a publicly accessible front desk at Redditch Police and Fire Station prevents members of the community from accessing a vital public service.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to review the provision of a publicly accessible front desk at Redditch Police and Fire Station to ensure adequate and accessible policing is available to the people of Redditch.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P003229]

**Large-scale Development Masterplans**

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Gen Kitchen.)*

3.48 pm

**Dr Allison Gardner** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to lead this debate on the role of masterplans in large-scale development. This debate will be of particular importance to many of my constituents in Lightwood and surrounding areas, where some 3,000 homes have been allocated through Stoke-on-Trent's emerging local plan under site BL1.

I want to begin by making my position clear: I oppose development of this scale in Lightwood. It is the largest single housing allocation in the entire local plan and would, in practice, create a substantial new community on the edge of the city. Like many constituents who have contacted me, I do not believe that the existing infrastructure, public services and transport network can accommodate development of this scale. I have consistently raised objections to the scale of this proposal. However, I recognise the reality that development is likely to proceed, particularly given that elements of the site are under council ownership.

I also believe that the centrally determined housing target for Stoke-on-Trent of 948 homes a year is a little too high, given the site's tight administrative boundaries and limited land. It is concerning that we have reached the regulation 19 stage of the local plan process without residents having any meaningful detail about how the strategic allocation of 3,000 homes would be delivered. There remains no comprehensive framework setting out infrastructure requirements, no clear understanding of how cumulative impacts will be mitigated and no shared vision about how a development of this scale will integrate with both existing communities and the wider area.

What makes this particularly difficult to understand is that residents elsewhere in Stoke-on-Trent have been afforded precisely that opportunity. The council prepared a masterplan for the strategic site at Packmoor, despite it being around a third of the size of the proposed Lightwood allocation. That process provided a clear vision for the site and enabled residents to engage with the overall shape of development before individual planning applications came forward. By contrast, residents in Lightwood are being asked to comment on a strategic allocation of 3,000 homes without the benefit of a comparable masterplan, and without the same level of consultation on how the site will ultimately be delivered. It is a clear example of inconsistency in the planning process.

Residents should not receive different levels of engagement, transparency and certainty about the future of their communities simply because they happen to live in different postcodes. When a development is large enough to create an entirely new neighbourhood, it should not be allowed to emerge through a series of disconnected planning applications. It should be planned from the outset through a comprehensive masterplan that establishes a clear vision for the area and provides a framework for future development. In Lightwood's case, the local planning authority should be taking a proactive role in preparing and co-ordinating such a masterplan.

[Dr Allison Gardner]

Masterplans are not simply about determining where houses will go. They are about creating successful places and sustainable, accessible communities, both new and existing. They provide the strategic framework that brings together housing, transport, education provision, healthcare capacity, utilities, mains water provided by water companies, environmental enhancement and design principles into a coherent vision for long-term growth. Most importantly, they ensure that supporting infrastructure is planned alongside development, rather than treated as an afterthought once planning applications have already been submitted.

In that regard, masterplans are entirely consistent with the ambitions of the national planning policy framework, which seeks to promote sustainable development, effective placemaking and infrastructure-led growth. While national policy recognises the value of masterplans and design codes, their use remains largely discretionary. The experience of Lightwood and Packmoor demonstrates the inconsistency that can result. That is why I believe there is a strong case for a clearer national requirement that developments above an appropriate scale should be supported by a comprehensive masterplan.

I am not suggesting that every housing development requires such a masterplan. A scheme involving a few dozen homes is clearly different from a strategic allocation comprising thousands of properties. However, where development may be delivered over many years, involve multiple landowners or developers, and have substantial implications for infrastructure and existing communities, the case for master planning becomes clear. In such circumstances, a comprehensive masterplan should be established before individual planning applications are determined.

Without a clear overarching framework, there is a real risk of piecemeal development. Individual planning applications may appear acceptable in isolation, but collectively they can create unintended consequences for transport networks, public services, drainage systems and environmental assets. Opportunities for integrated transport links, co-ordinated infrastructure and high-quality placemaking can easily be lost when development comes forward parcel by parcel.

A masterplan provides the framework that ensures every proposal contributes to an agreed vision for the site. It should establish how movement through the site will work, where community facilities will be located, how public transport will be integrated, where drainage infrastructure will be provided, and how development will connect with surrounding neighbourhoods. It should also identify how environmental assets will be protected, enhanced and connected across the site as a whole. That brings me to a particularly important issue: green infrastructure.

Green space is often treated as a residual element of development, fitted into whatever land remains after housing numbers have been maximised. A proper masterplan takes the opposite approach; it recognises that accessible green spaces, recreation areas, tree planting and biodiversity corridors are fundamental components of healthy communities. They contribute to physical and mental wellbeing, create opportunities for recreation and social interaction, improve climate resilience and flood mitigation, and help maintain a connection between

communities and the natural environment. Green infrastructure cannot be viewed as an optional extra; it is essential and ensures that growth enhances rather than diminishes the places people call home.

Infrastructure planning is equally important. Questions about road capacity, public transport provision, walking and cycling routes, school places, healthcare services, utilities and drainage cannot sensibly be addressed on an application-by-application basis. They must be considered collectively, and in the context of both future residents and the communities that already exist around the development.

That is particularly important in relation to mains and water infrastructure. I remain concerned that the mains water companies do not upgrade their systems to match the new developments. My village of Upper Tean has frequently had that problem. The developers meet their requirements on mains water, sewage and flood mitigations, but when something hits the mains systems, we get manhole covers blowing out and flooding happening all over. People's homes get flooded, as well as businesses and play areas, with the ensuing environmental problems.

A masterplan should also ensure, if we are serious about creating inclusive communities, the development of accessible homes and communities, including bungalows, so that they meet the needs of those who are ageing and have disabilities or are frail. The English homes study found that 91% of homes do not meet the necessary requirements for wheelchair users to visit, let alone live in them. Data by Habinteg Housing Association, which provides thousands of accessible social homes across the country, shows that wheelchair users could wait up to 47 years for a suitable accessible property to become available.

Masterplans can be a valuable way of ensuring that future housing developments meet existing local housing needs, including the estimated 20,000 wheelchair users nationally on local authority housing waiting lists. Currently, fewer than 2% of newbuild homes are bungalows, meaning that most are not fully accessible.

Sites such as Lightwood are not a blank canvas. People already live there. They rely on local roads, footpaths, public transport, schools, healthcare services and community facilities. As we work to deliver the homes that this country needs, we must make full use of the planning tools available to ensure those homes become successful communities, accessible to all. I ask the Minister to consider strengthening national planning policy, so that large-scale developments, above an appropriate threshold that can be discussed, are required to have a comprehensive masterplan in place before individual planning applications are brought forward.

3.57 pm

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Dr Gardner) on securing this important debate. I commend her for the compelling argument she makes about the importance of planning effectively for large-scale residential developments to ensure that they are well-connected, well-designed, sustainable and attractive places where people want to live, with all the infrastructure, amenities and services needed to sustain thriving communities.

While I note my hon. Friend's comments, both today and previously, in respect of the BL1 green-belt site in Lightwood that is identified in the draft local plan, I know she is cognisant of the fact that I cannot comment on specific local plans, sites or planning applications, due to the quasi-judicial nature of the planning process, but I will make some general points that I hope will be of use.

I start with plan making. The plan-led approach is, and must remain, the cornerstone of our planning system. The benefits of an up-to-date local plan are significant and well known across the Chamber. Local plans are the best way for communities to shape decisions about how to deliver the housing and wider development that areas need. They enable local areas to set the strategy for future growth and the approach to protecting and enhancing the environment, and they provide the certainty and confidence required to bring development forward across the country.

In the absence of an up-to-date local plan, there is a high likelihood that development will come forward on a piecemeal and speculative basis, as my hon. Friend mentioned, with reduced public engagement and fewer guarantees that it will make the most of an area's potential. That is why the Government remain determined to drive local plans to adoption as quickly as possible in order to achieve our ambition of universal plan coverage and to ensure that plans contribute positively to increasing rates of house building and infrastructure delivery.

My hon. Friend will know that the emerging Stoke-on-Trent city council local plan is undergoing the regulation 19 consultation, and I encourage her and her constituents to engage meaningfully with that process, if they have not already done so, to ensure that any specific concerns are understood by the authority even at this advanced stage. Anyone who has submitted a representation during the consultation on the draft plan may make a request to be heard by the inspector during the examination.

Once submitted for examination, it will be for the independent inspector to examine the plan and the proposed site allocations to ensure that they are legally compliant and sound. Of course, it is for the inspector to ensure that the plan is in conformity with national policy, which has always been clear that local plans should identify the infrastructure necessary to support the delivery of the local plan, providing certainty and better outcomes for communities, businesses and developers.

I want briefly to mention the interaction between design guides, codes and masterplans and local plans. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that local planning authorities can identify and prioritise where design guides, codes and masterplans are produced and can make provision for their adoption as supplementary plans. There is no requirement for them to be adopted as part of the development plan, but where they are incorporated into development plans, they are afforded more weight on that basis.

It is important that for those key sites where a local authority wants to see a masterplan in place, they are incorporated into plans. They can also be produced as part of the development management process to support the delivery of larger site allocations. In the new national planning policy framework that we published on 17 August, we included new policy—policy L1, for those who are

interested—which encourages the use of masterplans, where appropriate, to optimise the use of site allocations. We included this in response to consultation feedback.

My hon. Friend made a number of specific points in the context of her concerns about the BL1 site about large-scale residential development and the importance of master planning to ensure the best outcomes for communities, and I very much agree with her about the benefits. Delivering at scale does provide opportunities for comprehensive development where homes, infrastructure, green space and community facilities can be planned together from the outset. National planning policy has long required local plans to take this joined-up approach, including by setting out the infrastructure needed to support growth and clear expectations for the quality of places to be created. That includes using design tools such as masterplans and design codes where they are needed.

In response to the specific points my hon. Friend raised, the new NPPF that we published on 17 August has strengthened national planning policy in this area for future plans and sites, including by introducing a definition of what is called a strategic site—a site of at least 1,500 dwellings, most often to be delivered in multiple phases, and that has significant infrastructure requirements. Through that NPPF, we have set clear expectations that such development should come forward in suitable locations, be supported by necessary infrastructure and facilities, address strategic environmental opportunities and—I quote from the glossary—“require a masterplan.” Going forward, we require a masterplan for any strategic site of over 1,500 units to be taken forward. To my hon. Friend's point on accessibility, the new NPPF also strengthens expectations for a mix of homes and tenures on strategic sites.

While it will principally shape future plan making and future site allocations, it does, I hope, demonstrate this Government's direction of travel, ensuring that large-scale developments are planned comprehensively, supported by timely infrastructure and capable of being well-designed, sustainable places even where a stand-alone masterplan is not in place. However, I understand my hon. Friend's concerns in the context of her draft local plan being assessed under the old framework, not the new one.

I want to touch briefly on design and infrastructure. I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of providing a long-term vision to guide the delivery of well-designed, large-scale development. Again, national planning policy is clear that local authorities should identify in their development plans where masterplans are necessary to achieve positive design outcomes and that they should use masterplans, where appropriate, to optimise the use of both allocated sites and smaller windfall sites. It also requires that masterplans reflect a clear understanding of local character and the wider context of an area, and should be informed by effective community engagement.

We are not complacent; we want to build on what is already in place. Our draft planning practice guidance on design and placemaking, which we consulted on between January and March this year, will go even further to support local authorities to prepare effective masterplans in collaboration with communities and key stakeholders.

[Matthew Pennycook]

A chief concern that my hon. Friend raised was infrastructure, the provision of which, as she made clear, communities across the country rightly expect to be delivered alongside development, rather than being an afterthought. We have been clear that while we need to build many more homes, they need to be supported by the right infrastructure to ensure that we are creating functioning places where people want to live and work.

The new NPPF has strengthened existing national policy to ensure that developers and local plans deliver much needed affordable homes and the infrastructure required to support new development such as schools and GP surgeries. Through the new NPPF, we have placed a greater emphasis on up-front clarity on expected developer contributions, reducing the risk of lengthy negotiations and again providing greater certainty for communities.

More widely, our new NPPF supports the provision of new community facilities and public service infrastructure, particularly where new development would have a significant impact on the number of people needing to use those services. The NPPF is also clear that, in planning for new community facilities and public service infrastructure, authorities should engage proactively with local communities and the relevant service providers, taking into account relevant strategies to improve health, address inequalities and foster social and cultural wellbeing for all sections of the community.

At the same time, the Government are backing delivery centrally with the launch of a new national housing delivery fund. That includes about £5 billion of capital grant funding to address viability challenges across the country, including through remediation of brownfield sites and the provision of unlocking infrastructure. The fund is designed to deliver a range of interventions, including large strategic schemes as well as faster, smaller sites and viability gap projects. Its aim is to accelerate housing delivery, increase supply and support our ambition to build 1.5 million new homes in this Parliament. It sits alongside the £16 billion of financial capacity that we have available to us through our national housing bank.

On landscapes and green places, again, it is important for me to say to my hon. Friend that the NPPF highlights the importance of conserving and enhancing landscape character, the natural beauty of the countryside and higher quality agricultural land. Local plans may designate land as local green space where that would safeguard green areas of particular value to the local community. We have also introduced a new requirement for plans to set standards for green infrastructure, defined as a multi-functional network of green and blue spaces.

The Government are obviously also committed to the ongoing protection of England's green belts, which have served England's towns and cities well over many decades. We have not shied away, however, from the fact that we do need to take forward a more strategic, targeted approach to green-belt land designation and release where that is necessary; but when local authorities have to release green belt under exceptional circumstances, we expect them to prioritise previously developed and lower-quality grey-belt land within the green belt.

I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for securing the debate and bringing this important issue to the House's attention. I am passionate about well-designed masterplans, which can really reduce opposition to development by convincing people that the development coming forward is infrastructure-led, well designed and sustainable. The Government are committed to delivering the right homes that people need while ensuring that development is supported by the appropriate infrastructure, working in tandem with local areas. We have, as I set out today, taken bold steps to reform the planning system and to drive wider changes across the housing market to improve supply, quality and fairness. I look forward to working closely with colleagues to build a housing system that is both fair and sustainable, and to drive up the quality and indeed coverage of masterplans, particularly on strategic sites across the country.

*Question put and agreed to.*

4.8 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

*Thursday 3 September 2026*

[PAULA BARKER *in the Chair*]

## Children in the Social Care System: England

### JOINT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

*Select Committee statement*

1.30 pm

**Paula Barker (in the Chair):** We begin with the Select Committee statement. Peter Swallow will speak on the publication of the second report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, “Human Rights of Children in the Social Care System in England”, HC 161, for up to 10 minutes, during which no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of Peter Swallow’s statement, I will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement, and call Peter Swallow to respond to them in turn. Questions should be brief and Members may ask only one question each. I call Peter Swallow on behalf of the Joint Committee on Human Rights.

**Peter Swallow (Bracknell) (Lab):** Thank you, Mrs Barker; it is an honour to serve with you in the Chair.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting the time for this statement, and my fellow members of the Joint Committee on Human Rights for asking me to make it. I am also grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Whitehaven and Workington (Josh MacAlister), for his attendance. As he knows, I never miss an opportunity to raise with him the progress of my local special educational needs and disabilities school, but I am getting that in at the start of my speech so that we can focus on what we are actually here to talk about: the very important matter of children’s social care.

This statement sets out the work done and recommendations made by the Joint Committee on Human Rights in the report “Human Rights of Children in the Social Care System in England”. It goes without saying that the state’s ability to intervene in families to remove children where, and only where, deemed absolutely necessary for a child’s welfare in the first instance is among the gravest and most serious of its responsibilities. But the responsibility the state takes for that child and how they are cared for next, which has the capacity to shape the rest of their life, is equally as serious.

No parliamentary speech can do true justice to the experiences of the care-experienced young people whom the Committee spoke to during its work on the report, in Leeds, in York and at a roundtable in Parliament. What we heard from them will stay with me for the rest of my life. I extend the sincere thanks of the Committee to every one of them for giving voice to their experience in the report, and I hope they see their voices reflected in the recommendations we have made. Many of the young people I spoke to were curious about how a Select Committee inquiry works, but sceptical of there being any hope that anything they may say could make a difference to the social care system in the UK. I hope

that scepticism may prove unfounded. Given that my hon. Friend the Minister is in his place, I take it that he is willing to listen to the experiences of those young people.

If I had to summarise all that the Committee heard in one sentence, it would be this: the outcomes of children in and around the care system are too often marred by challenge and difficulty, and too often end in tragedy. Children in the care system are regularly left with inadequate mental health support, despite the substantial trauma they may have faced. For some young people, that means that challenging behaviours that may be met with support and love in a family home are often handled by services including the police, which means that the care system can be a driver of criminalisation. The Committee also heard that when young people leave care, they too often face a cliff edge, and are left alone to navigate adult life without suitable support and the enduring social networks that so many of us rely on. That means that some young people fall into destructive behaviours and relationships, which can end in criminalisation, mental health difficulties or isolation.

Those outcomes are troubling in and of themselves, but they can also lead to something far more tragic. The recent review into early deaths of care leavers, which was commissioned by my hon. Friend the Minister, led by Ashley John-Baptiste and Clare Chamberlain and published just after the Committee’s report, demonstrates that point exceptionally starkly. In 2025, the death rate for care leavers aged between 18 and 24 was three to four times higher than that of the general population.

The report offers a window into the lives and experiences of some of those young people who died far sooner than they should have. It sets out how the services that are supposed to support them, both during and after their time in the social care system, could and should have served them better. That is why the Committee is clear that more targeted support must be made available for young people when they are in and once they have left the social care system, and that there should be greater discretion to extend that support past age cut-offs where necessary. The Government must do more to work with young people, local authorities, the police, social work professionals and others to address the root causes of the challenges too often faced by care-experienced children and adults.

Throughout our evidence gathering, the Committee heard that the legal framework around children’s social care must be reformed and strengthened to deliver a reality where children and professionals understand and can advocate for their rights. One of the recommendations we received most often was also one of the simplest. Despite what I know to be the genuine commitment of this and previous Governments to the UN convention on the rights of the child, the convention remains unincorporated into domestic law in England. Bodies including the Children’s Commissioner, UNICEF and ECPAT UK all highlighted in their evidence to the Committee that the incorporation of the convention could have significant and wide-ranging impacts on children’s rights. The Committee recommends its full incorporation.

All children who are in or around the social care system are vulnerable, but those who have disabilities often face extra barriers and challenges. The Committee heard that those difficulties were often exacerbated by

[*Peter Swallow*]

the disjointed and piecemeal legal landscape that comprises the disabled children's social care framework. The framework is complex and difficult to navigate for professionals, let alone families and the young people themselves. For that reason, the Committee is in agreement with the Law Commission that there should be a single and comprehensive piece of statutory guidance on disabled children's social care law, as well as an explicit duty to assess where need is identified.

The Committee also heard that the provision of support following assessment is a postcode lottery. It therefore supports the Law Commission's recommendation to introduce national eligibility criteria to standardise support across local authorities. On top of that, the current working definition of disability in the Children Act 1989 is outdated and must be updated using the language of the Equality Act to be truly inclusive and reflective of the needs of children today.

I remember many of the conversations I had on the doorstep during my general election campaign, but one in particular will stay with me forever. I knocked on the door of a woman who took a good look at me and asked whether I knew what a kinship carer was. I have to confess that at the time I did not. I say that because I suspect that I was not alone in that, despite the fact that kinship care is the most common form of alternative care for children in the UK and across the world. Since the election, I have been incredibly humbled to speak to those delivering kinship care in Bracknell Forest, and I pay tribute to the work of charities such as Kinship that work so hard to represent them. I welcome the work the Law Commission is doing on the legal reform of kinship care, including on clarifying the legal framework. The Committee is looking forward to seeing the outcome of that work.

The children's social care market is fundamentally broken, and across the country children are being placed in unsuitable and in some cases illegal and unregulated accommodation, lacking proper safeguards and scrutiny and away from the vital support networks of their family and friends. At the same time, the cost of residential accommodation is hitting local authorities' already stretched budgets. I welcome the introduction of new powers in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 for Ofsted to issue fines for breaches of the Care Standards Act 2000 and the introduction of regional care co-operatives to drive up standards and end profiteering. The 2026 Act will also require local authorities to allow reasonable contact between children in care and their siblings. Although that is to be welcomed, our report concluded that the Government need to follow implementation closely.

I could say much more about the complaints system and the rights of unaccompanied asylum seekers, all of which is included in the report, but I will just finish by again thanking the Minister, paying tribute to my colleagues on the Committee and thanking the young people who spoke to us during our inquiry.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Chair of the Select Committee and other hon. Members involved for their recommendations. Some of the stories that the hon. Gentleman referred to in setting the scene are

indeed harrowing and incredibly worrying, and yet transparent and physical change can be made. Things can get better.

My question to the Chair of the Select Committee is this. The protection of children is incredibly important. Will the Select Committee, and ultimately the Minister, share their findings and recommendations with us back home in the Northern Ireland Assembly, where this is a devolved matter, so that we can also implement the necessary changes?

**Peter Swallow:** The hon. Member has done me the great honour of promoting me: I am not, in fact, the Chair of the Select Committee. That is my noble Friend Lord Alton in the other place, because we are a Joint Committee of both Houses. Nevertheless, I will pass on the hon. Gentleman's request, and I am sure that the Committee can send a copy of the report to all relevant persons in Northern Ireland. I thank him for his interest.

**Sarah Russell** (Congleton) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for that introduction to the Select Committee's work. I have a particular concern, having met with the National Association of Child Contact Centres this week, about the ability of children in social care to continue to have supervised and appropriate contact with wider family members, particularly in the context of wanting children to see more of their siblings, which everyone would absolutely welcome. My concern is that contact centres have been closing at a huge rate. Is that something that we have tracking information on? Could we look at perhaps using family hubs as locations to resolve that issue?

**Peter Swallow:** My hon. Friend makes a really good point. As I said, I welcome the amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act, which gives some assurance to those at risk of family separation through the care system. However, the proof of the pudding will be in the implementation. As my hon. Friend highlights, there are real practical barriers to that. I hope that the Minister has heard her point and will make sure that it is addressed as we seek to implement that law, which is now rightly on the statute book.

**Jen Craft** (Thurrock) (Lab): I listened with great interest to my hon. Friend's report on the Committee's inquiry. Will he join me in urging the Minister to look more widely at the issue of looked-after children who spend the vast majority of their lives on in-patient wards in paediatric hospitals? A small number of children have spent the majority of their lives living on in-patient wards because they are ill. If they had a traditional nuclear family, they would be at home and cared for by their parents or carers, but because they are looked-after children, it is far too difficult to find suitable placements for them due to their medical needs. That represents a fundamental lack of care for some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Will my hon. Friend support my call for that to be looked at in greater depth?

**Peter Swallow:** My hon. Friend gives me the opportunity to reference another report that the Human Rights Committee undertook, as pre-legislative scrutiny of the Mental Health Act 2025. We very much looked at this issue, and particularly the issue of vulnerable young people being placed on adult mental health wards, and urged changes at that point.

It is absolutely the case that vulnerable people who are care-experienced and are also facing mental health crises face a double vulnerability, which heightens the duty of the state to those individuals even further. Some of the measures we have suggested to reform the rights of disabled children can absolutely play a part in that.

I will also highlight something that I did not get a chance to mention. There are recommendations in the report to strengthen the complaints system, including by making sure that there is no wrong door when a care-experienced young person is making a complaint and that they all have an opt-out right to a legal advocate. That would go some way to making sure that children, particularly those facing a mental health crisis, have an advocate in the way that is also envisaged in the Mental Health Act 2025. I hope that if the Government listen to some of the recommendations in the report, we can go some way to addressing the very real concerns that my hon. Friend has raised.

**Ben Coleman** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Lab): In my constituency, the care-experienced young people who live in Fulham benefit from the fact that the council recognises care-experienced as a protected characteristic. That means that council housing teams and schools and recruitment processes inside Hammersmith and Fulham have to actively check that their decisions do not disadvantage care leavers. They have to track outcomes, and care leavers have the right to recourse. Currently, this only happens if decent councils such as Hammersmith and Fulham choose to do so. Is there an argument for pressing the Government to make care-experienced a protected characteristic in law?

**Peter Swallow:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point; it gives me another opportunity to place on the record again my thanks to everyone who hosted us

in Leeds and York, where we saw some fantastic work being done to support care-experienced young people. I know that that is replicated in councils across the country, including, may I say, in Bracknell Forest, whose children's social care services were recently rated outstanding by Ofsted—I got the local plug in there. I pay tribute to all those working tirelessly to support children in the social care system. The shortcomings I have highlighted today in no way take away from the many people who have dedicated their working careers to supporting the most vulnerable in our society.

My hon. Friend makes a very interesting point. Making care-experienced a protected characteristic in law is something that we explored as part of the inquiry. The responses that we received on that point were mixed. Some felt that that would be singling care-experienced children out in some way, when in reality what they were hoping and asking for was to be treated no differently from anyone else, so that as they enter adult life, they can leave behind the fact that they are care-experienced and go forward with their lives.

Others felt that the proposal would be beneficial. The evidence was mixed. If I remember correctly, I think we settled in the report on not having that as a recommendation—I will correct the record if I am wrong, but I think that was our decision. It was something we considered, though, because it is something that is raised, and it is interesting to hear that it has worked well in my hon. Friend's local area. That shows that sometimes these solutions should be locally based.

1.47 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## BACKBENCH BUSINESS

### Vaccination Rates: England

1.50 pm

**Danny Beales** (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered vaccination rates in England.

It is an honour to serve under your chairship today, Mrs Barker. I am pleased to co-sponsor this debate alongside colleagues from the Health and Social Care Committee who are also here today.

It is very easy, from the vantage point of the 21st century, to forget that about half of children used to die before the age of 15 from infection and disease. Thankfully, we now have vaccines and our routine vaccination schedule providing protection against 15 preventable infections across our lifetimes. For decades, our system was one of the best in the world. The childhood diseases that used to cause so much suffering—measles, polio and others—sound like things from history books. I am sure we all have memories of our early school-based vaccinations and flu jabs in the winter period, and the joy of the discovery of the covid-19 vaccine and the hope it brought of a return to normality. So why have this debate today? Because, despite a seemingly continued record of progress and innovation since 2012, our vaccination system has been sleepwalking into a crisis.

The percentage of eligible people getting the major vaccines has been falling year on year, dropping below the 95% coverage recommended by the World Health Organisation to prevent onward transmission. We have now undoubtedly hit a crisis point. Across England as a whole, the 95% target is not being met for any routine childhood vaccination programme and many adult programmes. For example, in 2024-25, only 83.7% of five-year-olds in England had both doses of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine. In my own constituency, the figure is even lower, at 74%. We are now seeing measles outbreaks in our cities and, shockingly, we have lost our measles elimination status nationally. Tragically, three children died this year from measles—a totally preventable illness.

When questioned about these issues at the Health and Social Care Committee, officials assured us that actions were under way and the tide was turning, but the most recent vaccine stats, released at the end of August, unfortunately show a continued downward trend. The 6-in-1 vaccine dose three coverage is down, the meningitis B dose three coverage is down, and the rotavirus dose two coverage is also down.

This is also a serious equalities issue. Children who grow up unprotected are disproportionately those living in poverty and from ethnic minority communities, and the gap in vaccination status is growing across the country. How has that been allowed to happen in modern Britain? The 2023 vaccination strategy under the last Government was intended to halt the decline, but it is clearly failing, with vaccination rates continuing to fall in the three years since. The WHO target of 95% coverage for all routine vaccination programmes was removed from NHS planning guidance in 2025-26, with the Secretary of State at the time saying,

“If everything is a priority, then nothing is”,

but the choice not to explicitly prioritise vaccinations is incredibly short-sighted.

My colleagues and I on the Health and Social Care Committee held a short inquiry into vaccination rates earlier this year, and we were, to be frank, shocked by the apparent complacency of leading NHS officials. There was no understanding of when it is hoped rates will return to WHO levels, or of whether and when our elimination status will be reached again. There is no target. This debate must be a call to arms to prioritise rebuilding our vaccination system as a matter of utmost urgency and to restore vaccination rates to 95% as soon as possible. Developing an effective vaccination system is not rocket science. Much of the existing strategy is relevant and positive, but we must acknowledge that we are off track.

The debate about what is wrong tends to focus on two key issues: access versus hesitancy. The access argument focuses on systemic, practical barriers that make it harder for people to get vaccinated, such as poor appointment availability, ineffective call and recall systems, lack of data linkage and fragmented health systems. On that argument, recent coverage decline is the sign of a system under strain, rather than a loss of confidence. Most patients and parents do trust vaccines: 85% of people polled by Ipsos in 2025 said that vaccines were safe. But people are busy—moving home, switching GPs—and they do not have endless time to navigate a confusing and increasingly fragmented NHS system.

The gap between MMR 1 and MMR 2 uptake is stark evidence of this failure, with MMR 1 coverage at five years at 91% and MMR 2 coverage at only 83%. The loss of contact is a system failure. Missed appointments should be chased, and families should retain close contact with trusted health professionals to guide them through the childhood vaccination schedule.

**Jen Craft** (Thurrock) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Our mini-inquiry into vaccination rates found that when rates decline or stall, the problem is often lack of trust and inability to access either trusted health professionals or the appointments themselves. Does he agree that improving the availability of vaccinations and advice from trusted health professionals is key to reversing this worrying trend?

**Danny Beales:** I agree. Those issues are clearly intertwined and cannot be separated.

Every contact should count. Shared digital records should identify, at the next GP appointment, pharmacy check-in, health visit or hospital appointment, where vaccines are missing. The system should be enabled, encouraged and paid to act, but this is currently not the case.

The hesitancy argument focuses on the growing prevalence of misinformation around vaccines and falling trust in vaccines and health institutions more broadly. Polling shows that these are not the most important factors numerically, but for the 15% of parents who have concerns, they matter. Evidence from the University of Manchester shows that this is especially important for certain population groups.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jen Craft) just said, the barriers are multifaceted: poor trust and poor access go hand in hand, because the best way to build trust is through regular contact with known, trusted professionals. To maximise vaccine coverage, we need a system that can reliably identify and locate every

child or patient missing their vaccination, repeatedly invite them for appointments and make attending appointments as easy as possible, with clear lines of responsibility when targets are missed. To do that effectively, the vaccination system needs adequate resourcing, accurate data and explicit accountability for meeting targets. Currently, we have none of that.

The Government have been acting. We are piloting health visits and community pharmacy delivery, although roll-out has been slow and it is unclear when national roll-out will be possible. Parents are now given access to their child's records through the NHS app, work is under way to improve the consent process for vaccinating children in school. More is being done, and all of that is positive, but the Select Committee is not convinced that that will be enough to restore our vaccination levels to WHO standards, and neither are officials, who are unable to say whether and when levels will be restored.

Moving forward, what do we need? We need resourcing. Data I have obtained through parliamentary questions shows that in 2023-24 NHS England spent 0.51% of its total budget, or £852 million, on vaccination, down from 0.65%, or £989 million, in 2022-23. The very year the strategy released, funding was cut. We also need to be honest about what improvement will cost. Vaccinating the last 10% or 15% of any population is not the same task as vaccinating the first 80%, because of deprivation, language barriers and housing instability. All families affected by those factors need more contact with clinicians, and GPs simply do not have the resources to do the necessary outreach.

We need to fund not just new medicines and drugs, but their roll-out. We should be using lifetime parental consent to increase uptake of school-age vaccinations, and developing efficient, convenient and ongoing catch-up opportunities in schools, shopping centres, nurseries and family hubs. The school-age immunisation service should be operating a check-and-offer approach at every contact.

For the last 15%, we should be willing to fund what actually works: explicit payments to GPs for outreach programmes for underserved communities, including funding for multiple contact attempts, data cleaning, and non-responder tracking, with incentives linked to real outcomes. We should be training healthcare professionals and community groups to have difficult conversations with confidence and making far better use of our community pharmacy network, which is rooted in local areas.

We also need clear accountability; the buck has to stop somewhere locally and nationally, with clear vaccination leads at both levels. Since the Lansley reforms in 2012 and the subsequent austerity cuts, lines of accountability have become blurred. From April 2027, integrated care boards will have greater responsibility for commissioning vaccination programmes locally, but who is overseeing the national strategy? That remains unclear. Who will require corrective action when that is deemed to be necessary? That is not clear.

The removal of national targets was clearly a step backward for the system. Health officials and clinicians tell us that it is not always clear who is responsible when vaccination rates fall at delivery level in a given neighbourhood. We need a new national action plan that sets out concrete steps that will be taken to return coverage to our WHO targets.

We do not have all the systems in place to tell us reliably who has and has not been vaccinated. Data challenges run right through the system. Vaccines given in maternity settings, community pharmacy settings or school often fail to make their way back to the child's GP surgery because the systems do not talk to each other. How can we expect call-and-recall strategies to work if clinicians do not reliably know which children need to be called?

Lastly, on hesitancy, we need to tackle misinformation, regulate it online and hold the peddlers of harmful and potentially deadly misinformation to account. Social media companies must step up their game in bringing down anti-vax information and providing clear, evidence-based health information instead.

I know much of this is not easy, but that is why it requires genuine commitment and prioritisation. I thank the Minister for listening; will she outline whether the Government accept that the situation is unacceptable and that urgent action is needed, and whether a clear timeline for meeting the WHO targets can and should be agreed by the NHS? If we are to set a timeline, will a clear action plan be outlined to set us on the path back to 95% of all children being vaccinated, so that we can all see a welcome and vital return of our measles elimination status? We must ensure that every child is safe, that people of all ages get the vaccines they need, and that the UK is once again a global leader in vaccinations.

2.1 pm

**Olly Glover** (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Barker, on the second consecutive day.

I thank the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales), who set out his case so well that I fear my contribution will add very little to his. Nevertheless, I want to add my voice in support of this very important topic. The issue of vaccination rates is critical to public health. Even small drops in uptake below the 95% World Health Organisation target can erode the collective benefit of vaccination and create the potential for more outbreaks, such as the measles outbreaks in recent years.

In Oxfordshire, where my constituency is located, we are below the target for all five of the main early years vaccination categories. For four of the five, we are in the 85% to 95% range, and for the pre-school booster for tetanus, diphtheria and polio, we are in the 90% to 95% range. The figures are too low and really need to be improved.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip set out articulately the sort of coherent and integrated NHS and Government plan that we need to tackle this issue; I will focus on the challenges of misinformation and disinformation. We need a proactive NHS and Government plan, because spending on vaccination is a really good illustration of the principle that prevention is better than subsequent treatment and hospitalisation. Improving our vaccination rates is a really good way of relieving pressure on other parts of the health service, and saving money from up-front investment as well as saving lives.

Vaccination is one of many areas of health where individual decisions can cause harm to a wider community. There will be plenty of parents and people who might have concerns about vaccination, whether legitimate or

[Olly Glover]

because of things they have seen on social media, but as far as possible—we had a lot of debate about this during the covid pandemic—we must try to think not just of ourselves and our families, but of our neighbours, friends and work colleagues when making decisions about vaccination.

We know that misinformation and disinformation are both rising, and that has been made easier, alas, by social media. Sustained action will be needed to tackle that. We definitely need tougher regulation of social media companies. We perhaps may need to introduce a verification requirement for any social media account claiming to be that of a medical professional. I would like to see the compulsory labelling and annotation of all posts about vaccination and vaccines with verified scientific facts by the relevant public health or national body.

We need to show leadership as politicians. Perhaps the Government could consider taking the lead on a national campaign in which we all show our support for vaccinations, maybe even sometimes when we take them. As adults, we do not need them quite so often, but we might for certain types of travel—because of my love of walking in the Alps, I have occasionally chosen to have a tick-borne encephalitis vaccine to reduce my risk of infection. We can all do a lot more, be symbols of progress and practise what we preach, as many politicians do for blood donation, for example. Perhaps the new Prime Minister could make one of his famous TikTok videos—although, of course, he has a long list of topics to tackle. We can also engage with social media influencers, who have the credibility on social media that those of us who are hopeless at it lack. They can be ambassadors for vaccination as well.

As the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip said, we need community outreach programmes. We need the health service to be properly supported, because this is yet another thing to add to the long list of things we expect of GPs. We need to go to the people and reach areas and communities that perhaps do not have as much access to or interaction with the health service as others. We need to build dialogue and trust. We need to create easy-to-access and visible vaccination opportunities, including at times of the day convenient for those communities, not just for health and medical organisations.

Only teamwork and determined action can avert us from our current path of falling vaccination rates. If we do not reverse the trend, we will, alas, see more illness and, ultimately, death. I hope to hear from the Minister what we can do to prevent that.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Paula Barker (in the Chair):** Order. I need to impose a time limit of three minutes.

2.5 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Barker, and I thank the Health and Social Care Committee for its work. It is a real privilege to be able to access vaccine programmes. They are the most effective public health interventions, and there are 15 vaccine-preventable infections

against which we can be inoculated. Just this week, the winter flu vaccination programme started; I urge all those watching to take up the opportunity to protect themselves and their community.

In York, take-up is relatively high; however, we are not complacent. A particular challenge for us is the uptake of the second MMR vaccine. I would like to know what the Government are doing to support initiatives to improve that. York's uptake is 86.2% against Yorkshire's 85% and England's average of 83.8%, but the World Health Organisation sets the ambition at 95% because that is the level for herd immunity, which will keep our communities safe. When will that target be reintroduced? It must be reintroduced, because we know that it is effective.

There are lessons we can learn about how to deliver vaccinations more effectively. If we think back to covid, many people—communities, schools and faith and community groups—were involved in getting the message out. We need to be able to communicate better to our communities, in this day of information overload, the importance of vaccines. Vaccine delivery mechanisms also need to be expanded—we have heard many examples today, such as health visitors visiting family hubs for the early years, the schools programme, and the places where people connect, including workplaces and elsewhere.

We need to ensure that we have a comprehensive system. I call on the Minister to look at the technology available to her to identify areas of low take-up. We know it is low in areas of deprivation and where ethnic minority groups, who are more hesitant to take up the vaccine, are concentrated. I ask that we have a proper, comprehensive vaccine passport that can be used by all clinicians who deliver the vaccine programme. I also ask the Minister to look at the issue of hesitancy in the round. We know that a small number of children, parents, carers and adults are hesitant about taking up vaccines. Sometimes that is about information, but sometimes it is simply a fear of needles. Can we look at different delivery mechanisms for vaccines so that people and communities are protected?

2.9 pm

**Dr Danny Chambers** (Winchester) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mrs Barker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales) on securing this important debate.

It seems that every time I open my social media feed or emails, I am being sold some supplement or superfood to boost my immunity. We know that the most effective way of boosting our immunity is vaccination. Vaccines can achieve something even more extraordinary: they can actually eradicate diseases from the face of the earth. During the 20th century alone, we lost hundreds of millions of people to smallpox until it was eradicated in 1977. Rinderpest, a cattle disease, was wiped off the face of the Earth by vaccination—the second disease to be removed from our planet.

Polio is on the brink of eradication. I recently spoke at a Winchester rotary event about polio eradication, organised by two of my constituents, Gillian Russell and Professor Kordo Saeed, both of whom contracted polio when they were children and have lifelong disabilities as a result. It is important to remind everyone that this is about preventing not just deaths, but disability and ill health that can last a lifetime.

We saw the power of vaccination during the covid-19 pandemic. A century earlier, during the 1918 influenza outbreak, which killed 50 million people, there were no flu vaccines or antiviral treatments. There were not even antibiotics to treat the secondary infections. During covid, we initially had only the same blunt tools—isolation and restriction on gatherings—to try to control the disease, but then the vaccine came out. It saved a huge number of lives and gave us a route out of lockdown. We got back to seeing our families, socialising, going back to work, running our businesses and just living our lives.

But there is a danger that vaccines can become a victim of their own success. We have become so unfamiliar with some diseases that we have forgotten how serious they really are. That is why falling childhood vaccination rates should particularly concern us. When politicians like Donald Trump and parties such as Reform platform anti-vaxxers, parents rightly become worried. They all want to do the best for their children, but when dangerous, provocative and downright false information is platformed, the truth is pushed further and further away from those looking for answers.

Centuries ago, hospitals were filled with iron lungs for children with polio, and graveyards were filled with children under five years old who died from entirely preventable diseases. Vaccines have saved more lives than any other medical intervention in history. They are the closest thing that we have to a safety blanket from disease, and we must not allow dangerous and divisive figures online or in politics to drive people away from science and evidence-led healthcare. Science produces solutions, answers and evidence, but politicians and politics can determine whether they are trusted.

2.12 pm

**Ben Coleman** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Barker. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales) and colleagues on the Health and Social Care Committee for securing this important debate.

I am particularly concerned about the fall in childhood vaccination rates and what that means for diseases such as measles, which we had all but eliminated. Before I entered Parliament, I served as a councillor on the North West London integrated care board. Because our figures were so poor, I pushed for North West London NHS to deliver MMR vaccinations through community pharmacies. All families go to pharmacies, so it seemed an obvious thing to do, but I was told that it was simply too complicated. I pushed a bit, and I got two pharmacies into a sort of project. It was a start, but it was nowhere near enough.

When I became a member of the Health and Social Care Committee, then, I was delighted to have the opportunity to pursue the matter. As has been mentioned, when NHS England and UK Health Security Agency officials came before the Committee in February, warning signs were already flashing red. The UK had lost its measles elimination status, London had the lowest childhood vaccination coverage in the country, and children were being hospitalised by a disease that is entirely preventable. It was extraordinary: I was strongly struck by the feeling they gave off of a complete lack of urgency in how they saw the problem. I asked whether

anyone had assessed the cost to the NHS of under-vaccination; the answer was no. I asked why a pharmacy MMR pilot across 43 sites in the north-west had not continued; I was told that it had worked as a campaign, but making it routine was “a different question”. I asked whether that question was even being assessed, and it clearly was not.

Sadly, since the Committee’s inquiry the situation has got worse, not better. As my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip touched on, UKHSA data shows that, as of 17 August, England had recorded 970 laboratory-confirmed measles cases this year alone. Of those, 650 patients were children aged 14 or under, and more than half of all cases were in London.

I am not saying that pharmacies are silver bullets—the Committee also heard arguments about strengthening school-age immunisation services—but it should not be either/or. It should be schools, GPs and pharmacies. We should use every available route to help our children and their families.

Officials told the Committee that they do not want to use pharmacies for childhood vaccination because they still do not know whether the evidence supports it. Surely, Minister, the obvious answer is to get the evidence. What are the Government doing to get the evidence? Will they get it by commissioning a proper evaluation of the use of pharmacies for routine MMR vaccination, with a clear deadline? In short, will the Minister ensure that the NHS stops prevaricating and acts before more children pay the price?

2.15 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): As always, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Barker—you are certainly earning your money, because you were here yesterday and are back again today. I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales) on introducing this debate, and I thank him for setting the scene incredibly well. As the Democratic Unionist party’s spokesperson on health, I am particularly interested in this topic and how it affects those in Northern Ireland. It is good to see the Minister in her place again, and I wish her well in her role. I know that her answers will encourage us—no pressure!

Vaccines have saved millions of lives, protecting our children from serious illnesses and life-changing complications. However, over the last decade, vaccination uptake has declined across the United Kingdom. In 2021, data showed that none of the routine childhood vaccinations had reached the World Health Organisation’s recommended 95% coverage target. That trend reveals a significant risk to public health, which we have already seen with localised outbreaks of measles and whooping cough in areas across the United Kingdom. Research published in August also showed further falls in UK-wide uptake among 12-month-old children of vaccines including pneumococcal conjugate, rotavirus and MenB. If vaccines are not done, it can lead to serious illnesses including pneumonia, meningitis and other life-threatening infections.

I will briefly comment on Northern Ireland, and then I have some asks of the Minister. In Northern Ireland, for children aged 24 months, coverage was above 84% for all reported vaccines. In 2024, the Department of Health warned that a measles outbreak was likely unless urgent action was taken to increase MMR vaccine uptake in Northern Ireland.

[Jim Shannon]

New parents must have access to clear, accurate and reassuring information that addresses uncertainty and maintains confidence in the safety of these vaccines. However, my biggest concern is related to practical barriers, which I want to ask about. Research from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health has emphasised that vaccine confidence remains generally high across the UK, while practical issues in accessing vaccination services are far more likely to contribute to declining uptake. Practical barriers are largely faced by those living in deprived areas, for example, or those living in rural areas who do not have access to transport.

Can the Minister comment on those who are prevented from accessing vaccines by lack of transport? Will she have discussions with the relevant Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive on vaccination uptake in Northern Ireland? We must get the correct messaging across social media and into schools with a non-condescending approach. Vaccination is in all of our best interests, but an educational approach must be the way forward. With great respect, this should not be a stick with which to beat parents who believe they are doing the best for their children.

2.18 pm

**Dr Peter Prinsley** (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Barker. I thank the members of the Health and Social Care Committee for securing this debate.

Doctors like me do not need any convincing about vaccination, but some of our political opponents do not agree. It is incredible to think that a platform was given at last year's Reform conference to someone claiming that vaccinations had caused cancer in the royal family, and that the head of the United States Health Department is a vaccine sceptic. That is quite pernicious and wrong—very, very wrong. Doctors like me do not need convincing. Nor do wives like mine who are Rhesus-negative and whose mothers had multiple miscarriages before the discovery of anti-D injections to prevent baby loss, which was first tested in the famous Sing Sing prison experiments.

When I was young, every county had a school for the deaf, but they had all closed by the time I was a senior ENT surgeon. Why was that? Maternal rubella, or German measles, in pregnancy had been abolished by simply vaccinating all girls at puberty, just like that—brilliant. There was no longer a need for so many schools for the deaf. A landmark 2026 *Lancet* study reported no cervical cancer deaths among women aged 20 to 24 between 2020 and 2024: a dramatic drop from the previous five-year period directly credited to the national human papillomavirus vaccination programme. We will see the same fall in the number of deaths from oropharyngeal throat cancer in boys as a result of HPV vaccination.

We all know that the national response to the pandemic was not a glorious one. There were costly errors in personal protective equipment and test and trace, but the one thing we did get right was vaccination, which saved countless lives. I recall myself vaccinating the first very elderly patients in Great Yarmouth.

Just lately we have seen reports of increased life expectancy in patients with malignant melanoma due to personalised cancer vaccines—brilliant. Doctors like me, unlike some politicians, need no convincing of the crucial importance of vaccination, but there must be a warning here, for we are short of clinical academics who lead medical education and research. We need to incubate the next generation of scientists who will lead these discoveries, for this is the country of Jenner, who discovered vaccination; of Lister, who discovered antiseptics; and of Fleming, who discovered penicillin. We have a great legacy, and we must secure a great future.

2.21 pm

**Lizzi Collinge** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Barker. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales) for securing this important debate.

Over the last 15 years, childhood vaccination rates have fallen across Britain. The uptake of vaccinations for those aged under five is well below the World Health Organisation's 95% target. The paradox of vaccination is that it has become a victim of its own success. It has protected us so effectively for so long that we can forget what it has saved us from. My grandma's friend died from diphtheria at the age of 12. When I worked in public health, I met a lady whose mum had rubella during pregnancy, as a result of which that lady had serious impairments.

Online misinformation is often put forward as the root driver of our falling vaccination rates. It is certainly true that false claims are dangerously contagious, but any explanation that focuses only on anti-vaxxers and the often-monetised pedlars of misinformation and disinformation risks mistaking the loudest part of the problem for the largest part of the problem. Most parents who miss vaccinations are simply exhausted, overstretched or unable to get an appointment that fits around their lives. Anyone who has experienced the first few months of a baby's life knows exactly what it is like, but at any time of life, when clinics require long journeys on public transport or time off work, missed vaccination is more often due to practical barriers than to any ideological opposition. Although vaccination in this country might be free, accessing it is not always without cost.

How do we fix it? First, we need to rebuild health visiting and early years services, as well as rebuilding the links between families and GPs, because vaccination rates are highest when people have access to trusted professionals who they see regularly. I certainly know that health visiting is in a much worse place than when I had my first child. The investment that this Labour Government are putting into our health services should address that, but I was interested to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip talk about the fragmented and confusing pathways, which I think are still there, and about his concrete suggested actions. I would like to hear the Minister's response.

Finally, I do not want us to forget how poverty and deprivation affect vaccination uptake rates. When someone is worried about making the rent, topping up the electric meter or putting food on the table, routine health admin

can fall down the list. All the action we are taking through the child poverty strategy, lifting the two-child benefit limit and free breakfast clubs will have a good impact.

I will use my final seconds to pay tribute to an absolute vaccine legend. Dolly Parton gave \$1 million to the development of the Moderna vaccine. Not only that, she did so much to encourage the uptake of the covid vaccine. I think we will all miss her.

2.24 pm

**Josh Newbury** (Cannock Chase) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under you in the Chair, Mrs Barker. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales) for securing the debate. I am the parent of two children who had plenty of vaccinations. One of them took it in her stride and the other made the biggest drama in the history of medicine, so I can appreciate why so many parents approach this topic with trepidation.

Before this debate, my team and I spoke to staff working in the Cannock North primary care network, which covers seven practices in the most deprived part of my constituency, about their efforts to improve lagging vaccination rates. They told me that rates are quite good for young babies, but they start to fall off as children get older, so they are looking at how they can step in earlier. They have produced plain and simple leaflets that explain the symptoms that a child might experience if they are not vaccinated. Staff will still hear parents say, "Well, I wasn't vaccinated against it," or "I've never even heard of polio," so they are tackling the false assumption that choosing not to vaccinate is safe. They are also looking at a simple sticker system for the red book as a quick visual reminder of the schedule.

Relationships with health practitioners can also be vital, as we have heard. The PCN suggested that trained health visitors could provide early immunisation, which I know is being trialled in other parts of England. The more hurdles we can remove, the better.

That brings me to neighbourhood health centres, where services could be joined up and accessible. I agree with the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB and NHS Property Services that Cannock and Rugeley would both be prime spots for centres. We know that vaccination programmes delivered strictly through GP practices see up to 27% lower uptake in deprived areas, whereas accessible pharmacy, community and neighbourhood programmes narrow that gap to as little as 7%. The lesson I took from speaking to the Cannock North PCN team is that improving vaccination rates does not necessarily require one huge intervention.

Finally, I would like to finish by raising a funding issue with the Minister. Since funding for childhood immunisations moved to the quality and outcomes framework, practices receive the funding only if they meet the 96% target. In a deprived area with a significant Traveller community, like Chads Moor, that can be incredibly difficult. Practices can spend significant time and money contacting families but still find themselves falling well short. For example, a practice could move from 70% to 80% after a huge effort but still receive no funding. I ask the Minister whether QOF could recognise progress in closing health inequalities, rather than just rewarding in-built advantage.

Clearly, the route to achieving high vaccination rates will look a bit different in every community. The practices I have spoken to are doing brilliant work despite funding disadvantages, and I wonder whether we could see outstanding outcomes in Cannock Chase and right across the country if we put rocket boosters under the innovation that we already see right across primary care.

2.26 pm

**Sarah Russell** (Congleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Barker. I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales) and for Worthing West (Dr Cooper) and the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) for securing this debate on such an important issue. I will attempt to talk about three different vaccinations in less than three minutes, but before I do that, I would like to say a huge thank you to Congleton Rotary, which recently raised over £1,000 towards polio vaccination. That is such an important topic.

First, it is completely unacceptable that the UK lost its measles-free status this year. We know that it can be a devastating disease for anyone who is unvaccinated, but it is especially dangerous for babies, young people, pregnant women and anyone with a weakened immune system. We have relied on herd immunity for a very long time, and we no longer have the percentage required to have that.

During the last major outbreak in central and eastern Cheshire, nearly a quarter of the cases were in the under-ones. Our babies depend on the rest of us having vaccinations, because otherwise they are profoundly vulnerable. We must work to get that rate back up again. Only 90% of children in Cheshire East had received both doses of the MMR vaccine by their fifth birthday. We must work harder on that, and I would welcome any progress that the Government can bring, including by addressing the legacy of missed appointments during the covid pandemic.

The second vaccination that I want to talk about is cervical cancer. Every year, 3,300 women are still being diagnosed despite the take-up of the HPV vaccine among younger women, and around 685 women a year are losing their lives to the disease. The recent study mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket (Dr Prinsley) shows that the risk of cervical cancer death before the age of 30 has effectively reduced to zero—the HPV vaccine is amazing.

Our goal as a Government is to eliminate cervical cancer by 2040, which would be fantastic, and we have a 90% target vaccination rate for girls. In Cheshire East, the vaccination rate at the moment is 77.4% of girls but only 72% of boys. For some reason, we do not have a target for boys, but boys are also vulnerable to the equivalent cancers, and they absolutely need and deserve the same protection as girls. Why are we not making sure that they also have these targets?

Lady Garden Foundation research found that over 45% of eligible girls who missed their school HPV vaccination did so because a consent form was not returned. Active parental refusal apparently accounts for just 12% of the failure rate. As a parent, I do not want vaccination to be forced on anybody, of course, but lifetime consent would make life so much easier.

[Sarah Russell]

Why am I being asked every single time? Unless a child's health status has changed, there is really no reason to withdraw vaccination consent. I believe we could make that much easier.

Lastly, Cheshire has so many people in hospital with flu each year, so I remind everybody of the importance of vaccinating children against flu, to protect both them and their elderly relatives over Christmas. I thank the Minister and the Health and Social Care Committee, and I hope we can move this forward.

2.30 pm

**Alex Mayer** (Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Barker.

Over the summer, I had the pleasure of visiting Kingsbury Court surgery to find out about its big push on childhood vaccination. I met Dr Abdullah Khan, who told me that, like others, he was really worried about the return of measles, which he thought created an urgent need for action. He saw the outbreak in Enfield as a real warning shot and talked about the UK losing its WHO measles elimination status.

Dr Khan told me his surgery had decided it needed a new approach—it is fairly similar to what we have heard today—built around confidence and convenience. I was introduced to the senior nurse, Elena Costache, who showed me a display she had made to rebut some of the myths that parents are seeing online. She also explained how staff go online to dispel those myths in the comments made on the surgery's own webpage, doing so respectfully but directly, and always in plain English.

Everything the surgery staff told me was useful and informative, although I have to say that one bit made me feel rather ancient: they said that one issue was that many parents seemed to think that measles, mumps and things like that were from long, long ago. I still have a childhood book called "Alex's mumps book", with lots of fun activities to do while I was a bit under the weather.

Those at the surgery also talked about convenience—staff going into nurseries, children's centres and crèches—about the active outreach they do and about the crucial point of following up again and again on missed appointments. All this is working. They are doing about 140 vaccinations a month and, importantly, over the last year they got their childhood vaccination rate up by 9%, which is fantastic, although they still plan to go further.

One specific issue staff raised with me was keeping up with vaccinations in an area with an awful lot of new build housing. Can the Minister comment on specific measures the Government are taking to ensure that people can stay up to date with their vaccinations during the upheaval of a house move? I also hope she can join me in congratulating Kingsbury Court GP surgery on what I think is a job well done.

2.33 pm

**Sojan Joseph** (Ashford) (Lab): This is an incredibly important and timely debate. The latest UK Health Security Agency data, published on Tuesday, underlined how vaccine rates have continued to decline. It also showed that uptake of the meningitis B booster for children aged two fell slightly last year. I find that especially alarming, given the meningitis outbreak in

Kent earlier this year. There were 21 confirmed cases, tragically including the deaths of two young people. A number of schools across east Kent also recorded confirmed cases, including one in my constituency. I am grateful for the co-ordinated action led by the various agencies. Their swift response helped to ensure that clear public health advice was communicated and that vaccination programmes could be rapidly rolled out.

Although I warmly welcome that action, at the time of the outbreak I joined colleagues from across the House in calling for more to be done. I was therefore pleased that, during the summer, the UKHSA and NHS England introduced a one-off national meningitis B vaccination programme to protect young people at the highest risk before the start of the new academic year, when meningitis B cases typically rise. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation also published a number of recommendations on a routine meningitis B programme for adolescents. Before the summer recess, the Government were considering those recommendations. Will the Minister provide an update on those considerations?

The meningitis outbreak in Kent should serve as a warning of the serious consequences when vaccine-preventable diseases regain ground. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for global tuberculosis, I also point to rising rates of TB in the UK. TB meningitis is one of the most severe forms of TB, particularly in young children. The BCG vaccine protects against TB, particularly serious forms of the infection such as TB meningitis. However, the latest data for the UK shows that, in the first quarter of the year, almost one in five children eligible for the BCG vaccine did not receive it.

Vaccinations remain an important part of preventing severe childhood TB, alongside early diagnosis and treatment. However, the BCG vaccine is more than 100 years old and does not provide reliable protection against pulmonary TB in adults. I therefore stress the need for continued investment in research and development on new, more effective TB vaccines. That is particularly important, given the country's role in global tuberculosis research and development.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket (Dr Prinsley) talked about Reform using its conference stage to talk about an anti-vaccination programme. We have a duty to base our discussions about vaccinations on facts and evidence. As politicians, we have a particular responsibility to promote clear, evidence-based information and to avoid contributing to uncertainty and mistrust.

2.36 pm

**Josh Fenton-Glynn** (Calder Valley) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mrs Barker. I thank my Health and Social Care Committee colleagues for bringing forward this debate.

One thing we learned during the pandemic was just how much we all rely on each other. Vaccines were a huge part of helping us get back to seeing our families and taking part in our communities. We got through that period because we recognised that looking after each other meant looking after ourselves.

At the same time, we saw a growth of misinformation online. Many of us spent more time online during the pandemic and, too often, social media algorithms pushed people towards content that reinforces fear rather than

answers questions. There is a fundamental problem with misinformation, which is that science is evolving and lives in the grey area; it is much easier to be wrong with certainty.

Diseases that once killed and disabled huge swathes of our population have been brought under control because of generations of vaccines. That is something we should never take for granted. Vaccines do not cause autism; they cause healthy children. Yet we are seeing a worrying decline in the uptake of vaccines, which is the reason for this debate.

In England, less than 84% of children have received both doses of the MMR vaccine, well below the 95% target that gives us the best protection. The consequences are not theoretical—we are experiencing them now. The growth of misinformation and the anti-vax movement puts children's lives at risk.

The majority of measles cases since the start of this year—61%—have been in children under 10. Most of those children were unvaccinated. Tragically, two children have died—of a preventable disease for which there is a safe and effective vaccine. That is two families suffering an unimaginable loss.

The irony with vaccines is that the lives saved never make the headlines—the children who do not get sick, the hospital admissions we do not have. The families who never experience that terrible loss will never know that it was vaccines that spared them from it.

At the core of this debate are trust and responsibility. The Government have a responsibility to champion the benefits of vaccines and to set out a clear path to 95%. We have a responsibility to take up those vaccines, but the Government must act. If social media companies do not stop the harmful content we have talked about, we must act to make sure they do.

I once again thank my fellow Health and Social Care Committee members for bringing forward this debate. We need to make sure we have a clear plan and clear action so that we can solve this problem.

2.39 pm

**Alison Bennett** (Mid Sussex) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship this afternoon, Mrs Barker. I commend the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales) on setting out the work that the Health and Social Care Committee has done, and all its members on looking into this vital issue.

Not so long ago, hospitals in this country were filled with rows of iron lungs ventilating children paralysed by polio, and schools were forced to close their doors as measles swept through entire classrooms, leaving some children permanently disabled, and some parents burying their children. We do not see those scenes today, and that is because of one of the single greatest achievements in the history of medicine: vaccination. In 2026, it is easy to forget that and to take for granted a world in which parents do not fear that a common childhood illness might kill their child.

However, we are at risk of forgetting the lessons our grandparents learned the hard way, and the numbers prove it. In England, just 81% of five-year-olds have received their 4-in-1 jab against diseases such as polio and tetanus, down from 89% a decade ago, and only 84% have had both their MMR jabs, down from 88%.

No childhood vaccine in this country now meets the 95% coverage threshold the World Health Organisation tells us we need in order to keep these diseases from spreading—and they are spreading. Over 800 cases of measles have already been confirmed this year, closing in on the total for the whole of last year.

Vaccine take-up is not evenly spread across our country either. In London, MMR coverage is just 72%, but in the south-west it is 83%—an 11 point gap mapped on to deprivation, inequalities and communities that already find it hardest to access the healthcare they need. It is not just children: only 70% of over-65s and 42% of pregnant women received a flu vaccine this past season, both figures well short of where they need to be. Last year gave us one of the worst flu seasons in memory.

As the hon. Member for Ashford (Sojan Joseph) noted, the tragedy we saw with the Kent meningitis outbreak earlier this year led to a change in policy on vaccination for meningitis, and we saw that there was the capacity for authorities to do more and to take action. As a mum to a teen who has been called for a meningitis vaccination this summer, I am hugely grateful for that change in policy. That action tells us something important: that when we make vaccination easier to access, uptake follows, and that this is not a lost cause but a policy failure, and policy failures can be fixed.

There is also a darker force at work, and we must be honest about it. Online medical disinformation is a genuine threat to public health, and it is increasingly being given a platform by people who should know better. Reform has refused to condemn Donald Trump's conspiracy theories linking vaccines to autism. As was noted by the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket (Dr Prinsley), at Reform UK's conference last year a keynote speaker blamed vaccines for cancer in the royal family.

We have seen in the United States exactly where this leads: trusted scientific institutions hollowed out, and the health of a nation put at risk. Doctors and nurses in our own GP surgeries and walk-in centres are now telling us that they are hearing these same conspiracy theories in this country today. We must listen to scientists, not conspiracy theorists, and politicians who lend credibility to dangerous medical falsehoods must be held to account for the harm they cause.

What can we do about it? First, we can invest properly, and for the long term, in our vaccination programmes. This cannot keep being treated as a cost-neutral afterthought. NHS England's strategy exists on paper, but everyone—from clinicians to campaigners—agrees that it lacks the funding and senior leadership to actually turn things around.

Secondly, we can take vaccination to where people already are. Community spaces and the places people trust should be central to how we deliver an ambitious new push for record vaccination rates. That is particularly true among the communities that we too often write off as hard to reach.

Thirdly, we need a serious, funded strategy to fight medical disinformation head on—not one or two well-meaning social media videos, but a real strategy. That means supporting doctors and nurses with the tools and training to engage constructively with vaccine-sceptical patients; investing in public health messaging that works with trusted local voices and online influencers,

[Alison Bennett]

not against them; targeted outreach to the communities where scepticism runs deepest; criminal liability for online influencers and politicians alike who profit from spreading dangerous medical disinformation; and a new verification system so that no one can falsely claim to be a medical professional online.

None of that is about shaming families who have been misled. It is about meeting them where they are, with facts, compassion and a system that makes doing the right thing the easy thing. We owe it to every family who lived through the era of iron lungs and empty classrooms not to let their hard-won progress slip away on our watch. Let us fund vaccination properly, let us take it into every community and let us have the courage to say clearly and without apology that we follow the science, not the conspiracy theories.

2.45 pm

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mrs Barker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales) on securing this important debate.

Why do we vaccinate? As we have heard today, we vaccinate because it prevents illness, it reduces the severity of illnesses that do occur, and it reduces complications. I should declare an interest as a consultant paediatrician in the NHS, as a parent of three children between 11 and 19 and as someone who was a volunteer vaccinator for many months at the local vaccine centre during the covid-19 pandemic.

Vaccines were first identified, or discovered, by Edward Jenner in 1796. He discovered the smallpox vaccine, which eliminated smallpox completely between 1958 and 1977. We have seen that happen with so many diseases. I have a list, but it is so long that I am not sure I have time to read it all out: diphtheria, tetanus, polio, haemophilus influenzae, pertussis, rotavirus, hepatitis B, tuberculosis, flu, respiratory syncytial virus, shingles, human papillomavirus, various strains of meningitis, rubella, mumps, coronavirus—I could go on. There are so many different things to which we now have vaccines that we did not have previously and that have reduced the incidence of death and serious illness in so many people. It is almost impossible to quantify how many lives have been saved.

I want to focus on measles, which several hon. Members have mentioned. My great-uncle Leonard died of measles at the age of 15 months. Pre-vaccine, it was a common condition that killed many people. Thankfully, now it is not—and why? Because of vaccines. Vaccination rates have fallen, however, and we have lost our measles-free status. We need to make sure, as far as possible, that everyone gets the vaccine. The concept of herd immunity means that if some children cannot be vaccinated because of a personal health condition, they will be protected to an extent by the fact of a large proportion of the population having been vaccinated, and by the reduction of that disease within the community in some conditions. If vaccination rates fall, there is a risk to those people, as well as to those who have just decided not to have the vaccine. I would be interested to know how the Minister will focus on measles in particular.

When we were in office, the Conservatives modernised the routine vaccination programme. In 2015, the UK became the first country to offer the Bexsero vaccine against meningitis B, which was given to babies aged eight to 16 weeks, followed by a booster around their first birthday. In 2017, we also switched to the hexavalent six-in-one routine vaccine programme so that babies could be protected against hepatitis B for the first time. Conservative Ministers expanded the HPV vaccination to boys, bringing the UK in line with other developed countries and preventing approximately 30,000 cases of cancer in males. The vaccine taskforce secured seven vaccines for the UK during the coronavirus pandemic, invested over £400 million in scaling up domestic manufacturing and mobilised more than 100,000 volunteers with sites right across the country. We also backed the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine with public funding and agreed a 10-year partnership with Moderna to invest in mRNA research and development. The previous Government supported vaccination in a number of ways; I look forward to hearing from the Minister what her Government will do to support it.

I also want to talk about meningitis B, which is a horrible, rapid disease that affects patients very quickly. It is one of the diseases that is quite frightening to see as a paediatrician because of the speed at which a child goes from being well to being critically ill. We have all heard about putting the glass across the rash to see whether it disappears, but I have watched that rash appear on children with lightning speed. The disease kills, and it leaves many children with severe, lifelong disabilities.

In 2015, the UK was first in the world to bring in a vaccine against meningitis for small children, but last year we saw meningitis B infections in groups of older children and young adults in Kent, Dorset and Reading. There were 21 cases in Kent and two deaths. The Government quickly brought in a local vaccine programme to treat people who might have been at risk, but there was also a stampede for private provision; Boots, Superdrug and other commercial ventures ran out of the vaccine within a few hours.

The Government have decided to bring in a system under which people born between 1 September 2007 and 31 August 2008, and those who are starting university or further education colleges for the first time this year, will be able to get the vaccine. However, the JCVI has suggested that children who have been vaccinated with one dose should be given a booster at age 15. That means those who were born after 1 May 2015, so the Minister has a little while to manage that, but the JCVI has also recommended two doses for adolescents who did not get the first dose. The Government do not seem to have taken up that recommendation yet. Will they do so? When?

A meningitis vaccine has also been brought in for men who have sex with men because, interestingly, it also has a 42% protective rate for gonococcal conditions. There was a record high of 85,000 cases in 2023. The vaccine has helped with those cases, but it would be beneficial to know when the Government will ensure that all our young children have the protection that they need against this frightening disease.

Other things are slipping, too. The flu vaccination is highly effective at reducing seasonal hospital admissions. The WHO recognises that it is the most effective way to

prevent infection and severe outcomes from flu, but coverage among the elderly and at-risk groups has declined in England. I would be interested to hear why the Minister thinks that is, what her research shows and what she is going to do about it.

Respiratory syncytial virus affects not just children, but the elderly. The vaccine is incredibly effective in the elderly; last year, the JCVI recommended its extension to the over-80s. At the time, I asked Ministers whether the vaccine, having been recommended by the JCVI in the early summer, would be ready for last winter. My understanding, from what was said, was that they were going to work at pace. They reassured me that it would happen, but it did not. I believe that the vaccine will be available to older people this winter, but what is the Minister doing to make sure that they are aware of that so that they take it up? It will help to reduce admissions to hospital over the winter and reduce the pressure on A&Es and ambulance services, and it will mean that people are less unwell, which is obviously a good thing.

Many hon. Members have talked about vaccine hesitancy. Polling by Ipsos found that more than two thirds of adults believed that it was

“difficult for the public to spot misleading health information.”

It also found that those in the most deprived areas were more likely to be affected. According to a UK Health Security Agency survey, last year 47% of parents who reported seeing concerning information about vaccines said that they had seen it on social media. As hon. Members have said, those sorts of message, such as the suggestion that cancer in the royal family was caused by vaccines, were platformed by a political party at a conference.

It is important that we give responsible information about vaccines that we know to be true. We do not pretend that there are no risks. There is always a small risk to anything: we take a risk when we get up in the morning and come to work, and we take a risk every time we cross the road. Every aspect of our life contains risk, but we need to be honest with people and explain that the risks of vaccines are tiny and the risks of the disease are potentially much greater. That will mean that people can make informed decisions.

When patients who have not been vaccinated come to clinic—we check with all children whether they have been vaccinated when they come for their first clinical appointment—they have very often refused once and not been asked again. The reason why has not been discussed. No one has asked them why they are worried about the vaccine; it has just been accepted at face value. Very often, when we talk to parents about it, they will then have their children vaccinated. We need to make sure that when unvaccinated children do present to medical services, we take the opportunity to try to get them vaccinated.

I welcome the addition to the relationships, sex and health education curriculum of facts about vaccination and immunisation, but what is happening to provide public information to parents and other adults? It is said that vaccine uptake among ethnic minority groups is markedly lower. Does the Minister understand why? What is she doing to improve it? The Prime Minister has previously attested that Healthwatch is a key factor in engaging marginalised communities, but this Labour Government have placed it on the chopping block in the

Health Bill, which is due back in the House next week. How does the Minister foresee that role being taken up by the patient experience body with which the Government intend to replace it?

From April next year, integrated care boards instead of NHS England will be responsible for vaccinations. I understand that that is part of the Minister's strategic commissioning vision, but will that additional responsibility be met with additional resources? How will the Government ensure that it does not cause further slippage in vaccinations?

Finally, I want to mention the life sciences industry, which is struggling under this Government's tax burden. Now that the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology has been abolished, what will the Minister do to ensure that the industry is given the support that it needs?

Occasionally during my career, a parent of a critically ill child has looked me in the eye, often as the child is being put in an ambulance to an intensive care unit, and said, “If I'd given my child the vaccine, they wouldn't be this ill, would they, Doctor?” There is trauma and grief for those parents, and a regret that is completely unnecessary and can be prevented. It is in the hands of the Minister and of this Government to do what they can to prevent it. I look forward to hearing what the Minister plans to do.

2.56 pm

**The Minister for Public Health and Patient Safety (Dame Diana Johnson):** It is a pleasure to serve under you today, Mrs Barker. I am grateful to the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), and its members for securing this important debate and am grateful to all hon. Members who have spoken this afternoon. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales) for his passionate opening statement. I also welcome the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), back to her place after the reshuffle; I congratulate her on surviving for so long.

I know that Members across the House are very concerned about this issue. I have been struck by the knowledge and expertise around the Chamber this afternoon. Many questions have been posed. If I do not get to every question that Members have asked, I will write to them with an answer.

After clean water, vaccination is the most effective public health intervention for saving lives and promoting good health. It protects individuals, protects families and protects communities. One vaccination can change the whole course of a life for the better or, if it is missed, for the worse. I am very conscious of that as a Hull MP, because in October 1961 we were the first city to mass-vaccinate with the new oral vaccine. When we faced a polio outbreak that threatened the city, over 350,000 people were vaccinated in two weeks. That led to the national roll-out soon afterwards, helping to virtually eliminate the disease nationwide.

Over generations, vaccinations have made diseases that once killed or disabled thousands of children rare and have eradicated smallpox worldwide. Vaccination is central to this Government's wider shift from sickness to prevention. In terms of the diseases we protect against, we deliver at the moment what I still believe is a

[*Dame Diana Johnson*]

world-class vaccination programme, backed by expert advice from the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. But the benefits depend on high uptake, and childhood vaccination rates have moved in the wrong direction.

Falling vaccination rates are a very serious challenge. Despite our programme achieving more than 90% coverage for babies' first doses against diseases such as polio and measles, we are not hitting our targets. There is no single cause and there is no quick fix. We know that some families struggle to get an appointment that works for them or have not received clear, trusted information in a way that works for them. Services also vary across the country. The pandemic put further pressures on the health system and misinformation can add to these problems.

[*SIR DESMOND SWAYNE in the Chair*]

We are therefore acting on four fronts: clearer NHS organisation, more flexible services, better public information and joined-up digital records. I will deal with each in turn, but first I will address targets, as well as funding and delegation to ICBs. Let us be clear: the Government have not dropped vaccination targets. To summarise, our targets are 95% for routine pre-school immunisations and 90% for routine school-age immunisations. Our targets remain in force and are based on standards set by the World Health Organisation. We have simplified the NHS planning guidance to avoid duplication, but we did not lower our ambition. We are also backing targets with better accountability. Coverage of MMR vaccinations for young children will form part of how the performance of NHS ICBs will be assessed as they take on responsibility for vaccination services from April next year.

We have not cut funding for vaccination services. We have confirmed funding for the next three years, giving the NHS certainty as responsibility moves from the NHS regions to ICBs in April 2027. Excluding covid-19 vaccinations, that is a real-terms increase and will help ICBs and vaccination service providers to plan service improvements further ahead.

On delegation, ICBs are best placed to improve vaccination coverage because they understand the needs of their local communities. That matters because the reasons for low coverage vary from place to place. ICBs can shape these services around local needs and barriers, whether that means more convenient appointments or clearer information from trusted sources. This is devolution in action.

I reassure hon. Members that national bodies will continue to set standards, monitor performance and hold the system to account.

**Dr Chambers:** Will the Minister give way?

**Dame Diana Johnson:** I will carry on because I have very limited time, but I am happy to write to the hon. Gentleman or talk to him afterwards. I know there are concerns about the cuts that have been made to ICB running costs. These are planned reductions that relate just to administration, not the funding that will be used to provide frontline vaccination services.

Turning to pre-school access, flexible services are critical. Vaccination rates are lowest in the most deprived communities, so improving uptake means making services easier to use. Pre-school children will continue to receive their vaccinations through their GPs. We have increased the payment to GPs for each routine childhood vaccination from £10.06 to £12.06 and changed the GP incentives to reward improvements where uptake is lowest.

However, we recognise that GP services will not reach every family and are therefore testing vaccinations through health visiting teams, including through 12 pilots across England, four of which are in London. Health visitors have brought vaccines to family homes to ensure that the most vulnerable families are offered these lifesaving interventions. We have also been expanding the use of community pharmacies and are evaluating that. We are looking at supporting targeted local outreach as well. The aim is simple: to reach those who might otherwise miss out.

School-age vaccinations are also a priority. The joint school-aged vaccination programme of work with my Department and the Department for Education is now overseeing actions to improve coverage in schools by resolving local delivery problems. The NHS is also rolling-out new digital technology to make it easier for busy parents to provide consent. It has published revised guidance for schools and the NHS and there are regional support forums to tackle any problems that are present.

We also have the Mavis—manage vaccinations in schools—scheme. That is a new digital system that allows parents to give consent online and helps NHS teams to keep records up to date. By September 2026, it will be used by 72% of school vaccination teams, covering more than 13,800 schools, with further expansion planned for April '27.

Turning next to awareness, most parents want to do the right thing for their children. Our job is to ensure that they can easily find the clear and trustworthy information that they need. That means stronger public campaigns and confident healthcare professionals giving that advice. We think that it could also be provided by schools and better start hubs, as well as trusted local organisations.

We all agree that false claims online can cause huge concern and worry. As a number of hon. Members have said, the actions of politicians have consequences. We all share the responsibility to base our comments on science and evidence. We have seen the damage that misinformation can cause. The entirely discredited and morally repugnant claims linking MMR and autism in the 1990s led to a substantial fall in coverage, so experts now monitor emerging misinformation and respond with accurate information. I hear the calls today for stronger action against social media companies, but we do not want to mistake misinformation for the whole problem. To improve coverage, many families simply need vaccinations to be easier to understand and to access.

I will conclude with the issue of digital and data. We are improving vaccination records. At the moment, information is held in different NHS systems and does not always follow a patient between services. Through new digital systems, we are joining those records together. That will help healthcare professionals to see which vaccinations someone has had, allow the NHS to identify communities where uptake is low and give families

clearer records, reminders and information about where to get vaccinated. Over time, families will also be able to access more of this through the NHS app.

Vaccinations have protected generations from serious disease, and all of us have a vested interest in ensuring that they continue to do so. That means clear accountability, easier access, trusted information and better record keeping. As I have set out, we are acting on each of those fronts. Rebuilding coverage will take sustained effort, but we will monitor progress closely and take further action wherever it is needed.

I note that the House of Lords Childhood Vaccinations Committee is due to report shortly. As the new Minister in this post, I will be looking very closely at the recommendations that come out of that report. I have had the chance to look at the letters that the Health and Social Care Committee wrote to one of my predecessors, and I can assure all hon. Members in the room today that I will go back to the Department and redouble my efforts to ensure that we see the increase that we all want in the number of vaccinations, particularly for children. I thank all hon. Members for their contributions this afternoon.

3.8 pm

**Danny Beales:** Thank you, Sir Desmond, for chairing the end of the debate, if not the beginning. I thank the Minister for her response. I and the rest of the Committee welcome her commitment to get back to us and to work with us. I just politely point out that the very good measures that she has outlined are measures that the Government and the strategy have been undertaking for many years, and we have still seen the decline continue. I encourage her to go back to her officials and press them for a timeline to regain elimination status and reach the WHO targets. If they are unwilling to put a target on that, I would suggest that perhaps they are not confident in the measures that they have so far been taking to achieve them, but I thank the Minister for her commitment to work with us.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered vaccination rates in England.

## Global Biodiversity and Ecosystems: National Security

3.10 pm

**Adrian Ramsay** (Waveney Valley) (Green): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security, published in January 2026.

It is fantastic to see how many Members from across the House are here for this fundamental debate. Climate breakdown and nature security are the most immediate and severe national security threats of our age. The fundamentals of human existence—food, water, health—all depend on healthy, stable ecosystems.

If anyone still thinks that environmental breakdown is a distant concern, this year should dispel that notion. We have experienced the hottest year on record so far, with prolonged drought, extreme temperatures and wildfires, and we are likely to have the highest number of heat-related deaths ever, forcing Ministers to evaluate where our national resilience is falling short. As the National Heat Risk Commission report published today shows, the country's leadership have failed to implement measures to protect lives from temperature rises that have been expected for more than a decade. The Climate Change Committee has estimated that temperatures will increase further in the near term. Extremes are projected to become the new normal, and annual heat-related deaths may reach 10,000.

This year's super El Niño will cause further chaos to seasonal weather systems. The breakdown not only is an immediate risk to life, but is rapidly destabilising our natural systems. We talk about tipping points, and there could be no clearer demonstration than the glacial collapse in the Himalayas last month, which unleashed a catastrophic torrent into the river system. Thousands were tragically killed or remain missing. Since then, glaciers vulnerable to collapse are being mapped out, with millions potentially impacted by violent shifts in landscape and the disastrous loss of vital fresh water supplies.

Today, we are debating a crucial national security assessment report that warns of the rapid depletion of global biodiversity, the collapse of critical ecosystems and the dismantling of major global food systems. The origins of the report are unclear. Indeed, the only document made public is a redacted summary of the assessment, published after a freedom of information request from Green Alliance. What we do know is that the Joint Intelligence Committee co-ordinated that landmark work to measure the impact of global biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse on our national security. That Committee is the authority on profiling risks to the country and our society—a group not of environmental campaigners, but of top-ranking specialists and experts from across the intelligence community, responsible for monitoring and providing early warning of threats to Britain.

Not only have the Government refused to publish the full version of the report, despite requests from Members of Parliament across parties and from the Environmental Audit Committee—of which, I declare, I am a member—but expert witnesses giving testimony before the Committee, including Lieutenant General Richard Nugee and Tony Juniper, the chair of Natural England, have noted

[*Adrian Ramsay*]

that the report has not had the official Government response that one would expect for any seminal piece of work, let alone such a stark warning from our intelligence authorities.

However, we do have a redacted version of the document, and that is stark enough. The assessment conclusively states that global ecosystem collapse and the loss of biodiversity threaten national security, human life and economic prosperity. The assessment presents a world where cascading risks from climate breakdown lead to crop failures, water scarcity, floods and novel diseases. That would mean billions of people facing likely food shortages, inflation, public health risks, supply chain disruption, loss of livelihoods, mass displacement and conflict.

**Ian Roome** (North Devon) (LD): A record hot summer has spread bluetongue disease among animals across my constituency at record rates, doing enormous damage to farming across the west country. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the most alarming findings in the report is just how exposed the UK is to food insecurity?

**Adrian Ramsay:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Member. I will talk about food security later in my speech, but he is absolutely right to draw that point to our attention.

On the scale of the risks that we face, if this is not one of the gravest prevailing national security risks of our time, I do not know what is. Without systemic change at national and international level, we are on a pathway to the total collapse of globally critical ecosystems. The trajectory of the collapse means that it will come as soon as 2030 for some and 2050 for others.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Biodiversity loss in my own constituency has happened with Thames Water dumping sewage into the River Brent. I am glad that the clean water Bill will bring an end to that, but does the hon. Member agree that we need greater assurance that vital ecosystems that have been ravaged will be built back?

**Adrian Ramsay:** I absolutely agree that the impact is seen at a local level in all of our communities and that nature restoration is fundamental. We have to step up the pace of that, as I will go on to set out further.

The Joint Intelligence Committee has identified several degrading ecosystems, the destruction of which could be so severe that our own national security and prosperity will be in peril. Those include the tropical rainforests of the Amazon and the Congo Basin, the major river systems of the Himalayas, the richly productive and abundant south-east Asian coral reefs, the aquatic nurseries of the mangrove habitats and the stabilising force of the Arctic boreal forests.

That is why our national security cannot only be understood within our own borders. We cannot build a secure island in an insecure world. We must keep to our international obligations, such as the actions detailed in the global biodiversity framework to be reviewed next month at COP17. We can also no longer obfuscate on

contributing to the Tropical Forest Forever Facility investment fund that the UK so proudly helped to set up.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Adrian Ramsay:** I give way to the hon. Member for Stirling and Strathallan (Chris Kane).

**Chris Kane** (Stirling and Strathallan) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member. As a former journalist, I am acutely aware of the need to communicate the risks clearly, as do the many hundreds of my constituents who got in touch with me about this. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I highlight that the need to share knowledge and best practice within the devolved nations of the United Kingdom is incredibly important. Although we need to look at this as a worldwide endeavour, does the hon. Member agree that the way in which the devolved nations also share best practice and knowledge is important? If we do not get it right as the UK as a whole, we are already getting off on the wrong foot for getting it right across the world.

**Adrian Ramsay:** I agree that on nature, as on climate, leadership starts at home. The UK has a huge leadership role to play. That, of course, has to apply to devolved Government, regional government and local government. We need to make sure that governments at all levels are properly resourced, both for nature recovery and for climate resilience plans. The data that I have recently commissioned work on, and will be releasing soon, shows that we do not have the level of local resilience plans that are needed on this issue.

I think the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Jonathan Davies) also wished to come in on the issue of the Tropical Forest Forever Facility.

**Jonathan Davies** (Mid Derbyshire) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for taking the intervention. Is he aware that the Government have announced this morning a £400 million loan to the Tropical Forest Forever Facility, and will he join me in welcoming that investment?

**Adrian Ramsay:** Absolutely. I welcome positive action wherever it happens. I have no problem at all in welcoming positive steps from the Government. I want to see more of them. I welcome the Minister, who is my constituency neighbour, to her place and look forward to her response to this debate. I want to be a constructive voice in this debate, and I very much welcome that news.

To some extent, countries with more resources like the UK can insulate citizens from the worst effects. Countries that are least able and most exposed to risks may not be able to do so, or to protect their communities from the full force of the impacts, which range from mass displacements to famine. For some of the most vulnerable countries, especially in the global south, water scarcity means famine, an impact on energy supplies and is likely to lead to the displacement and deaths of millions of people. Such instability is intensified further by competition for scarce resources and worsens cascading external risks to our own domestic national security.

**Catherine Fookes** (Monmouthshire) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for raising the big importance of the Joint Intelligence Committee report and shedding light on it. Does he agree that citizens must be brought up to

speed on what they are facing with climate change? Does he agree that we must have a televised national emergency briefing across the UK?

**Adrian Ramsay:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point, and I completely agree. Like many Members in this Chamber, I signed the early-day motion calling for a national screening of the people's emergency briefing. I know that a lot of Members will have hosted or attended screenings in their constituencies, as I have done. I have more coming up in my constituency in the coming weeks. It is incredibly powerful, even more powerful than the showing in November, because we can see how people are responding to that evidence. Of course, we need to look at the solutions as well as the problems, but I absolutely echo that call. I am interested in the Minister's comments on the call for a national screening, so that we can be really clear on the scale of this challenge, which sadly does not get the same national profile as it did a few years ago. We need to increase that profile again.

**Anna Dixon (Shipley) (Lab):** I was with the hon. Gentleman at the national emergency briefing, and like him I have many constituents to whom I am grateful for organising local screenings. Does he agree that climate change is not only an emergency, but a public health emergency? That is clear not only from the heat deaths in the UK, but the global impact on public health of water scarcity and the spread of malaria to new regions. Does he also agree that we should continue to support the likes of the World Health Organisation in efforts to tackle what is both a climate and public health emergency?

**Adrian Ramsay:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right: this is a public health issue. Organisations such as the World Health Organisation are clear on that, and it is clear from Natural England's oral evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee yesterday. It is clear not only that there will be risks to public health if action is not taken but that nature as national security infrastructure can help with positive health outcomes, and we really need to embrace that as a country.

Nature is a foundational element of national security, and nature depletion, biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate breakdown are not merely environmental problems. Collectively, they will lead to the ruin of critical systems on which lives and livelihoods depend. We are no longer confronted by individual isolated incidents, events or extinctions. What lies ahead is whole-system collapse. As nature provides essential services that protect people, food, water and the economy, it is infrastructure—our most critical infrastructure—and should be treated as such.

**James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab):** The Labour rural research group has just done a report on the future of the rural economy. One chapter looked at nature markets, which are going to be really important for rural economies because of how we should think about and value nature. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that for nature markets to work and evolve as quickly as is required, we need the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Government to put in place a clearer framework so that people know how they can invest in nature and biodiversity in the UK?

**Adrian Ramsay:** Like the hon. Gentleman, I represent a rural constituency, Waveney Valley in East Anglia, where I have done a lot to support and promote local solutions, including natural flood management landscape-scale projects to re-naturalise rivers, which brings significant environmental benefits. I know that the wildlife trusts and others are looking at things such as nature markets as part of the answer to that. I do not think that market forces are going to be anything like the majority of the solution to this problem. We would be kidding ourselves if we thought that was the case, but they could be part of the answer, as long as we are clear that the Government are setting out the direction and scale of ambition that is needed and the public funding goes in to make that possible. Crucially, companies must not be allowed to get away with trashing crucial ancient environments in one area by funding them in another. We need to be very careful about how we use those mechanisms in the right way. They could potentially be used as part of a wider mix.

**Manuela Perteghella (Stratford-on-Avon) (LD):** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if we are serious about tackling global biodiversity loss, we must ensure that commodities such as soya and palm oil entering the UK supply chain are not linked to deforestation and that UK trade and finance are not contributing to ecosystem destruction overseas?

**Adrian Ramsay:** I thank the hon. Lady for making that point. She is absolutely right that to protect crucial ecosystems internationally, our trade has to be fair and sustainable and that has to be embedded into farming policy. I am sure the Minister will pick up on that point as well.

Landscapes where ecosystems are compromised are more prone to natural disasters, such as drought, wildfires and flash floods. I say natural disasters, but those are often the results of decades of destructive policies and practices. Natural systems that reduce exposure to climate hazards are therefore part of our national resilience. We need to invest in adaptation now. Sustainable land management, for example, or harvesting and conserving water supplies, has become absolutely essential. The Climate Change Committee's 2026 assessment makes the wider point clearly:

"Although climate risks are intensifying, the resulting damages are not inevitable. Proven and cost-effective adaptation measures are available for immediate deployment... Their implementation will be critical to protecting lives, infrastructure, and economic prosperity".

**Charlie Maynard (Witney) (LD):** I thank the hon. Member for his speech. Around Witney, 200 farmers are implementing a landscape recovery scheme. Only three such schemes have been implemented in the country. That one is on the Evenlode. Would it be helpful if the Minister said when the Government are going to bring forward the third round of landscape recovery schemes? We urgently need to be moving faster.

**Adrian Ramsay:** I absolutely agree. That is a strong example of one of the main points I want to make. The Minister will point to a number of welcome measures, but the question is whether the scale and pace of those measures are commensurate with the challenge. At the moment, they are a long way from being so. The funding

[Adrian Ramsay]

that needs to be put in place for landscape recovery and the sustainable farming incentive is crucial. Farmers say to me all the time that they will get behind this as long as they can see a long-term funding framework for them to do so. One farmer in Suffolk said to me that he built a pond, which was crucial for natural flood management, in spite of the fact that it actually reduced his farm's income. Most farmers are not going to be in a position to do that. That has to change.

**Mr Jonathan Brash** (Hartlepool) (Lab): One of the other recommendations in the report was ensuring that at least 60% of food consumed in the UK is produced in the UK. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the only way we will ensure that is by protecting our farmers from the changes we are seeing in our climate?

**Adrian Ramsay:** Yes, that is crucial. With all the shocks that farmers are facing, we have seen that more protection and support are needed. The ambition needs to be a lot higher than 60% if we are to be resilient to the scale of geopolitical and environmental challenges that the world will be facing.

We should begin to plan and fund natural infrastructure with the same seriousness as engineered infrastructure. The assessment makes it clear that there is still a chance for major interventions to slow the trend, protect communities and restore national security, but only if we act now—in this Parliament—and at the scale that the crisis demands.

**Edward Morello** (West Dorset) (LD): The hon. Gentleman is being extremely generous with his time. The Brit Valley Project in West Dorset is bringing together 43 landowners and will improve biodiversity over 4,000 acres. Every time I speak to community groups—I am sure other Members have examples of this—they want to see faster action. Does he share my frustration that politicians nationally and internationally are using the climate crisis and ignoring the science for their own political ends?

**Adrian Ramsay:** Yes, of course I share that frustration. I am pleased to see many Members, from lots of parties, in the Chamber for this debate. We need to increase those numbers and rebuild the national consensus we had on climate. I hope we can have such a consensus on nature restoration and climate adaptation. We all need to tackle the myths and make this debate less fractious and more about bringing people together than driving culture-war wedges. We can do that with how we put forward the solutions that are needed.

Nowhere in this debate are the threats clearer than with regard to food security. This year, water scarcity and drought threaten food production. As all of us representing rural constituencies will be aware, the UK's agricultural sector has suffered three of the five worst harvests in the past decade, and this year will almost certainly add to that record.

**Blake Stephenson** (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Adrian Ramsay:** I will. I am being generous with interventions, which will mean we wait longer before we get to more speeches, but I trust that those intervening are conscious of that.

**Blake Stephenson:** The hon. Gentleman is being extremely generous, and I thank him for that. On food security, like many hon. Members with rural constituencies, I met farmers over the summer. Many told me that they want to build their own reservoirs and extract water dynamically from rivers so they can use that water when it is needed. Does he agree that that is a very simple regulatory change that the Government could make, which would support our farmers in adapting to climate change challenges?

**Adrian Ramsay:** I agree with the hon. Member; that is something that farmers in my constituency have raised with me frequently. There must be solutions to the growing problem of far too little water at some times of the year and far too much water at other times. The solution he outlines is part of how we seriously step up our water management work.

The UK imports around 40% of its food from overseas. Our over-reliance on global markets for food and fertiliser exposes the UK to supply shocks that could make the cost of living crisis much worse. Food security is not simply about producing more food; it is about the resilience of the entire system of agricultural production, including soils, water, fertiliser, feeds, distribution, international markets and the natural systems upon which they all depend. We also depend on international food markets, global supply chains and a stable international system, so protecting critical systems abroad is not simply an act of environmental justice; it is an investment in our own food security. [Interruption.] I hear you, Sir Desmond, but I have been very generous in the number of interventions I have taken. Had I not been so, there would be a much longer list of speeches for later, so I will persist for now.

There is still hope. The Joint Intelligence Committee assessment does not simply describe the threat; it identifies remedies, as it recognises that nature recovery strengthens resilience. Nature restoration and reducing human pressures on nature are both essential. We need to approach nature not as an environmental policy sitting outside national security policy, but as delivering national security benefits and integrated into all areas of policy.

The Government have levers to begin this wide-scale transformation, including fully funding the national tree plan; expanding the sustainable farming incentive; investing in natural flood management schemes such as river renaturalisation and wetland restoration; regenerating soil health to boost resilience for food production; restoring rivers and wetlands to rehabilitate freshwater habitat, flood protection and drought resilience; restoring peatlands for carbon storage and natural flood management; establishing more broadleaf woodland to enhance habitat for biodiversity and landscape-scale resilience; and converting to nature-friendly and climate-resilient farming. All those measures will contribute to maintaining the ecological functions on which we depend.

We need a stronger institutional approach to treating critical natural systems as national infrastructure and to establishing mechanisms to strengthen resilience and adaptation. That means recognising that healthy, natural systems are themselves a form of critical infrastructure.

On the question of transparency, Parliament should have full, unredacted access to the national security assessment as a matter of urgency, to scrutinise the evidence and ensure that our response as a nation is commensurate with the threats. If the Government want the public to become more resilient, the public must be trusted with the facts.

Historians will write about our decisions and future generations will judge us for them. They will recount how we knowingly gambled with global stability, the health of the natural world and the safety of human life and called it a growth agenda. As nature decline is a top-tier threat against the economy, weakening statutory protections and falling short of international obligations directly harms our economy and risks future prosperity. There is a temptation in politics to address environmental policy as an optional extra. The Government no longer have the luxury of time, and it would be a dereliction of duty by everyone in the House to disregard these warnings.

We need a Minister responsible for co-ordinating resilience to move from a managed decline approach to proactively investing in safeguarding for the future, because this is a cross-Government issue that needs to be addressed at scale. The Prime Minister has created a No. 10 for the north, but we need a No. 10 for the future, in the form of a dedicated climate protection unit in the Cabinet Office to drive the scale and pace of work required to restore nature and protect the public. Nature security is national security, and protecting the natural foundations of our country and our planet is ultimately protecting the security of life itself.

**Sir Desmond Swayne (in the Chair):** There will be a formal two-minute time limit on speeches.

3.33 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Your Party): In two minutes, I will do my best, Sir Desmond.

I am proud to represent a very small urban area of Britain in which, over the years, we have managed to increase the number of parks and open spaces. Our council takes an assertive approach in encouraging school gardens and promoting an understanding among children of the need for biodiversity. If we are to win the debate about biodiversity, it will be by convincing people who live in urban areas, who often sadly have very little interaction with the natural world, and where children are brought up without any understanding of the natural world, gardens or growing anything.

A couple of weeks ago, I was talking to some children about hearing the cuckoo. Very sadly, none of them knew what a cuckoo was or had ever heard of one. I grew up in a country area where we had a competition over who heard the first cuckoo in spring. It is that sort of change in understanding that we have to bring about if we are to win this debate on biodiversity and sustainability on our planet.

The Government are pledged to the 30by30 target for the oceans. That is fine, and I absolutely agree with it, but the problem with delineating figures like that is that it does not tackle the problem of river pollution going into the seas and the dangerous chemicals that go with it, which do not disappear but instead remain forever. Designating part of an ocean as a marine protection zone does not protect the entirety of the ocean; all it does is designate that area. We have to address the wider

issue, which is the pollution emanating from our towns, cities and industries into our rivers and the water companies that do not deal with it.

I have 13 seconds left, so I will simply say this: it is great that the House has come back to this issue and that so many Members want to speak today. We are beginning to reverse the downward trend in the environment debate in favour of a debate on real sustainability.

3.35 pm

**Mr Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Desmond. I congratulate the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) on securing this debate. Today is an incredibly important opportunity to highlight the national security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security, in which Government intelligence authorities spell out a clear warning: environmental degradation is an existential threat to the UK's national security.

I entirely support the Government's commitment to ensuring that every penny of international aid is well directed, but in the context of General Nugee's assessment that global biodiversity loss creates a national security risk here, we have to question whether the cuts to international climate finance and international aid can be justified any more. The report spells out the link between degradation overseas and the impact here. The assessment lays out the consequences: food insecurity, economic insecurity, increased migration and refugees, increased interstate competition, conflict and geopolitical instability, all of which will threaten us here at home. Experts told the Environmental Audit Committee that this means we must intervene internationally to halt and reverse environmental degradation.

I will conclude by saying three things to the minister. First, what specific actions have the Government taken since this assessment was completed? Secondly, I welcome the fact that the Government have joined other countries in investing in the Tropical Forest Forever Facility; it is absolutely fundamental to protecting us here at home. Thirdly, will the Minister consider bringing forward the fourth national adaptation programme? NAP3, published by the previous Government in 2023, was deemed ineffective by the Climate Change Committee. NAP4 is not due until 2028, but can we afford to wait two more years before we have an adequate plan?

3.37 pm

**Dr Ellie Chowns** (North Herefordshire) (Green): We have seen just recently what ecosystem collapse looks like: collapsing glaciers in the Himalayas and horrific loss of life on Nepal-Tibet border. We see what it looks like in the UK: the hottest ever summer and the worst ever arable harvest. Things are only going to get worse. This is clearly an issue of national security, and the security services themselves are raising the alarm, not just the environmentalists. We have to change course. Farmers in my constituency of North Herefordshire see this on a daily basis. We have to change the conversation about national security and recognise that it is not just about investment in weaponry and conflict, but about acknowledging the true, existential risk posed by climate change and ecosystem collapse, both in UK and across the world, as highlighted in this report.

[Dr Ellie Chowns]

It is disappointing that this short report had to be dragged out of the Government, kicking and screaming, and published only after a huge amount of pressure. Where is the evidence base underlying it? What are the Government afraid to share with us? Will the Government publish the full report and the evidence base that underlies it? If they will not, why not? Will they recognise that ecosystems are critical national infrastructure and have to be addressed as such? To echo a point made by the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins), will the Government recognise that we cannot wait another few years for the national adaptation plan, given today's announcement from the World Meteorological Organisation that climate change is supercharging natural phenomena such as El Niño, which will lead to even worse effects in the UK and globally than we saw this summer? Nature security is national security.

3.40 pm

**Samantha Dixon** (Chester North and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Desmond. I congratulate the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) on securing this important debate.

Among G7 nations, the UK has the lowest remaining levels of biodiversity, which reduces our environment's ability to support our society. However, it is possible to combat biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse. The UK is privileged to be home to many world-leading zoos and conservation organisations—including, in my constituency, the wonderful and world-renowned Chester zoo—which have the expertise and experience in species conservation and habitat restoration to propel large-scale ecological recovery projects. I was pleased to learn of Chester zoo's programme to reintroduce more than 100,000 critically endangered greater Bermuda land snails to the wild, saving the species from extinction, after a small surviving population was discovered in an air conditioning unit.

The efforts of such conservationists are essential to enriching ecosystems across the UK and the world, and we must strive to support them. Does the Minister agree that supporting our world-leading conservation sector is vital to ensure the UK's long-term security and climate resilience?

3.41 pm

**Dr Danny Chambers** (Winchester) (LD): It has been well pointed out that biodiversity is not just a nice thing to have. As sad as it is to see species go extinct and to live in a less rich natural world, biodiversity is vital to our food security. In particular, pollinators can affect crop failure, and it is well documented that the number of insects and pollinators has been declining in the UK and around the world over the last few years.

In my limited time, I will highlight one reason for that, which I would like the Government to work with us on: the availability of pet flea and tick treatments over the counter in supermarkets. Some of those products, including fipronil and imidacloprid, are banned from agricultural use because they are considered to be too dangerous to the environment, yet they are available without a prescription or a check of the need for them. They are often used without any clinical need, so people

regularly treat animals that do not need treatment with an inappropriate product. These products are being detected in waterways and chalk streams. They damage the entire ecosystem, especially insects and the salmon that live in chalk streams.

I have pressed the Government on this matter before, and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate is looking at it. This debate is about biodiversity. Allowing people to purchase in a supermarket products that are banned from agricultural use seems completely irresponsible and needs to be stopped.

3.43 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Desmond. The national emergency, coupled with the national security assessment, makes it absolutely clear that the political landscape has to change locally, nationally and internationally. We need to change the geopolitical processes and fora through which these issues are discussed and acted on. Their insufficiency in the face of the emergency of our time dictates that we do that. Every conversation, policy and action must be oriented towards saving our planet.

The scale and pace of collapse mean that we have no choice, but we do have an opportunity if we can pull our country and our communities together and focus on our consumption—we consume the equivalent of 1.6 planets. We must also pull the nations together. We all live on this fragile planet, which is disintegrating before our eyes. This is an opportunity to reset the clock and get global and environmental stability. All nations much work together to save planet Earth. We are already seeing how intolerable it is, not least in the global south. It is coming our way too, so we cannot prevaricate, as we have over decades in the political space. We must now convene and act to stop the multifaceted risks we are seeing before our eyes, ensure that we stick to the Paris climate commitments and move faster. The disintegration and collapse of this planet is getting out of control. Will the Minister convene her colleagues for a new opportunity for geopolitical stability and, hopefully, save our planet?

3.45 pm

**Dr Roz Savage** (South Cotswolds) (LD): The threat is real. The assessment makes three judgments with high confidence: that global ecosystem collapse threatens UK national security and prosperity, that every critical ecosystem on earth is on a pathway to collapse and that those ecosystems include those that underpin global food production. Yet the accountability is non-existent. The assessment does not live within the climate change risk assessment, so no Minister has a legal duty to do anything about it. Under the previous national risk assessment, the Government named an owner for each of the 61 identified risks, but this one has none. Instead, everything the Government have offered in response to the national security assessment is discretionary.

The gaping hole in ownership is matched by one in funding. The Government's own assessment places the annual value of ecosystem services to the UK at £87 billion, yet for every £100 of annual value that nature provides to us, public biodiversity spending is barely £1.20. We would not fund railways, hospitals or defence in this way. The choice is not between spending money on nature or

saving money by ignoring the assessment, but between investing in resilience for our grandchildren or passing the considerable cost down to them when the consequences manifest. Yet it feels as if ignoring it is precisely what the Government intend to do. The report was published on the final day of a freedom of information internal review, after an initial refusal. It was pulled from a launch event. We still do not have the unredacted version.

I have three asks of the Minister. Who in Government owns this risk? When will the Government publish a cross-Government action plan in response to it? Will Ministers reconsider publication of the full assessment?

3.47 pm

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) on securing the debate.

Nature is screaming at us. I spoke to farmers last week who told me just how alarmed they are at the situation. We have seen the wildfires, the droughts, the suffering of disease and the rupturing of glaciers, but as a society we are guilty of ignoring the environmental degradation around us. We live in the belief that the environment can somehow absorb these changes. I think it was 60 years ago that James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis came up with the Gaia theory. Most of us realise that the fact that we are losing species is contributing to the breakdown of our ecosystems. If it was an economic supply chain, we would be acting immediately.

Locally, about the equivalent of an Olympic-sized swimming pool of construction waste is dumped into Whitnash Brook every day. We cannot allow this kind of degradation to continue. As Chair of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, I know that raising the matter of general resilience is crucial, and I look forward to the report from the National Resilience Committee in the Lords later this year.

The report produced by the Joint Intelligence Committee is significant. I believe it is as significant as the Stern report 20 years ago—it is a stand-out piece of work. It is critical that we listen and act for our environment, our economy, our food security and our health. Environmental resilience guarantees human resilience, and we must ensure that we restore and preserve our planet.

3.49 pm

**Brian Mathew** (Melksham and Devizes) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Desmond. I thank the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) for proposing this important debate.

This year, in the midst of unnatural heatwaves and wildfires, I have so far attended five screenings across my constituency of the film on the national emergency briefing. It was heartening—but, at the same time, concerning—to see so many people of all ages coming together to agree on one thing: that something needs to be done about the environment and the impending disaster we are staring down. Those honest and open conversations are partly why I am so concerned that the Government have so far refused to publish in full the national security assessment. The public and Parliament deserve to see the full picture, especially on an issue with such significant implications for national security.

Over the summer I camped on the south coast, in Dorset, and it certainly felt and looked more like a scene out of Africa than the damp summer holidays I remember from my youth, but that is not something to celebrate. As the national emergency briefing makes clear, a halt to the gulf stream could lead to perishingly cold winters, as well as stifling summers. Elsewhere in the world, life itself may become intolerable, leading to many more climate refugees seeking to come to our shores.

The recent tragic events in Nepal resulting from climate-driven glacial collapse emphasise the consequences of inaction. We in the north, who invented the industrial revolution, which directly led to CO<sub>2</sub> increases in the atmosphere, have a duty to find and implement solutions for the future of human—and, indeed, all—life on this beautiful planet Earth. Those solutions should not be seen as costs, but instead as the best investments that we and the whole world can profit from.

3.51 pm

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent West) (Lab): Sir Desmond, imagine that the top brains in the country's security and intelligence community produced a report that told you how to save the world. You would want to see it, right? Well, the report we are discussing is not about how to save the world; it is about what happens if we do not. It is a sober assessment of the risks that global biodiversity loss and the consequent ecosystem collapse pose to our human security.

That is why we were never meant to see the report: the previous Administration considered that it was just too alarming. Economic insecurity will become more likely. Migration will rise as development gains reverse. Serious organised crime will look to exploit and gain control over scarce resources. Pandemic risks will increase. Conflict and military escalation will become more likely. The nuclear threat will rise as clashes between nuclear powers become more frequent. Those are the cold assessments of the Joint Intelligence Committee.

The Government were right to think that those assessments might scare people—they scare me—but they were wrong to think that they could hide them from the public. They were even more wrong to fail to make the case by setting out to the public the incredibly good news about how we can avoid those risks and create a world that looks much better than the one we currently inhabit. The convention on biological diversity COP coming up in Yerevan will look at the 23 targets of the global biodiversity framework, which set out the pattern for what we can do to change all this. What happens if we actually achieve them? Our air is cleaner, our water is purer, our energy is cheaper, our health is better, our economy is richer and our world is safer. What's not to like?

3.53 pm

**Martin Wrigley** (Newton Abbot) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Desmond. Like many Members, I have been inundated by constituents writing to me about this issue and explaining at great length their concerns about climate change and their fears for the future. The existential risk of ecosystem collapse and biodiversity loss at home and abroad is a common feature of those concerns.

[*Martin Wrigley*]

Wildfires across Devon, as well as in Stourbridge, have caused a catastrophic loss of biodiversity. It is therefore no surprise that my constituents have told me that reading this biodiversity report has made them worry for the future. They fear what will happen to the world as a whole, and to our national security, if what is set out in the report is allowed to come true.

I have been consulting people across my constituency for many months to hear their concerns face to face, including by attending as many screenings as possible of the “People’s Emergency Briefing”, which I encourage the Minister to see. I also held a local climate assembly with my constituents, which was an important step in hearing how I can work with them to share their concerns, and how we can work together on long-term and sustainable solutions to biodiversity and ecosystem collapse, albeit only locally.

The report makes for very worrying reading. One constituent told me that the briefing went “far beyond” anything she had “feared for the future”, and that she was frightened by the real and imminent global risks that we face from climate change and biodiversity loss. Although the report is a worst-case scenario, about what could happen without action, the very suggestion that this is a possibility should worry us all.

**Richard Foord** (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): We both live near the University of Exeter, and Professor Neil Adger has talked about the risks and limits of a securitisation framing of nature and biodiversity, and the idea that this is a global problem of our biosphere but not a national security problem. What does my hon. Friend think? Does he see this as a people’s emergency or a national emergency?

**Martin Wrigley:** I think that this is an emergency on every level: it is a local, regional, national, international and global emergency, which is happening in the climate and in biodiversity at the same time. That is why we need action now.

The report mentions making radical change to farmland usage, but farmers need Government support for that. I recently discussed the issue with a constituent who has great knowledge of sustainable farming initiatives. He proposed a joined-up approach, with farmers working together on a 1000-acre challenge to research and develop sustainable farmland programmes. That is the kind of initiative that we must be developing now, before it is too late, and I urge the Minister to work on it.

I hope the Minister will listen to the concerns that I and many other colleagues have raised today and take urgent action to protect our ecosystems and promote sustainability globally for years to come.

3.56 pm

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): Following the heatwaves and wildfires across Europe this summer and the destruction caused by the glacier collapse and catastrophic flooding in Nepal and Tibet, the message is becoming impossible to ignore: the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation are real, not some distant future threat.

As the national security risk assessment says, climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystem disruption pose risks not just for the environment but for our economy, security and way of life. Climate and nature shocks are arriving faster, harder and more systematically than many of our economic systems were designed to handle.

We see that in four main ways: physical risks, including floods, wildfires, droughts and storms; transition risks as economies move away from high-carbon industries; nature-related risks affecting food production and natural resources; and systemic risks, where shocks spread rapidly across sectors and markets.

For many years, conversations about green finance primarily focused on corporate social responsibility. Today, they are equally about resilience and risk management. The UK is well placed to lead on that, but I fear that we are not doing as much as we could be.

I am vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Tibet. What is happening in the Himalayas and the Tibetan plateau is one of the clearest examples of climate risk unfolding today. The glaciers of the third pole function as Asia’s water tower, feeding major river systems that support nearly 2 billion people. When rising temperatures accelerate glacial melt, the consequences extend far beyond the mountains. This is not simply an environmental catastrophe; it is about infrastructure resilience, water and energy security, as well as economic stability across the entire region. It is entirely the kind of systemic risk that modern resilience finance should help countries to anticipate and manage.

I conclude by asking the Minister this: who will be attending COP17, and will we make sure we show leadership on global resilience there?

3.57 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Desmond. I thank the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) for setting the scene.

We must not overlook the fact that nature security is national security. As a person of faith—as you are, Sir Desmond—I am guided by the profound principle of stewardship. We have a God-given responsibility to tend this Earth, protect creation and hand it down to our children—and, in my case, to my grandchildren.

The global statistics are eye-opening. We have seen a decline in monitored wildlife populations over the last 50 years. This is not just an issue for conservationists, but an existential threat to global stability that is unravelling the complex biological safety net that regulates our climate, purifies our water and pollinates our crops. Biodiversity loss accelerates climate breakdown, destroys agricultural land and creates resource scarcity. When water runs dry, crops fail in vulnerable regions and conflict inevitably follows.

In my constituency of Strangford, the hard-working farmers, fishing sector and conservationists support our rich biodiversity, which supports local economies and resilience. Right across Strangford we are seeing superb frontline stewardship work being done on the ground. We are adopting nature-friendly farming practices, and local conservation projects are working tirelessly to protect native species and restore vital peatlands, which act as crucial carbon sinks. We cannot allow environmental

protections to become an unaffordable luxury or an undue tax burden on the very people keeping our communities afloat.

I have one question for the Minister, who I wish well, by the way—she has quite an endurance test today. I urge her to outline how the Government are integrating nature risk into our strategic defence frameworks. We need a comprehensive national nature security assessment that backs the brilliant stewardship we see in Strangford while strictly safeguarding the financial resilience of our hard-pressed farmers.

4 pm

**Sarah Dyke** (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): It is an honour to serve with you in the Chair, Sir Desmond. I congratulate the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) on securing this important debate.

Disappointingly, this heavily abridged report did not reach the Chamber in Government time, and when it was finally released, the timing coincided with Davos, which dominated the headlines. That raises questions about how seriously this Government take the warning from their own report that nature is a foundation of national security and can no longer be treated in isolation from it.

**Olly Glover** (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): My hon. Friend makes a very good point about the seriousness of this issue. Does she agree that a great way for the Government to show they understand that seriousness would be to publish the report in full and agree to a national broadcast and a national emergency briefing?

**Sarah Dyke:** I wholeheartedly agree. The report describes a collapse of interconnected natural systems reaching a point of no return—the loss of climate regulation destroying harvests in the world's breadbasket regions, triggering famine, disease and mass migration, driving up food prices and poverty here in the UK. With 77% of land in England and Wales farmed or managed by farmers, and more than 800 farms in my constituency of Glastonbury and Somerton alone, we already know who would be best placed to lead our investment in long-term biodiversity resilience.

**Dr Scott Arthur** (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): The hon. Lady makes a really good point. When I speak to farmers in Edinburgh South West, they often feel that they are the problem when it comes to protecting biodiversity; in fact, they are the solution. We should be doing all we can to support the Government to support farmers to help protect our environment.

**Sarah Dyke:** I absolutely agree, which brings me to my next point. As Martin Lines of the Nature Friendly Farming Network puts it, healthy soils and water functioning as good systems should be treated as critical national infrastructure. He argues for more spongy landscapes, healthier soils, wetlands, ponds and trees that hold water, buffering both drought and flooding, while still supporting food production.

With DEFRA budget cuts slashing the farming budget by more than £100 million and uncertainty over future support systems, many are disincentivised from the environmental role that their own survival depends on. We know that nature-friendly farming can bring real ecological improvement.

The Lang Partnership in Curry Rivel has proudly championed regenerative and nature-friendly farming methods for more than 30 years, showing what is possible when farmers are committed to working with nature rather than against it, but this needs widespread adoption and adoption to work.

The environmental land management scheme should be a vital road map to a resilient farming sector, but there has been a lack of investment in higher-tier schemes that will deliver the best outcomes for nature. That is why the Liberal Democrats would invest an additional £1 billion—a cash injection—into the farming budget, properly phased to target where it helps nature the most and to help farmers to boost food security, rather than allowing them to fall through the gaps.

**Terry Jermy** (South West Norfolk) (Lab): There are a number of rare and unique landscapes across the country, such as the Brecks in my own constituency. Does the hon. Lady support calls for increased funding for specific landscapes impacted by climate change and biodiversity loss?

**Sarah Dyke:** I agree with my hon. Friend—I call him that as he sits on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee with me.

This summer's drought has put farmers under severe financial pressure. A potato farmer in my constituency, James Pullen of Perrins Hill Farm in Tintinhull, told me that he expects to be £200,000 down on his potato sales this year. In a good year, his crop averages around 25 tonnes to the acre, but this year it will be closer to 20 tonnes, with potatoes badly bruised or simply failing to grow.

I am grateful for the recently announced drought support for farmers, but we need real action that prevents ecosystem collapse and the heightened risk that that poses for our food security. We also need investment to hold water on farm reservoirs and fire ponds—nature-based solutions to water scarcity that will irrigate the land during prolonged drought and help communities to battle wildfires. However, farm reservoirs are not being built quickly enough to meet demand, as they are being held back by abstraction licences, planning permission, cost implications, uncertain grants and limited contractor availability.

**Jessica Toale** (Bournemouth West) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Sarah Dyke:** I will not, if the hon. Lady does not mind, because I have quite a lot to get through.

I recently visited Wessex Water's constructed wetland at Shapwick Heath in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wells and Mendip Hills (Tessa Munt). At 21 hectares, it is the largest water treatment wetland of its kind in the UK, filtering forever chemicals, phosphates and microplastics from our water, while boosting flood resilience and supporting Somerset's biodiversity. Wessex Water is currently upgrading its sewage treatment plant, which will remove 170 tonnes of phosphates over the next 10 years. To put that into context, the 18,000 homes across Somerset that are currently stuck in a planning moratorium due to the nutrient neutrality regulations would produce only 3 tonnes of phosphate. That clearly demonstrates what nature-based solutions can bring to the future of water management and nutrient neutrality.

[Sarah Dyke]

Somerset is increasingly exposed to devastating flooding that impacts farmers and homeowners alike. I was really happy to secure £50 million of flood defence funding for Somerset earlier this year, and I welcome Somerset council agreeing to ringfence some of those funds to target nature-based solutions that work in conjunction with hard engineering river maintenance across high-risk catchments, restoring natural hydrology upstream while protecting communities and infrastructure downstream. I am also pleased that a major element of the programme will be the council's "My Community" programme, empowering local communities with bespoke, bureaucracy-cutting support and creating shared action on the ground.

Peatlands like those in the Somerset levels and moors provide vital species habitats, flood alleviation and water filtration, yet across the UK over 80% of peatlands are damaged. Somerset is one of only two counties still extracting peat, with licences to 2042 despite the levels and moors storing an estimated 11 million tonnes of carbon, which is equivalent to 10 years of the county's emission. My Horticultural Peat (Prohibition of Sale) Bill sought to end the sale of peat, building on local efforts that are already under way, with companies such as Durstons near Street and RocketGro growing peat-free compost ranges. I congratulate the Minister on her new role, but I would be grateful for clarity on peat issues. Will there be a dedicated funding scheme for peatland restoration once the nature for climate peatland grant scheme ends next year? Will she go further and provide a timeline on when the Government will seek to end the sale of horticultural peat?

Habitat destruction also impacts insect life. For example, the shrill carder bee, which is one of the UK's rarest bumblebees, has retreated from its historic stronghold on the Somerset levels and moors to a depleting population around Somerton, Castle Cary and Ham Hill. Its numbers have collapsed from around 140 in 2015 to just seven in 2022. Only five of 22 biodiversity indicators show long-term improvement, and 13 are still deteriorating. Does the Minister accept that the Government's current approach is failing to meet their own Environment Act targets? What new action will change that trajectory?

Central to this failure to protect habitats is planning policy. The Government must adopt a strategic spatial approach to planning that protects the UK's most important places for nature, which would support, not undermine, environmental regulation and champion nature-friendly design in house building and infrastructure from the outset. That is why the Liberal Democrats opposed and voted against Labour's Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025.

If the Government are expecting 75,000 of their 1.5 million homes target to be delivered in Somerset, they must be fit for the future. I visited Bradfords Building Supplies in Glastonbury recently to discuss exactly this: how we make homes resilient to a changing climate, and how we prepare for extreme heat in summer and flooding in winter, including by making sustainable drainage systems mandatory in new developments. We cannot keep building homes for yesterday's climate; Government planning policy needs to catch up.

**Julia Buckley** (Shrewsbury) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Sarah Dyke:** I will not, just because of time.

We are also calling for the loopholes in the biodiversity net gain system to be closed, for the extension of how long a net gain habitat must be maintained from 30 years to 120 years, and for raising the requirement for major developments on larger greenfield sites from 10% to 100%. The case could not be starker. The Green Finance Institute puts the potential economic hit from nature degradation at the equivalent of 12% of GDP. That is more than twice the impact of the 2008 financial crash.

To conclude, this report was published in January. Half a year on, we have already seen the devastation that this year's climate crisis has brought to the UK. Will the Minister confirm whether DEFRA and the Joint Intelligence Committee will reclassify the food security risk as high, publish the full assessment as originally intended, and act with the urgency it deserves, including through an annual climate and nature statement to Parliament?

4.10 pm

**Dr Neil Hudson** (Epping Forest) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Desmond. I congratulate the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) on bringing forward this important debate, and I welcome the Minister to her place. I would normally go through some of the powerful contributions we have had today, but it would take all my allocated time to namecheck everyone's constituencies. Basically, the take-home message has been the importance of protecting our precious planet from the existential threats that we face from climate change.

Protecting biodiversity and ecosystems is very close to our hearts and the hearts of our constituents, and it is crucial to national security. As the MP for Epping Forest, I am privileged to see and experience the many benefits of biodiversity in our ancient woodland and beyond. As the heart and lungs of north-east London and our part of Essex, Epping Forest hosts 55,000 ancient and veteran trees and is home to 10 bat species, nine native reptile and amphibian species, over 15,000 fungal species and 28 butterfly species. I want the flora and fauna of Epping Forest and more widely to flourish and thrive, yet water security, air quality and climate change—to name just three risks—threaten biodiversity and ecosystems domestically and globally. That is why the report we are debating today is an important wake-up call.

The last Conservative Government's Environment Act 2021 established legally binding targets, including to increase species abundance, so that by 2042 it is greater than 2022 and at least 10% greater than 2032, and to restore or create more than 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitats outside protected sites by 2050. Our Conservative environment improvement plan built on that Act, committing to protect 30% of our land and our sea by 2030. Supporting the COP15 global target, we agreed to protect 30% of global land and global ocean.

The security assessment we are debating, published by the current Government in January this year, outlined the immense risk that biodiversity loss and ecological degradation is having and will continue to have unless we take action. It was disappointing that it took an FOI request from the Green Alliance for the Government to publish the report in this abridged form. It is clearly

something that the Government do not want us to see in full. Will the Minister say what the Government's plans are for letting us see it in full?

Turning to what was published, the report looks at global factors, such as food supply chains, but it is important that the Government's approach to supporting biodiversity and ecosystems is not siloed between action abroad and action domestically, but is instead a joint approach. International action to address biodiversity must not solely sit within the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, but must be co-ordinated with DEFRA and tie into the UK's domestic agenda to boost supply chains and ecosystems here.

The report identified biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse as a national security threat. We must all keep that at the forefront of our minds. This debate considers national security and keeping the UK—our families, homes and livelihoods—safe. National security should always be the first and foremost duty of any Government. One of the reasons the threats identified in the report are different from some other national security threats is the unpredictable behaviour of some natural events, such as the extreme weather events we are seeing both in the UK and globally—we have heard that point powerfully articulated today.

In the UK this summer, we have experienced one of the worst droughts in history. Over two-thirds of England—approximately 71%—was in drought following the driest July since 1836. In my constituency, the extreme heat facing the rest of the country was made worse by thousands of my constituents being left without running water this summer for about a week due to unacceptable Thames Water outages for several days. They faced hours of long queues for bottled water or waited anxiously for priority service delivery, with little certainty that they would receive any at all. With warmer summers expected as the norm, I would appreciate it if the Minister assured mine and everyone's constituents that the Government are taking steps to ensure that they are integrating planning for warm weather into the very heart of our water industry's operations, so that our constituents are not left exposed in such a vulnerable position in future.

The Government should also be supporting farmers to adapt to the impact of climate change, biodiversity loss and increasing market volatility. Sadly, the Government have voted for the family farm tax and the fertiliser tax. That is very pertinent to today's debate, with the report touching on UK fertiliser resilience. There is also the double-cab pick-up tax and increased national insurance contributions for employers. All those actions have not only caused serious economic and cash-flow problems for farmers; they have also damaged job opportunities for young people coming into agriculture.

Why is this so important? Our fantastic farmers are custodians of approximately 70% of the UK's land. Failing to support farmers is failing to support nature and biodiversity in the UK, which is both unforgivable and incredibly short-sighted. Farmers are pivotal to UK food security. The report says:

“Without significant increases in UK food system and supply chain resilience, it is unlikely the UK would be able to maintain food security if ecosystem collapse drives geopolitical competition for food.”

Therefore, once again, and in a sadly recurring theme, when this current Government should be supporting our family farms to help feed the nation and bolster our food security, there has been a record number of farm closures.

Sadly, when it comes to biosecurity, which is intrinsically linked to our food security, yet again the current Government have been slow throughout their tenure. I needed to ask 17 times in Parliament before they provided anything close to the money needed to complete the rebuild of the Animal and Plant Health Agency's headquarters. They also continue to preside over an illegal meat import crisis at our borders.

In the last couple of years, Europe has seen foot and mouth disease, and African swine fever is also advancing up the continent. As we have heard in this debate and this morning's statement, bluetongue virus is surging in the UK and poses a specific threat in the context of climate change. The virus is rapidly multiplying in the midge vector, the range of which is advancing northwards. Leaving us exposed to those threats is reckless.

The report we are debating is a much-needed wake-up call to the Government, who sadly seem to be asleep at the wheel. A report of this kind should have prompted an immediate response, yet we have seen in DEFRA that this Government do not seem to move with speed. That must change.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to the points made today. However, more than anything, I would like a guarantee that there will be co-ordination across Government to bolster ecosystems internationally and in the UK. DEFRA must play a leading role in this work. I really hope that the Prime Minister was misspeaking in his comment yesterday about how he rates DEFRA among Government Departments. DEFRA should be at the heart of Government in protecting and feeding our country and looking after our precious environment. I would appreciate it if the Minister could confirm that.

Co-ordinated policy also needs us to be using every tool at our disposal. I urge the Government to recognise the important role that zoos play in conservation, as we also heard from the hon. Member for Chester North and Neston (Samantha Dixon). Zoos such as Chester and London, through species reintroduction and habitat restoration, do so much to help fight species decline. They need to be used to our full advantage to meet biodiversity targets.

In conclusion, when ecosystem degradation is occurring across all regions of the globe and, as the report states, the world could be on a path towards

“geopolitical instability, economic insecurity, conflict, migration and increased inter-state competition for resources”

the Government must not stand and sit idle. I ask them to act.

4.18 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Jenny Riddell-Carpenter):** I congratulate my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) on securing this incredibly important debate. I also thank hon. Members for their powerful and thoughtful contributions. I am very aware that many did not get the time to make the contributions that they would have liked to make. In the interests of time, I will not be

[Jenny Riddell-Carpenter]

taking interventions, but I am more than happy for Members to write to me after the debate and I will get back to them in writing.

I will start by addressing the point made by the hon. Member for Waveney Valley about the status of the assessment and the material behind it, and I know that issue has been raised by a number of Members from across the House. As my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry East (Mary Creagh), outlined in some detail to the hon. Member for Waveney Valley in a session of the Environmental Audit Committee in July, it is standard and given practice that the Government do not comment on speculation about different drafts or versions. That position has not changed as I stand here today, nor will it likely change tomorrow. With that in mind, it is far more important that I focus my response on the critical themes raised in the debate.

Publishing the assessment was clearly vital, so that Parliament, the public and our international partners can see its core findings. Those findings are clear: biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation pose a real risk to security, resilience and prosperity. We cannot, and this Government will not, shy away from the real challenges that creates. Climate change is one of the biggest challenges of our time, and this Government are the first to lead this country with both a Climate Minister and a Nature Minister. That reflects how seriously this Government take climate change and nature security.

I have long said that net zero and nature are two sides of the same coin when it comes to tackling climate change. The assessment highlights the critical role that nature plays in our ability to tackle the climate crisis. Of course, we cannot fight this greatest challenge alone, and many hon. Members raised that point. Climate change and nature do not abide by rules or borders. Working to implement the advice raised through the assessment requires leadership at home and abroad, working with our international partners to strengthen food security, biosecurity, global supply chain resilience and international co-operation.

As many hon. Members highlighted, the findings of the assessment are stark. Global ecosystem degradation and collapse threaten UK national security and prosperity. That is not an environmental issue alone; it is a systemic risk to the UK's resilience and long-term security, as many hon. Members articulated. The UK's food security and economic resilience depend on healthy ecosystems at home and overseas. Nearly 40% of our food is imported, and for as long as we continue to enjoy bananas, rice, kiwis and avocados, we will never realistically be able to rely on domestic food production alone. That means we are at heightened risk of environmental pressures overseas disrupting our supply chains, increasing prices and reducing resilience in the UK.

That is not an isolated finding. The World Economic Forum's "Global Risks Report 2026" identified extreme weather as the most severe global risk over the next decade, with environmental risks accounting for five of the 10 highest-ranked long-term risks. The nature security assessment suggests that domestic nature-related risk could reduce UK GDP by around 6% by the 2030s, with a further 6% reduction arising from international risks transmitted through global supply chains in some scenarios. The conclusion of our assessment is extraordinarily

clear and should leave no one in any doubt: nature security is national security, and nature stability is global stability.

Responsible Governments identify emerging risks early, strengthen preparedness and build resilience before shocks occur. This Government are determined to rise to that responsibility. Other political parties may tell people simply to sit back and enjoy a rapidly changing climate, as we heard over the summer from Reform. However, we will not give up on tackling these threats head-on or put our head in the sand, as others in Opposition sadly seem determined to do.

It is important to stress that the assessment is neither a forecast nor a prediction. It is a forward-looking assessment designed to help the Government to plan for potential shocks, such as disruption to food systems, supply chains and economic stability, that are credible enough to warrant preparation. Its purpose is to help us to anticipate those risks, test our resilience and take appropriate action. That is exactly what the assessment does: it looks around corners rather than relying on the rear-view mirror. It is worth stressing that, via the assessment, the UK is doing something important that other countries are not. By creating, publishing and debating the assessment, we are a global frontrunner in discussing nature security.

Our assessment is the first published national security assessment of its kind in the world. After we published it, the UK's presentations at the OECD resulted in several global partners using our approach to understand and consider how ecosystem-related risks affect their own resilience and national security. Later this month, the Foreign Secretary will bring Foreign Ministers together at the United Nations to discuss how to respond to climate and nature security threats. The assessment will provide an important evidence base for those conversations.

I recognise that this is a critical juncture for nature. We will continue to use upcoming international opportunities to make the case that protecting nature and tackling climate change must go hand in hand, because healthy ecosystems underpin resilience, security and prosperity.

Turning to this Government's response, we have launched the first ever taskforce on the national security and resilience risks of a changing climate and nature loss, bringing together leading security, military and academic experts to help us to identify and prioritise risks, strengthen cross-Government co-ordination and turn evidence into practical action. The taskforce, launched in June this year, provides independent challenge and recommendations to ensure that climate and nature risks are considered more systemically across national security and resilience planning.

Separately, we have commissioned a three-year nature security research and development programme to improve indicators, early warning capability and analytical tools. That will help the Government to identify emerging risks earlier, stress-test resilience and take preventive action before disruption escalates.

A number of hon. Members on both sides of the House spoke about the importance of the food sector to national security and the functioning of the UK, which the Government have recognised by designating it as critical national infrastructure. DEFRA works closely with the Cabinet Office and other Government Departments to strengthen preparedness and resilience across the food

system and supply chains. We are also investing more than £2.7 billion a year in farming and nature recovery, supporting resilient domestic food production, healthier soils, pollinators and nature-friendly farming.

The nature security assessment makes it clear that severe ecosystem degradation can contribute to the emergence of novel zoonotic diseases. We are acting to bring down the risks that that poses, strengthening resilience to those risks through the UK biological security strategy, enhanced disease surveillance and a one-health approach that recognises the links between environmental, animal and human health. That improves our ability to identify, assess and respond to emerging biological threats.

This Government are also addressing nature-related risks at source through the international climate finance programme. Climate markets and green finance were mentioned by several hon. Members during the debate. The UK's international climate finance strategy places nature at its core, investing in the protection and restoration of forests, oceans, freshwater and other critical ecosystems that support global stability.

It was mentioned right at the beginning, but I am delighted to confirm that today the Government have announced that they intend to invest £400 million in the Tropical Forest Forever facility. The TFFF represents a critical evolution in forest finance, providing long-term support for tropical forest protection. I am sure hon. Members recognise that investing in forests is one of the most effective ways to tackle the climate and nature crisis and to support UK growth and security.

As hon. Members across the House have acknowledged, the nature security assessment has made it clear that nature loss can impact food security, water security, economic

resilience and national security. We are taking those findings seriously. There is no single Department that can address them alone, and that is why we are working across Government to ensure a co-ordinated response. These are global challenges, but they are being felt close to home. The recent wildfire at Dunwich Heath in Suffolk was in my constituency, and it was a stark reminder to me that the environmental risks are no longer distant or abstract, and that we must build resilience here in the UK as well as overseas.

We have restored nearly 23,000 hectares of peatland since 2020 to store carbon. I was delighted to visit my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (John Whitby) recently to look at the work that the UK is doing to restore and invest in our peatlands. That work plays a vital role not just in managing and restoring nature but in helping to tackle the threat of wildfires. Such work, which is in addition to supporting farmers through nature-friendly farming schemes and delivering our environmental improvement plans, means we are taking practical action at home alongside our international efforts abroad.

I again thank the hon. Member for Waveney Valley for securing this important debate and the continued interest of the House in this agenda.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security, published in January 2026.

4.29 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

*Thursday 3 September 2026*

## DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### **Warner Bros. Discovery: Proposed Acquisition by Paramount**

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy):** On 30 June 2026, my Department wrote to Paramount and Warner Bros. Discovery on my behalf, informing them under the Enterprise Act 2002 public interest regime that I was minded to intervene in the proposed merger between the two companies, and I issued a written ministerial statement setting this out, which is available at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2026-06-30/hcws162>

The parties were given the opportunity to make representations to me by 6 July in response to my concerns. Paramount put forward a set of assurances, seeking to address the issues I raised. These assurances included a range of commitments on future investment in the UK, maintaining the distinct editorial identities of key services, and the editorial independence of news. Following further discussions with DCMS officials, Paramount offered to strengthen those assurances and turn them into legally binding commitments by way of a “deed of undertaking” made in my favour.

On 6 August, the Competition and Markets Authority announced its decision that there are no competition aspects of this proposed merger in the UK that necessitate its further intervention.

In parallel, after careful consideration, I decided not to issue a public interest intervention notice, on the basis that the assurances and further legally binding commitments I secured from Paramount provide a set of protections that will help safeguard the continued availability of a diverse range of broadcasting and on-demand services in the UK; the continuation of their distinct editorial identities; and the distinct editorial identities of key UK news programmes. Paramount has committed to providing me with annual statements of compliance with the undertakings in the deed, and DCMS will closely monitor their implementation. In the circumstances, I have decided to accept the deed and have informed the parties of my decision. A copy of my public statement issued on 6 August, the letter of assurances from Paramount and the deed can be found on gov.uk here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-statement-proposed-acquisition-of-warner-bros-discovery-by-paramount-decision-of-no-intervention-on-public-interest-intervention-or-foreign-sta>

Having made this decision and informed the parties, I made a public statement on 6 August, and wish to formally update Parliament of my decisions, now that it has returned from summer recess.

I have made this decision based on the specific powers currently available to me under the Enterprise Act 2002, which only relate to matters concerning the UK broadcasting and news media landscape. As set out in the “Watch this Space” Green Paper published on 23 June,

the media sector is undergoing a profound and rapid transformation. I believe it is of the utmost importance to protect plurality, diversity and distinct British voices across our wider creative industries, including film, and I share the concerns about the impact consolidation could have on the UK’s creative industries.

I have met with Paramount CEO David Ellison to obtain specific assurances about the impact of this proposed deal on film outputs and diversity of content. I look forward to continuing to work with both Paramount and sector leaders to ensure that our world-leading creative industries feel real benefits as a result of these discussions. Beyond this, as set out in my public statement, I am also considering all avenues to ensure the Government have the ability to protect plurality, diversity and British content when it is under threat.

#### *Video on demand services*

In my previous written ministerial statement, I noted that should I decide to intervene in this case, I would bring forward secondary legislation to amend the plurality of control public interest consideration set out in the Enterprise Act, to enable Ofcom to examine the impact of the proposed acquisition on video on demand services. While DCMS will no longer be bringing forward secondary legislation in relation to this specific merger, I may do so in future, given the role on demand viewing now plays in the market.

#### *Foreign state influence regime*

Having considered the proposed merger under the statutory foreign state influence regime, I have concluded that I do not have reasonable grounds to suspect that my duty to issue a foreign state intervention notice has arisen. I am therefore currently not minded to intervene in this case. I will reassess the position if any new information comes to light suggesting otherwise.

[HCWS309]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### **Gamebirds: Call for Evidence**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Jenny Riddell-Carpenter):** My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Lords (Baroness Hayman of Ullock) has made the following written statement:

As set out in the land use framework and the animal welfare strategy for England, the Government committed to strengthening the evidence base on gamebird rearing, release and shooting in England.

I am today announcing that a call for evidence will launch on 4 September 2026 as the next step in delivering that commitment.

Gamebird rearing, release and shooting are established activities within rural land use and management. They can contribute to rural economies and land management, but their environmental, animal health, animal welfare and wider impacts are not yet fully understood. The call for evidence will gather information and evidence to improve understanding of both the positive and negative impacts associated with these activities.

The call for evidence will consider the rearing of gamebirds, the release of reared birds from captivity, associated shooting and land management activities, and impacts at local, regional and national level. It will seek evidence on biodiversity, protected sites and habitats, biosecurity and disease, bird of prey crime, animal welfare, use of natural resources, and other relevant environmental or social impacts.

Evidence gathered through this exercise will be carefully reviewed, including by independent external reviewers for information on release and shooting. This will support DEFRA's understanding of these activities and their impacts and inform any future policy development. No decisions have been taken at this stage on whether to introduce any changes, and any future proposals would be subject to public consultation.

The call for evidence will be published on gov.uk and will be open for responses until 1 November 2026.

[HCWS308]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Jo White):** My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is today laying before the House a statement of changes in immigration rules.

*Changes to "Appendix Skilled Worker" to support victims of modern slavery*

The sponsorship system is designed to ensure that overseas recruits have a genuine job to come to, that they will be paid appropriately, and that they can enjoy their employment rights. However, we have seen instances of skilled worker visa holders who entered the UK in good faith, complied with the terms of their visa and have experienced exploitation. This is simply unacceptable. Our crackdown on rogue employers continues and this includes taking action against sponsors who have exploited or enslaved their workers. To date, UK Visas and Immigration has revoked more than 7,500 sponsor licences, including 1,800 in the care sector alone. But we recognise that there is more to be done to ensure that victims are protected and supported by our immigration system, as set out in the immigration White Paper.

To ensure that victims of exploitation do not face further vulnerabilities, the changes we are making now allow victims who entered the UK legally and have been recognised as victims of modern slavery to undertake work in any occupation for the remaining duration of the visa validity. This incentivises victims to come forward early and guards against those who seek to weaponise the sponsorship system in order to exploit vulnerable workers.

*Changes to facilitate the UK rejoining the Erasmus+ programme*

*UK standard visitor route*

I am expanding the provisions of the visitor immigration route to facilitate new short-term activities under the Erasmus+ programme, which the UK agreed to rejoin as part of the UK-EU common understanding package at the UK-EU summit in May 2025.

I am introducing new changes to "Appendix V: Visitor" of the immigration rules to permit visitors under the Erasmus+ programme to study at UK state schools and academies. State-funded schools and academies will now be able to host Erasmus+ participants under short-term study placements for up to six months.

The changes to "Appendix V: Visitor" will also introduce new eligibility requirements and safeguards to ensure that Erasmus+ participants are legitimate and, where necessary, have permission from their parent or legal guardian and their home institution to undertake Erasmus+ activities in the UK.

Additionally, to facilitate new activities stemming from participation in the Erasmus+ programme, I am introducing new changes to "Appendix Visitor: Permitted Activities". All Visitors will now be able to partake in workshops, debates, and attend skills competitions.

A new section reserved for Erasmus+ activities will be introduced to "Appendix Visitor: Permitted Activities", which will allow participants to undertake courses and provide or receive training, and undertake traineeships—all at UK based organisations and academic institutions. Erasmus+ participants may also partake in coaching and training assignments at UK-based sports organisations through the standard visitor route.

*Student route*

To facilitate the wide array of activities being undertaken through the Erasmus+ programme, I will be introducing new changes to the UK's student immigration route.

I will be implementing new amendments to "Appendix Student" to allow Erasmus+ participants to undertake study activities at RQF level 2 and above or SCQF level 5 and above for Scotland. The changes made to "Appendix Student" will also exempt courses through Erasmus+ from the requirement that a course must lead to an approved qualification.

Additional amendments to "Appendix Student" will be made so that, where an Erasmus+ course includes a work placement, the course does not need to lead to an approved qualification and, for below-degree courses, the confirmation of acceptance for studies does not need to be assigned by a student sponsor that is not a probationary sponsor.

The study conditions set out in "Appendix Student" and "Appendix Child Student" will be amended to permit Erasmus+ participants to study at a state-funded school or academy, where the institution holds a sponsor licence and sponsors the Erasmus+ student.

I will be making further changes to the student sponsor licence arrangements to allow state-funded schools and academies to hold sponsor licences to sponsor inbound Erasmus+ students.

*Government authorised exchange visa scheme*

I will be opening a new scheme on the GAE immigration route to facilitate eligible Erasmus+ programme placements. This will permit those entering the UK for the purposes of Erasmus+ to partake in a range of supernumerary work placements and internships as an Erasmus+ participant.

These changes to the immigration rules are being laid on 3 September 2026. The changes will come into effect on 8 October 2026, 29 October 2026, 30 November 2026, and 9 December 2026, as detailed in the statement of changes.

[HCWS311]

## JUSTICE

### **Young Offender Institutions: Authorisation of PAVA Use**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Jake Richards):** In April 2025, the then Lord Chancellor announced the authorisation of PAVA spray for use by a specially trained and selected group of staff in the three public sector young offender institutions: HMYOI Feltham A, HMYOI Werrington and HMYOI Wetherby. This authorisation was granted for a period of 12 months and was accompanied by enhanced oversight, monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

The introduction of PAVA in the YOIs was intended to provide staff with an additional means of responding to the most serious incidents of violence, where its use is necessary, proportionate and appropriate to prevent serious harm to young people in custody or staff. It remains authorised only as a measure of last resort. As the only distance-based tactical option available to specially trained staff in these settings, PAVA provides an important capability to respond to serious violence rapidly to reduce the risk of injury to staff and young people.

Violence within the children and young people's secure estate continues to present significant challenges. While work continues to improve safety, stability and outcomes for young people in custody, staff must be equipped to respond effectively to the most serious and dangerous incidents.

Having considered the available evidence, including operational experience, monitoring data and ongoing evaluation of the use of PAVA in YOIs, during recess agreement has been reached across Government to extend the authorisation for a further 12 months in the three public sector YOIs and I wrote on 11 August to the Justice Committee and the Justice and Home Affairs Committee to inform them of my decision. I am making this statement today to ensure all colleagues are aware.

This extension will provide further time to gather evidence on the effectiveness, appropriateness and impact of PAVA in youth settings. Throughout the extension period, every incident involving the drawing or use of PAVA will continue to be reviewed and evaluated as part of established oversight arrangements including ongoing monitoring of its use and the impacts on children with protected characteristics.

Data and emerging trends will be subject to ongoing scrutiny through existing governance processes, including oversight by the independent restraint review panel. An independent expert will continue to monitor the use of PAVA and provide advice on its operation, impact and any issues relating to proportionality.

Over the extension period, NHS England data and evidence relating to children on whom PAVA is used in the three public sector YOIs will be incorporated into the evidence gathered by the Youth Custody Service. This will help strengthen the evidence base and inform assessment of any health impacts, with input from the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England; any impacts on the emotional and behavioural wellbeing of children, including any longer-term implications as they develop into adulthood; and the impacts on children with protected characteristics and other vulnerable groups.

Ministers will continue to receive regular reporting on the use of PAVA, including on its effectiveness, any disproportionate impacts identified, and the actions being taken in response.

Our long-term ambition is to significantly reduce the use of force across the youth secure estate. To achieve this, we must continue to bring down levels of violence across the estate.

This is a key objective of the youth custody transformation plan, which is due to be published in the coming months. Alongside this, we will continue to improve standards for children in custody.

[HCWS310]



# Petition

Thursday 3 September 2026

## OBSERVATIONS

### BUSINESS, INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND TRADE

#### Hundredstone Post Office

*The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,*

Declares that an alternative operator for the Hundredstone Post Office site in the Morrisons Daily on Glenthorne Avenue in Yeovil must be provided before the store's closure 29 July 2026; and further declares that the current model for local services, whereby bank services often operate in post offices and post offices often operate in shops, means that local people lose almost all of their in-person services when shops, as is often the case in the current business and regulatory environment, don't survive.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to put pressure on the Post Office to ensure a replacement operator for the post office in the area is in place before the current site is closed; and to consider how to provide communities with more resilient in-person services.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Adam Dance, *Official Report*, 8 July 2026; Vol. 789, c. 424.]

[P003221]

*Observations from the Minister for the Future of Work (Kate Dearden):*

I thank the petitioners for raising concerns regarding the future of Hundredstone post office, as set out in petition P003221, presented on 8 July 2026.

The Government recognise the important role that post office branches play in supporting local communities, and fully appreciate the impact that the loss of a branch can have on residents and local businesses.

While Post Office Ltd is publicly owned, it operates at arm's length from Government and has the commercial freedom to manage the network within parameters set by the Government. Decisions regarding individual branches, including closures and formats, are therefore operational matters for the company. As such, it would not be appropriate for the Government to intervene directly in these decisions; however, we have raised the concerns of the Yeovil community with the Post Office.

The Government protect the post office network by setting minimum access criteria, which, for example, require 99% of the UK population to live within 3 miles of a post office outlet.

Post Office Ltd has been working to secure a replacement branch for Hundredstone post office and maintain access to post office services in the area. In the meantime, customers can continue to access post office services at nearby branches. These include Westfield post office, which is approximately 1 mile from the former Hundredstone branch, and Orchard Street post office, which is approximately 1.3 miles away.

The Government expect Post Office Ltd to continue to engage with the local community and stakeholders as it explores options for maintaining services in the area.



## Written Correction

*Thursday 3 September 2026*

### Other Correction

**ANDREW GEORGE**

#### Community Pharmacies

*The following extract is from the debate on Community Pharmacies on 2 June 2026.*

**Andrew George:** We are also witnessing troubling behaviour in the sector. Some large corporate pharmacy chains are redirecting patients to independent pharmacies

for medicines that are above tariff, incorrectly stating that those medicines are unavailable when in reality they are unwilling to supply them because of the financial loss involved.

[*Official Report*, 2 June 2026; Vol. 786, c. 93WH.]

*Written correction submitted by the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George):*

**Andrew George:** We are also witnessing troubling behaviour in the sector. **Allegations have been put to me that** some large corporate pharmacy chains are redirecting patients to independent pharmacies for medicines that are above tariff, incorrectly stating that those medicines are unavailable when in reality they are unwilling to supply them because of the financial loss involved.



# ORAL ANSWERS

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**not later than  
Thursday 10 September 2026**

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