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Business of the House

Volume 733: debated on Thursday 25 May 2023

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🕒 11.17am

Thangam Debbonaire >

(Bristol West) (Lab)

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Will the Leader of the House give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons >

(Penny Mordaunt)

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Before I give the business of the House, I should like to make a brief statement, Mr Speaker.

First, I associate myself with the remarks made in the House this week about the anniversary of the Manchester Arena attack and the murder of Lee Rigby. My thoughts are with all those affected by those tragic events.

Yesterday, we had the sad news that the world has lost an icon, Tina Turner; but in the early hours of this morning, we in this place also lost our own larger-than-life character: our former colleague Karen Lumley, the Member for Redditch from 2010 to 2017. As well as the work she did for her constituents and in the service of Parliament on the Welsh Affairs, Finance and Transport Committees, and in government as a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Department of Health, Karen was a force of nature and a force for good. We will miss her, her amazing hairdos, and the joy she brought us all. We will cherish our memories of her. I know the whole House will want to send our love to her family, especially Richard, Lizzie and Chris, and all who knew and loved her.

Hon. Members

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Hear, hear.

Penny Mordaunt >

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She meant a lot to all of us.

The business for the week commencing 5 June will include:

Monday 5 June—General debate on the role of local government in reaching net zero, followed by a general debate on delivering new housing supply. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

Tuesday 6 June—Consideration of an allocation of time motion, followed by all stages of the British Nationality (Regularisation of Past Practice) Bill.

Wednesday 7 June—Opposition day (17th allotted day). Debate in the name of the official Opposition. Subject to be announced.

Thursday 8 June—General debate on National Carers Week, followed by a general debate on the work of the Council of Europe. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee

Friday 9 June—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 12 June includes:

Monday 12 June—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill, followed by a debate on risk-based exclusion of Members of Parliament.

Tuesday 13 June—Remaining stages of the Procurement Bill [*Lords*].

Wednesday 14 June—Opposition day (10th allotted day, second part). Debate in the name of the Scottish National party—subject to be announced. Followed by a general debate—subject to be confirmed.

Thursday 15 June—Business to be determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

Friday 16 June—The House will not be sitting.

Members will also wish to know that, subject to the progress of business, the House will rise for the summer recess on 20 July and return on Monday 4 September; rise for the conference recess at the close of business on Tuesday 19 September and return on Monday 16 October; and rise for the Christmas recess at the close of business on Tuesday 19 December and return on Monday 8 January 2024.

I will announce further recess dates and future business in the usual way.

Thangam Debbonaire >

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It is a sad moment when we lose one of our colleagues. I know Karen Lumley was loved across this place, and colleagues, including my former hon. Friend Louise Ellman and others, really appreciated the personal support she gave them and her dedicated work on the Transport Committee. We join the Leader of the House in sending our love and condolences to her family.

I will come on to Tina Turner shortly, but I also want to mention the parliamentary football team, who I hear have a match against the Scottish parliamentary football team. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) tells me he is the star player—who knew? We will find out.

We all join the Leader of the House in paying tribute to the queen of rock and roll, Tina Turner. She was an icon, a heroine to the domestic violence movement and a role model to all of us women doing our best work in later life. Perhaps the Leader of the House could draw inspiration from Tina today and search river deep, mountain high—there will be more—for all the Government's missing legislation. Where is it?

Let us start with the Leader of the House's failure to bring forward the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill, which includes important protections for dogs and cats, and would clamp down on the cruel practice of puppy smuggling. Labour has been calling on the Government for years to stop unscrupulous breeders cashing in by bringing puppies and kittens into this country with no concern for their welfare, which that Bill would have sorted out. Having already carried over the Bill from one chaotic Tory parliamentary Session to the next chaotic Tory parliamentary Session, the Bill will now expire on 8 June. I understand that, in the ministerial statement later today, the Government now plan to scrap the Bill, which is shocking. I have raised this at least five times over the past eight months. Is this Prime Minister so weak that he cannot even bring himself to stand up against evil puppy smugglers? What a way to run a Government.

Brace yourself for more Tina puns, Mr Speaker. Labour wants our schools to be simply the best—I am trying not to sing, but it is really hard—but the Government scrapped the Schools Bill. It was left to Labour to stand up for the safety of schoolchildren this week, when we tried to force Ministers to reveal the extent to which school buildings are crumbling on the Government's watch. For over a year, the Department for Education has known that the risk of building collapse is very likely, so why did the Leader of the House and her colleagues continue the Conservative cover-up and hide from parents exactly which school buildings are dangerous?

Also missing in those deep rivers and high mountains was the leasehold reform part 2 Bill. This week, it was, again, Labour that brought forward a motion calling on the Housing Secretary to keep his promise to the thousands of people in Bristol West and the millions across the country who are living in leasehold properties. Labour forced the Government into committing to end the sale of new private leasehold houses and replace existing leaseholds for flats with commonhold. All that was needed despite a 2019 Conservative manifesto commitment and promises made almost every year by successive Housing Secretaries since then. The Tories are rowing back on their promises, and the Housing Secretary did not even bother to turn up—he rarely does these days. Will the Leader of the House tell us when the Housing Secretary will come to this House to tell us how he is going to implement Labour’s plan for leasehold reform, which this House voted for on Tuesday? Just to remind the Leader of the House, as well as what I have already mentioned we want to give greater powers to residents over the management of their homes in the interim and crack down on unfair fees. When will leasehold residents in Bristol West and beyond see the Government get on with implementing these measures?

Finally, we clearly do need another hero—*[Interruption.]* Well spotted. Instead of having this weak Prime Minister spending all his time watching his back, we could have a Labour Prime Minister showing real leadership and strong action. We have shown this week that we are the party with a plan and we have the leader to deliver it.

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Lady for that. I join her in wishing the football team well and in what she says about the great Tina Turner, who was a complete icon. What a woman, what a life and what a legacy she leaves all of us.

I am sorry that the hon. Lady did not feel able to welcome the good news that we have had this week. Thanks to the stoicism of the British people and the hard work of their Government, inflation is falling, as are energy costs, and the International Monetary Fund has upgraded its growth forecasts for the UK. There has also been more inward investment, with £18 billion from the G7 host nation, to mention just one, and more funding for our schools. She did not welcome the news of the vast improvements that our reforms in England, and phonics in particular, have brought. I would be happy to compare the track record of our school buildings programme in my constituency with the legacy left by Labour. I recall that when I came into this House, I made a freedom of information request to the Department for Education to find out how much traffic and correspondence there had been from my Labour predecessor on trying to rebuild our decaying schools—there had been none. Since then, we have had a number of schools completely rebuilt and a new university technical college, and that position is echoed around the country. Even if she did not want to mention any of that, she could have at least welcomed the price of a good bottle of plonk coming down, thanks to red tape being cut.

The hon. Lady mentions the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill, whose measures are manifesto commitments. It joins a long list of animal welfare reforms that we have brought in: new regulations for minimum standards on meat chickens; a ban on the use of conventional battery cages for laying hens; CCTV being made mandatory in slaughterhouses in England; microchipping being made mandatory for dogs; the modernising of our licensing system; protecting animals via Finn’s law and Lucy’s law; passing the Wild Animals in Circuses Act 2019; implementing humane trapping standards; passing the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022; passing the Ivory Act 2018; and many other things. Clearly, there are further measures in the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill that we want to bring forward and that are manifesto commitments. We are still committed to those measures. In the statement later today, Members will be able to see both our commitments and our plan to deliver them, and, I hope, the opportunity to deliver some of those measures faster than the Bill would have allowed. The same applies to leaseholder reform, which I have spoken about many times: we are committed to those statements.

We are making good progress. There has been a lot of chat this week about things trying to slow us down, including “the blob”, which I understand was a poor-quality production from the 1950s. It was about an amorphous, spineless, shape-shifting jelly that keeps changing its position on things, is red in colour and must be stopped at all costs for humanity’s sake. That is not the civil service; it sounds rather like the Labour party. I may have just hit upon a plan for our next party political broadcast.

Further business and further recess dates will be announced in the usual way.

Mr Speaker >

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I call the Father of the House.

Sir Peter Bottomley >

(Worthing West) (Con)

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We are grateful to the Leader of the House for the way that she spoke about our late colleague and to the shadow Leader of House for her response.

Recently, the examiners classified the Holocaust Memorial Bill as hybrid. Will my right hon. Friend, in peacetime, refer to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee the comments of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and of those who lead the Holocaust Memorial Foundation that they welcomed the Bill passing this step and that the Government actually spent their time trying to oppose the Bill being classified as hybrid. I also refer the Government to something in the press notice that said that one holocaust survivor has had to wait nine years from the time that this proposal was put forward to getting to this stage, and that he hopes to be able to be there when the memorial is opened.

Under the present plans, assuming that the Bill gets through both Houses of Parliament, with or without amendments—probably with amendments—that memorial cannot be completed for another five to six years. I suggest that the Government consider having the memorial—not necessarily the big one in Victoria Tower Gardens, but a smaller, more appropriate one—either there, in College Green, or Parliament Square and recognise that the learning centre is well suited at the Imperial War Museum, where one of Dame Diane Lees’s tributes was to create both the learning centre and the holocaust galleries. Everyone can then be satisfied and the holocaust survivors may be able to see a memorial in their lifetime.

Penny Mordaunt > [Share](#)

I thank my hon. Friend for raising that matter and for suggesting a pragmatic way forward. My understanding is that that suggestion has been made and rejected, but he will know that the Government are very keen to ensure that a memorial can be built in the swiftest time possible, precisely because we want the remaining holocaust survivors to be able to witness that. I shall make sure that the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has heard his suggestions today.

Mr Speaker > [Share](#)

I call the SNP spokesperson.

Deidre Brock >

(Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)

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I am sorry for the losses expressed by the Leader of the House, and we send our deepest condolences to all those affected, particularly the family and friends of Eilidh MacLeod.

I am not sure where to go with my business questions today. I could ask the Leader of the House about the £74 billion wasted in last year’s reckless September Budget and the resulting pain for householders, the questions hanging over the UK Government’s flagship freeport project and why the National Audit Office has not been asked to investigate it, the 4 million children living in poverty in the UK today because of Tory austerity, or the catastrophe of Brexit, which, of course, Scotland did not vote for. The truth is that it will not matter as the Leader of the House will once again ignore my question and instead read a pre-prepared script for the latest of her routine videos attacking Scotland’s elected Government, rather than answering for the actions of her own. So, I am afraid that it is in the spirit of hope rather than of conviction that I ask her this: can we have a debate in Government time in this Chamber on the infected blood scandal, so that the terrible accounts that those of us on the all-party group have heard from victims and their families might be told again and, hopefully, finally shame this Government into taking action now before it is too late for many of them. It is too late for Randolph Peter Gordon-Smith, the late father of my constituents, Justine and Rachel, but it is not too late for them to be treated equitably as the executors of his estate, and to be given proper compensation for all the traumas that they suffered as carers during the dreadful and distressing decline of their father until death finally overcame him.

In the light of the second interim report, Justine cannot understand—and neither can I—why registration of the estates of the unrecognised infected deceased cannot be completed through existing support schemes now, using the same mechanism as the first interim payment, without further complicating and prolonging matters through the establishment of an arm's length body, as the report proposes. Do not these families deserve justice now where it can be delivered? I would be most grateful to the Leader of the House if she addressed that question before reading out the video script written for her.

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Lady for her kind remarks about Karen and the other remarks she made.

I admire the hon. Lady's consistency in her lack of situational awareness. She mentioned management of budgets, and I remind the House that the SNP Government have mismanaged their budget; despite cutting £1.2 billion of spending on public services, they had a £100 million overspend. I remind her to compare our record on caring for children, where we have 400,000 fewer children in absolute poverty than when we took office in 2010.

As I mentioned in my remarks to the shadow Leader of the House, we have also had good news of improving life opportunities for children in England, with the good news that English schools have dramatically improved our reading performance for nine and 10-year-olds. We are fourth best in the world, having inherited a situation where, in 2012, only 58% of six-year-olds were able to read fluently.

In contrast, in Scotland, both on health and education the SNP is letting the children of Scotland down. We have the worst-ever gap between the richest and poorest pupils, thanks to botched reform; literacy rates were falling before the pandemic and they have dropped dramatically further still. The only thing the SNP has managed to increase in education is the tax burden on teachers.

The hon. Lady raises the very serious matter of the infected blood inquiry. I have had the privilege of meeting many of those who were infected and affected by that appalling scandal, and I went to hear some of the evidence that they gave at the inquiry. It may fall to us in this place, on our shift, to put that right, but we must put it right. There is not just the original injustice that was done to those people, many of whom were children at the time, but the further layers of injustice that have happened with regard to their financial resilience, as many of them lost their homes and were not able to work, facing the appalling stigma and hardship that came with that. We have to put that right. That is why this Government set up the compensation scheme review to run concurrently with that inquiry, because we very much wanted, when that inquiry reported, to be able to make amends for that scandal. It would be an excellent topic for debate and I know that many Members in this House would want to attend if a debate was secured.

Sir Bernard Jenkin >

(Harwich and North Essex) (Con)

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When are the Government planning to hold another debate on the situation in Ukraine? Does my right hon. Friend not agree that it is an important opportunity for the nation's representatives to state their support for the Government's policy—also supported by His Majesty's Opposition—as a clear act of will that we are determined to see the Ukrainians reach a satisfactory outcome to this conflict, which means recovering all their territory? Will she consider having a debate on a motion setting out the Government's policy for approval by the House?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank my right hon. Friend for raising that matter. I think all Members of this House will want to continue to show our resolve in supporting the people of Ukraine. There are clearly big decisions being taken at the moment in various international forums, including at NATO. I know many Members of this House have engagements with those international forums and would want to express the contribution they are making on the Floor of this House. I will certainly raise the request with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mr Speaker >

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I call the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

Ian Mearns >

(Gateshead) (Lab)

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I thank the Leader of the House for answering the business question, for announcing the Backbench Business debates of 5 and 8 June, and for confirming that our Committee will determine the subject of debates on 15 June as well. We have pre-allocated for that day debates on celebrating Pride month and on Government migration policies. I notice that there is to be a general debate on Wednesday 14 June. I am sure that the Government are already thinking of this, but may I suggest to them that that debate should be about the 6th anniversary of Grenfell, which is the date that it would fall on?

We anticipate debates on departmental estimates in July. A trend has occurred whereby Select Committee Chairs and their Committees have applied for those debates, but I stress that we accept applications from any Back-Bench Member. We do not yet know exactly when estimates day debates will be scheduled, but we have been told that it will be in early July. Members are encouraged to review the note on estimates from the scrutiny unit, and to contact the Backbench Business Committee to apply for debates via the Table Office.

I had the privilege of seeing Tina Turner twice at Gateshead stadium, in 1990 and in 1996. She is a very sad loss. On both occasions, it was a sell-out 35,000 crowd. Of course, Gateshead stadium is also the home of Gateshead Football Club, which, I am sad to say, finished as runner- up in the FA Trophy at Wembley on Sunday. May I congratulate Halifax Town, the victors on the day?

Mr Speaker >

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That might be Nutbush City Limits—*[Laughter.]*

Penny Mordaunt >

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Very good, Mr Speaker.

May I thank the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) for his work in advertising to colleagues—again, very successfully—the opportunities that his Committee brings for them to air their views on things that they care about. We have run debates on the anniversary of Grenfell, and he will know that there are ongoing discussions about that just to make sure that it is what everyone wants. I thank him for that.

My commiserations to the hon. Gentleman's team, but he is also very good at congratulating the victor.

Laura Farris >

(Newbury) (Con)

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Two years ago, Great Western Railway significantly reduced the direct train service between Bedwyn and Paddington. In this week's timetable change, it has halved the number of carriages on the 7.45 train from Newbury to Reading, which has led to significant overcrowding. All that is causing significant headaches for my constituents who commute, many of whom have written to me. Can we have a debate in Government time to address the adequacy of GWR's performance through the Newbury constituency and the wider south-east?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I am very sorry to hear about the situation that my hon. Friend is dealing with. I will certainly ensure that the Secretary of State has heard the concerns that she has raised again today. It is absolutely vital that market towns, including those in her constituency, are properly served by the rail service. What her constituency is having to endure is, I am afraid, not appropriate.

Andy Slaughter >

(Hammersmith) (Lab)

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Can we have a debate in Government time on the regulation of e-bikes and e-scooters? Privately owned e-scooters are uninsurable on public roads. Serious fires are caused by faulty lithium batteries and chargers, and thousands of bikes and scooters are just dumped on pavements every day. What should be a positive addition to transport is a hazard because of the Government's failure to act

Penny Mordaunt > [Share](#)

These are important matters. I know that organisations are changing their policy because of the newly discovered dangers of e-scooters. I will make sure that the Secretary of State hears the hon. Gentleman's remarks. The hon. Gentleman will know that the next oral questions at which he can raise this matter will be on 8 June.

Dame Maria Miller >

(Basingstoke) (Con)

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May I join my right hon. Friend in sending love and condolences to the family of Karen Lumley? She was a great colleague.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is—as you know, Mr Speaker, as our president—a key organisation of the Commonwealth that is headquartered here in the UK. It wishes to change its status from a UK charity to be more properly recognised as an inter-parliamentary organisation. Will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House use her good offices to find time for my ten-minute rule Bill, which would enable the CPA to change its status, to make progress before we rise for the summer recess and help to secure the future of the CPA secretariat here in the UK?

Penny Mordaunt > [Share](#)

I thank my right hon. Friend for all the work she is doing, which I know will be supported by Members across the House. We are incredibly proud to be the headquarters for the CPA and the incredible work that it does. We should retain that, and we want to retain that. She will know that I have made representations to the Foreign Secretary, and I know that he is working on this matter. I thank her for raising it again. I know that she will have not just my support but support from across the House in achieving that.

Wera Hobhouse >

(Bath) (LD)

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The loss of the former Member for Redditch is keenly felt across the House and, although I did not know her personally, as I only entered Parliament in 2017, I send condolences to her family on behalf of the Liberal Democrats.

It is incredibly disappointing to hear from the Bath Interfaith Group that the Government are removing funding for the Inter Faith Network. This comes just a few weeks after the King included “all faiths” as part of his coronation. At a time when polarisation and division are rife, we must support the Inter Faith Network to promote understanding, co-operation and good relations between all faiths. Can we have a debate in Government time on the efforts to promote interfaith relations?

Penny Mordaunt > [Share](#)

I thank the hon. Lady for her kind remarks regarding our former colleague. She raises an important matter. She will know that there are several sources of support and funding from different Departments, but I will let the Cabinet Office know her concerns and ask that the appropriate Department get in touch with her office about this matter.

Sir Paul Beresford >

(Mole Valley) (Con)

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Hopefully, my right hon. Friend will agree that, in seeking net zero, a considerable proportion of our energy production will have to come from nuclear power sources. On that assumption, could she induce a debate in Government time to allow Government to discuss their plans to speed up the provision of nuclear power units, be they large or small reactors, and the prospect of fission and fusion reactors throughout the whole United Kingdom?

Penny Mordaunt > [Share](#)

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The launch of Great British Nuclear and the competition for small modular reactors, along with pre-existing commitments to Sizewell C, for example, demonstrate our ongoing work to build the UK nuclear industry and meet those net zero objectives. We are classing nuclear energy as a green technology and including it in the UK's green taxonomy, which is the right approach. Others who take a different approach are severely misguided.

Zarah Sultana >

(Coventry South) (Lab)

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Coventry University Nursery provides excellent early years care and education for children of university staff, students and the wider community, but the university is threatening the nursery with closure, potentially as soon as September. Not only would that be devastating for the university staff, but the lack of supply of nursery spaces means that parents will be unable to find alternative nursery provision, forcing some—disproportionately women—to leave their jobs and degrees. Parents and unions are calling on the university to reconsider its plans and work to ensure the nursery's survival. Will the Leader of the House give Government time to discuss the importance of early years care and the value of Coventry University Nursery?

Penny Mordaunt > [Share](#)

I am sorry to hear about the situation in the hon. Lady's constituency. She will know that this Government have done a great deal to support the sector and increase access to free childcare. The next questions where she can raise this matter will be on 12 June, but I think she may have secured her objective today in raising that matter on the Floor of the House, and I hope the university is listening to what she says.

David Mundell >

(Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con)

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May I associate myself with everything that has been said about our former colleague, Karen Lumley? She was truly a beautiful person. I also had the privilege of seeing Tina Turner play at the Edinburgh Playhouse as part of the Private Dancer tour. Above all else, she was an incredible live performer and that is important to recognise.

The Leader will be aware that Ofgem has announced that there will be a new lower limit in relation to energy costs for households, saving them something like £426 a year from this summer. But many small businesses, such as the Pyet restaurant and bistro in West Linton in my constituency, are trapped in energy contracts where they are paying way above wholesale prices. Will she bring forward a debate in Government time on the challenges that these small businesses are facing and what can be done to help and support them?

Penny Mordaunt > [Share](#)

I thank my right hon. Friend for raising that important point about people on fixed contracts. Other issues, such as high standing charges, will still be ongoing concerns to Members of this House, even though we have had some good news and expect that trajectory to continue. The next Question Time on this issue is not until 4 July, but he will know that the Department is running surgeries in Parliament on these matters, particularly concerning support schemes and the ongoing issues with regard to bills. He will be able to seek advice on behalf of his constituents at those surgeries, but I will also make sure that the Secretary of State has heard his comments today.

Nick Smith >

(Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)

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As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I really value the work undertaken by the National Audit Office on behalf of our Parliament. Now, despite genuine concerns of financial shenanigans on Teesside, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has stopped an NAO study into the development corporation there. People may ask, “What’s Gove got to do with it?” [Hon. Members: “Very good.”] Thank you.

The Teesside Mayor has previously called on the NAO to undertake an investigation, so to address parliamentary concerns, can we have a statement on the Government’s alternative proposal, and can any appointment include independent voices such as Amyas Morse, the former Comptroller and Auditor General at the NAO? The Government must take action to avoid accusations that concerns are being swept under the carpet—£650 million from the public purse is at stake.

Penny Mordaunt >

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First, on behalf of all Members, I thank the hon. Gentleman for that joke—a joke that only the Secretary of State for Levelling Up would appreciate. He will know that the Mayor of Teesside has called for an NAO-led inquiry—he has done that—and it is right that a lot of money has gone into that area. Just to briefly recap: £80 million to kick-start an investment zone; regeneration projects and levelling-up projects in Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough; more levelling-up funding for Stockton South, Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland; in the Tees Valley Combined Authority, a £107 million investment, the first investment by the UK Infrastructure Bank; freeport status, a carbon capture cluster and a devolution deal; £46.3 million for the combined authority from the shared prosperity fund; millions for Middlesbrough rail station, Central Park business and lab workspace, and Teesworks gateway infrastructure; town deals for Darlington, Middlesbrough, Thornaby-on-Tees, Hartlepool and Redcar; and future high streets funding for Stockton, Loftus and Middlesbrough—all delivered by a Conservative Government and a Conservative Mayor, in contrast with what Labour did in the preceding 13 years, which was the square root of diddly squat and a disgraceful attitude in taking such communities for granted.

Dame Andrea Leadsom >

(South Northamptonshire) (Con)

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I send my love and best wishes to the family of our good friend Karen. She will be greatly missed.

My right hon. Friend will recall that, back in 2018, both Houses voted to decant from this place so that vital mechanical and engineering works could be carried out, yet the Public Accounts Committee has recently said that we are now spending £2 million a week on patching and mending. Does she share my concern and frustration at the lack of progress, and what more can she do to make sure that we preserve this globally important UNESCO world heritage site for future generations?

Penny Mordaunt >

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First, I thank my right hon. Friend for all the work she did to move this forward when she was in this role. She is right: we all understand that this building is not just somewhere we work, but a national heritage site and an international, world-renowned UNESCO heritage site. It must be kept safe and preserved, and on a good day with the wind behind us, it should be enhanced, too.

My right hon. Friend will know that changes have happened to the governance of the restoration and renewal programme. That is making good progress. She is absolutely right, and I know that the Commission, the Speaker, and others at the other end of this place want us to get cracking on that programme. There should be no impediment to that, and I thank all Members of this House who are on those new governance structures and are helping us get there. We hope to get there by the end of this year.

Patricia Gibson >

(North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)

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Unless fair remuneration for postmasters to deliver Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency services can be agreed by the end of June, DVLA products will be withdrawn from post office branches. This will be yet another challenge to the sustainability of our beleaguered post offices. Will the Leader of the House make a statement setting out her views on the importance of our post offices? Given that the DVLA is a UK Government organisation, will she use her good offices to ensure that our postmasters are fairly paid for delivering DVLA services in our communities?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

These are important services. Although many services are moving online, it is important that they are still accessible by other means, too. I will certainly make sure that the Secretary of State has heard the hon. Member's concerns today, but I also advertise that the next questions to the relevant Minister will be on 8 June.

Martin Vickers >

(Cleethorpes) (Con)

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NAVIGO, a social enterprise in my constituency providing excellent mental health services, has been refunded from the Department for the recent pay award to NHS staff, but it has not received any recompense for the one-off payment relevant to 2022-23. That anomaly clearly needs correcting. It is providing the funding from its own reserves, which is a situation that cannot continue. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the appropriate Health Minister to come and give a statement on how they will correct this anomaly?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I am sorry to hear about this difficult situation in my hon. Friend's constituency. I will certainly write to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to make him aware of the situation. I also suggest that my hon. Friend press the Minister on that matter on 6 June, which is in the first week back after recess.

Afzal Khan >

(Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)

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Last week, five young people from Sudan, who are part of the All4One youth group and are seeking asylum in Manchester, wrote to the Minister for Immigration expressing worry for their families who are stuck in Sudan. They have no news about the safety or whereabouts of their loved ones and they are desperate to be reunited safely with their families. Can we urgently have a debate in Government time on the humanitarian support that the UK Government are providing in Sudan, and on what plans the Government have to open safe and legal asylum routes for those fleeing the violence in Sudan?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this matter. Off the top of my head, Sudan is in the top 10 of nations that we take refugees from. Grant rates for asylum applications from that country range from 86% to 94%. On safe and legal routes, more than 40% of those taken in via those routes were children. We already do a huge amount, and he will know we are doing a tremendous amount in-country as well. I do not want to give the impression that we are not taking people via safe and legal routes. The facts speak for themselves. I thank this group of young individuals for raising that issue and their concerns, and I hope what I have said has put their minds at rest.

Peter Gibson >

(Darlington) (Con)

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I thank my right hon. Friend for her positive remarks about the transformation that has taken place in Teesside and the Tees Valley thanks to Conservatives.

Last Saturday, I met my constituent Chloe Daley, who is 25 years old and is suffering from chronic Lyme disease caused by a suspected tick bite when she was eight years old. Chloe has faced more than 15 years of tests, treatment and misdiagnoses. She is now seeking to raise funds for further treatment that is only available in the United States. My right hon. Friend will be interested to note that, despite there being around 1,500 laboratory-confirmed cases of Lyme disease in England and Wales each year, it has not, save for one written question, been raised in this place since March 2019. Can she find time for us to have a debate on the study and treatment of Lyme disease, so that Chloe and others who suffer with the disease can have their voices heard?

Penny Mordaunt >

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First, I thank my hon. Friend's constituent, Chloe, for all the work she is doing to raise awareness of this matter. I understand that the UK Health Security Agency has today published the first quarterly report of this year on common animal-associated infections, which summarises the numbers and cases of laboratory-confirmed cases of particular diseases, including Lyme disease. The UK Health Security Agency is also working on public awareness campaigns, and we are actively seeking opportunities to work with academic partners and research partners, both nationally and internationally. I think it would be an excellent topic for a debate, and he will know that the next Health questions, when he can raise this issue, is on 6 June. I thank him for his campaign.

Sammy Wilson >

(East Antrim) (DUP)

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I pass on our condolences from the DUP to the family of Karen Lumley on her death.

In October this year, according to the GB border model proposals, checks on goods from or passing through Northern Ireland will be implemented and border control posts will be set up at Cairnryan and Liverpool. This is despite the promise that there would of course be frictionless trade between Northern Ireland and GB. Traders are being kept in the dark. They do not know the nature of the checks, what paperwork will be required, whether Northern Ireland goods will be exempt and, if they are exempt, what the criteria for that exemption will be. Despite all that, no statement has been made in this House. Indeed, when I raised these issues with the Northern Ireland Minister, he did not even seem to be aware of them.

Given the appalling nature of how people are being kept in the dark about a new set of border posts within the United Kingdom, and how this will disrupt trade with Northern Ireland, can we have a debate in Government time on how the border control model is going to operate, and an explanation of why the promise of frictionless trade between Northern Ireland and GB is going to be broken?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the right hon. Gentleman for raising this very important matter. This is not just about the integrity of the internal market; businesses need to understand what obligations will be placed on them by these processes and they want clarity soon. He will know that further work is ongoing on a number of fronts in the wake of the landmark Windsor framework. The next questions to the

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland are not until 21 June, so I will write on the right hon. Gentleman's behalf both to him and to the Foreign Secretary, who is heavily involved in these matters as well, to make them aware of his concerns.

Nickie Aiken >

(Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)

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First, can I associate myself with the words about Karen? She had a huge influence on me, and actually took me to my first Conservative party conference in 1993. She will be a huge loss to us and to her family.

At a meeting with Holcroft Court residents in Fitzrovia last week, I was concerned to hear of the myriad problems they are having with their landlord, Westminster City Council, including the failure to secure an EWS1 fire safety certificate, which means they cannot sell properties and cannot remortgage. Will the Leader of the House consider asking one of her ministerial colleagues to make a statement to the House outlining how important it is to ensure that landlords, including local authorities, know the importance of, and the obligations they have on, fire safety?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

This is obviously a critical matter and I am very sorry to hear about the circumstances in my hon. Friend's constituency. She will know that the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is very focused on ensuring that landlords deliver on their obligations to their tenants and that local authorities know what their obligations are. The next questions when she can raise this matter are on 5 June, but given its importance I will also write today on my hon. Friend's behalf to ensure that Ministers are apprised of the situation.

Chris Elmore >

(Ogmore) (Lab)

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In response to the shadow Leader of the House, the Leader of the House talked about the good news that inflation is coming down, but she forgot to mention that core inflation has gone up and food inflation is running at 20%. The Chancellor said in response to the inflation figures that the Government must do more to bring food inflation down, without setting out what he or the Treasury will do. I have raised the issue of food poverty with the Leader of the House over many months. The fact is that people in my constituency are now running out of the surplus food that they purchase from food pantries, as I am sure are people in her constituency and the constituencies of every Member across the House. Can she find time for the Chancellor to make a statement on the Floor of the House to tell us what he is going to do to tackle this spiralling food inflation, where prices are out of control and my constituents cannot afford to eat?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

This is a very important matter and although we are faring better than, for example, other EU nations, it is a concern to many Members. We have faced some pretty unique circumstances, in particular the failure of a sugar beet crop that is doubling the price of sugar. The hon. Gentleman will know that we have a cost of living package totalling £94 billion. The Chancellor is keeping the House apprised of further measures he will introduce, but as the next Treasury questions are not for a while, I will make sure that my right hon. Friend has heard the hon. Gentleman's comments today.

Bob Stewart >

(Beckenham) (Con)

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I am really sad about the loss of Karen Lumley; she was a dear friend who first came to Parliament, with so many of us, in 2010 — actually I am heartbroken.

Last Saturday, I was in Tiya's Café in my constituency—I meet there every Saturday morning—and a public servant said to me, "People would be going back to work in Ministries if they had desks to go back to." Many civil servants are not returning to their Ministries because when they get back, there are, I am told, no desks for them; they have to do their work in nearby cafés on the internet. May we have a debate on this subject?

Penny Mordaunt >

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It would not be appropriate to ask my officials in the box to wave and demonstrate their presence on the estate today, but I thank them. They are in every day, and I certainly think that is hugely important in building a team and ensuring people are trained: presence in the workplace matters. Each Department has its own policy on allocating desks, such as hot desks, and the attendance figures for Departments are publicly available, but I shall make sure the Cabinet Office has heard my right hon. Friend's concerns.

Martin Docherty-Hughes >

(West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)

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I extend my condolences to the Leader of the House. Losing a friend is a very sad and difficult time, but I am sure she will, like many of her colleagues, remember the good times for Karen. I knew her briefly before she left the House in 2017.

As for Tina Turner, I attended her first farewell concert in 1990 at the Scottish exhibition and conference centre in Glasgow. She was a great campaigner for women like her who suffered profound domestic abuse, and she was a committed Buddhist and a champion of the LGBT community. She will be missed.

When Parliament debated the establishment of the diffuse mesothelioma payment scheme on 20 May 2013, the Conservative peer Lord Freud told the other place:

"The issue of individuals who have developed other asbestos-related diseases through negligence or breach of statutory duty and are unable to bring a civil claim for damages of course needs to be addressed." — [*Official Report, House of Lords, 20 May 2013; Vol. 745, c. 690.*]

After 10 long years, is it not time to right the vindictive wrong by having a debate in Government time to ensure that people with other asbestos-related diseases such as certain lung cancers gain access to the right of compensation?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks about Karen. The matter he raises is one for the Department for Work and Pensions. We were right to bring in the scheme and the legislation that enabled it to be stood up. The next questions to that Department are not until 19 June, so I will write to it on his behalf to raise his concerns.

Anna Firth >

(Southend West) (Con)

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Last week, during Water Saving Week, I met Mr Garry Moore, an impressive constituent who has developed a new form of toilet. By using considerably less water, Mr Moore's new Velocity water-saving toilet has the potential to reduce household sewage by 28%. Mr Moore has applied to Ofwat for £500,000 of development funding in partnership with Thames Water and Exeter University, and he hopes to hear good news soon. Will my right hon. Friend wish Mr Moore well with his application? May we have a debate in Government time on the Government's targets to reduce water waste and how we can encourage local innovators such as Mr Moore from Westcliff to help us meet those targets?

Penny Mordaunt >

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May I congratulate my hon. Friend's entrepreneurial constituent? Who knows—the VT may take over from the WC. I wish Mr Moore well in his application. It is through such innovation that we will improve our management of water, which is a vital resource. I hope that my hon. Friend will keep us all updated on Garry Moore's progress.

Navendu Mishra >

(Stockport) (Lab)

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This weekend, Stockport County are playing Carlisle at Wembley, so I wish to place on record my best wishes to the entire team.

I was recently contacted by an NHS hospital trust specialising in cancer care and treatment, which shared with me its problems in obtaining the tracer dye used in highly specialised PSMA PET-CT scans. Despite the importance of cancer scans to the delivery of high quality cancer care, when I subsequently asked the Minister for Health and Secondary Care about that in written parliamentary question 137980, he responded:

“We are not aware of any supply issues with tracer dyes used in PSMA PET scans.”

All cancer patients deserve the highest quality care. Will the Leader of the House confirm who is right: the health workers in the hospital or the Department of Health and Social Care? Will she ask the Secretary of State to correct the record and address this serious and potentially life-threatening issue?

Penny Mordaunt >

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Diagnostics of all descriptions are a priority for the Government, which is why we have uplifted funding and created new diagnostic centres, in part to help us crack through the covid backlog. I strongly suggest that the hon. Gentleman raises this matter with the Secretary of State at the next questions on 6 June, and asks to speak to the Minister. I am not equipped to answer his question, but the Department will be. I strongly suggest that he seeks a meeting.

Bob Blackman >

(Harrow East) (Con)

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I associate myself with my right hon. Friend's remarks about our dear friend Karen Lumley. She certainly brightened up Prime Minister's Question Time—each week, we were not sure what colour her hair would be.

This weekend, on Sunday 28 May, Azerbaijan will celebrate independence day. Azerbaijan was created as the first secular Islamic republic at the end of the great war, after the Soviets had taken over Russia. British troops were involved in defending Azerbaijan against an invasion by the Turks at the time. Azerbaijan was the first country to enable women not only to be represented in its Parliament but to vote—way before we did. However, that did not last long, because the Soviets invaded and, indeed, until 1991 it was part of the Soviet Union. It eventually gained its independence. Will my right hon. Friend join me in celebrating Azerbaijan's independence day and in welcoming the Speaker of the Azerbaijan Parliament to this country in celebration?

While I am on my feet—I crave your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker—I am sure that the whole House will wish us well as the Lords and Commons cricket team embark this afternoon on our first match of the summer, taking on Harrow School in our annual fixture.

Penny Mordaunt >

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Good luck to the cricket team—I think they are going to need it. I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Azerbaijan on the anniversary of its independence and wish those on the inward visit—the Speaker in particular, but also anyone else in the delegation—well. I thank my hon. Friend for enabling us to get that on the record.

Ms Anum Qaisar >

(Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)

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My constituents, like those of many Members, have been impacted by the actions of Apostle Accounting. Many owe large amounts in repayments to HM Revenue and Customs, causing undue stress and anxiety. The current interest rates mean that people, including my constituents, are left owing staggering amounts. Given the scale of the issue, will the Leader of the House make available Government time for a debate on the support that HMRC can provide to the victims of the scandal and how to prevent it from occurring again?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I am extremely sorry to hear about this ongoing situation and suggest that the hon. Lady raises the matter with the Business Secretary. The next oral questions are a little way off, so I shall ensure that the Department knows about her concerns and see whether it can offer some advice on how she can best support her constituents. What needs to happen with regard to that company is clear.

Mr Louie French >

(Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con)

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My right hon. Friend will be well aware of Labour's disgraceful ultra low emission zone tax raid on hard-working people in London, which will hammer businesses and people on the lowest incomes with daily charges of £12.50, or £25 for the likes of emergency workers working nights in my local hospital. Given that yesterday's data revealed that one in two vans are still not compliant, does she agree that the Labour party is not on the side of hard-working people? Will she please advise me on how we can have another debate on the subject as more of Sadiq Khan's claims over ULEZ go up in hot air?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

There is immense concern about how the scheme was arrived at, how it was set up and how it is being administered, and it is causing problems not just for Londoners but for anyone who trades with London. It is clear that its primary aim is to be a tax-raising measure. The Mayor of London has often got on his soapbox and spoken of his concern about the cost of living, support for small businesses in London and so forth. One thing that he could do to alleviate considerable pressures on Londoners, and people elsewhere, is to stop taxing people for going about their daily lives.

Dan Jarvis >

(Barnsley Central) (Lab)

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I suspect that the Leader of the House will be aware that more than 1,200 Afghan relocations and assistance policy-entitled Afghans are stuck in limbo in hotels in Islamabad. To be clear, they are people who supported our mission in Afghanistan and whom the Government committed to relocate to the UK. Having spoken to Ministers this week, I have been assured that the Cabinet Office, the Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities are working to house those Afghans who are already here, but I am concerned that there does not seem to be the same level of cross-governmental work to support those stuck in Pakistan. These are people who have done the right thing and seek to use the legal routes to which they are entitled. I would be grateful if the Leader of the House used her good offices to ensure that activity is undertaken to help get these Afghans to safety.

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this important point. Many Members will know these individuals—they will have worked with them or met them on visits—and I know that this is a concern to many Members on both sides of the House. It is quite right that we use our finite resources in this respect for those to whom we have the most moral obligation, and these individuals are firmly in that

category. I shall ensure that all three Departments have heard his remarks and will encourage them to update the House on the work that I know is ongoing.

Dr Kieran Mullan >

(Crewe and Nantwich) (Con)

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I have been supporting hundreds of residents of Coppenhall Place who overnight found themselves living in homes without planning permission, never expecting that, between them, Countryside and Labour and independent-led Cheshire East Council would let them down so badly. I welcome Countryside's commitment this week to cover residents' out-of-pocket costs, but will my right hon. Friend ask for a Minister to meet me to discuss how we can get all the residents a full investigation and the full compensation package that they deserve?

Penny Mordaunt >

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When I hear about such situations, I wonder how in God's name it could have happened. How on earth does a local authority enable and watch homes being built, in the full knowledge that they have not been through the systems in its planning department? This is a disgraceful situation, and the developer and the local authority need to step up and deliver on their moral obligations to the individuals who bought those homes in good faith. I suggest that my hon. Friend raises this matter at the next Levelling Up, Housing and Communities questions on 5 June. He will know that the Secretary of State takes a dim view of local authorities and planning authorities that do not adhere to their obligations to their residents.

Drew Hendry >

(Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)

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Far from being able to afford what the Leader of the House described as a good bottle of plonk, by the end of this year another 1.3 million homeowners will be looking to renew their fixed-term mortgages, with most having to pay £200 or more extra per month. With inflation as it is, it does not bode well for interest rates. Can we have a debate in Government time on this emerging crisis and what her Government intend to do to support homeowners?

Penny Mordaunt >

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The hon. Gentleman will know that three of the Prime Minister's five priorities are focused on the economy and on enabling precisely the individuals he speaks about to be in a much better situation later this year. I shall certainly ensure that the Treasury has heard what he has said. He will know that the next Treasury questions are on 20 June.

Aaron Bell >

(Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con)

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This year, the ancient and loyal borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme celebrates its 850th anniversary. It is dated to the granting of our royal charter by Henry II in 1173. Sadly, that charter has been lost in the mists of time, but undeterred we have a full year of celebrations, including, on 3 June at Brampton Museum, an unveiling of a re-creation of that charter by Mr Glenn James, a renowned local illustrator. Will the Leader of the House praise Mr James for his efforts, and the leader of the council, Councillor Simon Tagg, and our new mayor, Councillor Simon White, for the work that they have done to put the celebrations together? Does she agree that a debate in this Chamber, perhaps an Adjournment debate, would be a fitting tribute to our history and longevity?

Penny Mordaunt >

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It is incredibly important for our communities that we celebrate important anniversaries, and I congratulate all who are working to make Newcastle-under-Lyme's 850th anniversary so very special. I am sure the whole House would want to congratulate Mayor White, Councillor Tagg and Mr James on the part they are playing.

Dan Carden >

(Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)

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As Lord Etherton completes the LGBT veterans independent review, may I say thank you to the 1,155 veterans, serving personnel, families and professionals who returned to their darkest days and stepped forward to give evidence? For those who lived lives blighted by the historic ban on homosexuality in the armed forces, they now wait, as they have waited for decades, to hear their fate. I know the Leader of the House will fully appreciate the significance to those service personnel affected. There are rumours of a delay, so can she confirm that Lord Etherton has submitted his review and that it will be published on 8 June, not delayed, to allow for full parliamentary scrutiny?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I applaud the hon. Gentleman and I know that all Members of this House will want to echo the thanks he has given to those individuals for the contribution they made to that review. The next Defence questions is not until 26 June and his question is clearly time-sensitive, so I will make sure the Department has heard his remarks today and ask it to update him and the House.

Greg Smith >

(Buckingham) (Con)

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The latest National Farmers Union digital technology survey shows that rural areas are lagging behind national averages on broadband and mobile connectivity, creating a barrier to growth. For example, less than half of respondents believe that their broadband speed is sufficient for the needs of their business, and 33% say that faster broadband would improve their ability to do business. From a safety perspective, only 21% of farmers report a reliable mobile signal throughout their farm. Can my right hon. Friend arrange for an urgent statement to be made to this House on progress on delivering the shared rural network and significant gigabit broadband roll-out for rural communities that we so desperately need?

Penny Mordaunt >

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My hon. Friend will know that this is a priority for the Government. Project Gigabit, our £5 billion mission to deliver fast reliable broadband across the UK, including rural areas, was launched in 2021. As he says, the £1 billion shared rural network deal with industry will focus on rural hotspots. He has just missed Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions, which was earlier today, but the next Science, Innovation and Technology questions will be on 14 June. I encourage him to raise that matter then and I congratulate him on all the work he is doing to ensure that these services are delivered for his constituents.

Kevin Brennan >

(Cardiff West) (Lab)

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May we have a debate on community safety, including the regulation of e-bikes and e-scooters? In doing so, may I express my condolences to the grieving families of **GRO-A** and **GRO-A** who died in the tragic incident in Ely in my constituency this week? May I also express solidarity with the residents who suffered the effects of the aftermath and the police officers who were injured in the ensuing disruption? May I also welcome the call from the grieving families for calm in the community to allow the independent investigation into the events that took place, so we can get to the truth of both the tragic fatalities of such young lives and the events that followed?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I am sure the whole House would want to join the hon. Gentleman in sending our condolences and our thoughts to the Evans and Sullivan families, and praise the families and other voices in the community who have called for calm and explained the role of the police, who are doing a very valuable job for that community. I shall make sure the Department has heard the hon. Gentleman's concerns today. I am sure that if he were to apply for a debate, it would be well attended.

Richard Thomson >

(Gordon) (SNP)

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The running costs for the Scotland Office topped £13 million last year. Judging by its website, its main activity seems to be the production of press releases, mostly extolling the virtues of other UK Government Departments, the subject matter of which allows it to churn out press releases at a prodigious rate of almost a whole two a week. At £180,000 a pop, it must be the most expensive press office in the world. May we please have a debate, in Government time, on what exactly is the point of the office of the Secretary of State for Scotland, what the Department does all day, and why on earth it costs so much?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I suggest that securing record-breaking and historic levels of investment from both the public purse and the private sector should be a starter for 10 for the work the Secretary of State is doing. I gently point out to the hon. Gentleman that the Scottish Government have spent rather a lot of money and time on preparing for independence, which was not the outcome of the referendum that was held. I also suggest that if he wants to preach prudence, he might like to talk to the SNP local authority that this week seems to have decided its main mission is not the emptying of bins or sorting out education, but actually trying to ban bouncy castles.

Karin Smyth >

(Bristol South) (Lab)

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I recently spoke with my Action Greater Bedminster constituents about the benefits of new housing supply in south Bristol. Our Labour council is building more homes for the future, including a heat network to tackle emissions and costs, and social housing. I welcome the Backbench Business debate that the Leader of the House announced for 5 June, but people's biggest concern in relation to building new homes is access to primary care and GP services. Before that debate, can she make sure she talks to her colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to come forward with answers and a plan to make sure we build homes for the future with GP access?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

The hon. Lady's question has been highly efficient. She has saved me the trouble of a stamp, as the Health team are on the Front Bench. There will be two statements today on health, which she might like to attend. I hope she will be pleased with what the Secretary of State says.

Clive Efford >

(Eltham) (Lab)

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The Leader of the House is aware of the cuts to my local train services, which I have raised at business questions on a couple of occasions. The trains that the Government have left us with are old and cost a lot to run. Many do not have lavatories on them. They are very much in need of replacing. Can we have a debate in Government time to all raise our concerns about the condition of our rolling stock and our local rail services, and to plead for improvements and upgrades?

Penny Mordaunt > [Share](#)

That is an important matter for the hon. Gentleman's constituents, which he will be able to raise on 8 June with the Secretary of State at the next available questions. In addition to this Government's investment in both rolling stock and the network, in stark contrast to the Labour Government, who only managed to electrify 13 miles of track, he will know that in those franchises there have been new standards on disability access and other services on those routes. The service that the hon. Gentleman's constituents are enduring needs to improve, and I encourage him to raise that with the Secretary of State.

Mohammad Yasin >

(Bedford) (Lab)

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My constituents have been anxiously waiting for the already significantly delayed East West Rail proposal. Both East West Rail and the rail Minister stated that the announcement would be made this month. Today is the last sitting day that a rail statement could be made, but there is no sign of it. Does the Leader of the House agree that it is outrageous that the Government are deliberately trying to slip out an important announcement about East West Rail, which will have a devastating impact on some of my constituents, just before recess to avoid scrutiny?

Penny Mordaunt > [Share](#)

With all due respect to the hon. Gentleman, I do not think that is the case. Neither he nor other Members of this House would be fooled by such a tactic if one were deployed. I will make sure that the Secretary of State for Transport has heard the hon. Gentleman's questions. He will have an opportunity to ask the Secretary of State about these matters immediately following recess, but I will also raise it on his behalf.

Richard Foord >

(Tiverton and Honiton) (LD)

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The leading comment article in *The Times* this week bore the title "Whitehall Witch-hunt". It follows a decision to no-platform the chemical weapons expert—and Liberal Democrat member—Dan Kaszeta, who is loyal to this country but not to the Conservative party. The decision to rescind Dan's invitation to a conference at the Ministry of Defence is an attack on free speech. Will the Leader of the House ask the Cabinet Office to give a statement to the House reassuring Members that experts can continue to address civil servants, regardless of their personal politics?

Penny Mordaunt > [Share](#)

That is a clear principle. As somebody who changed the methodology that we used at the Cabinet office in our resilience planning to make sure that we were dealing with a wider range of organisations, I appreciate why obtaining input from a large number of organisations and individuals is incredibly important to producing good policy and good outcomes for the people we are here to serve. I can give him that reassurance. He will know that he can raise specific matters with Departments in question time. The next opportunity to do so with the MOD is on 26 June.

Simon Lightwood >

(Wakefield) (Lab/Co-op)

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My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Andrew Western) led a fantastic Westminster Hall debate this week on the Healthy Start scheme. It was timely, as charities are warning of parents using unsafe means to feed their babies because the cost of infant formula has increased so much. The Government committed to reach 75% of those eligible for Healthy Start, but in Wakefield

just 67% receive it, meaning that hundreds of families are missing out. Can we please have a statement on how the Government will increase awareness and uptake of that vital scheme?

Penny Mordaunt >

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I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this important matter. I refer him to the remarks made by the Minister who summed up the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien), who happens to be sitting on the Front Bench—business questions are very efficient today. The hon. Gentleman will know that funding has gone up since that scheme went digital. The Government are doing many other things to support people, including the early years strategy pioneered by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom).

Andrew Bridgen >

(North West Leicestershire) (Reclaim)

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This week, we saw the BBC unveil its new “Verify” unit. If only we had had such a unit in 2021 to scrutinise the disinformation we were told about the covid-19 vaccines. *[Interruption.]* The House might recall that we were told that the experimental treatments “will stay in your arm, not pass around your body”—completely incorrect. We were told, “These vaccines will stop you contracting and transmitting the virus”—completely wrong. Safe and effective is not ageing well. All that disinformation was spread by the BBC itself, which is now holding itself as the arbiter of truth. *[Interruption.]* The question is, who checks the checkers, especially when they have such a chequered history on this subject? Can we have a statement on the discussions the Government have had with the BBC on the setting up of this new unit?

Penny Mordaunt >

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We have all just had a very important moment. We should pause for a moment, because I think we may have just heard the first cuckoo of spring. The hon. Gentleman will forgive Members chuntering from a sedentary position when he asked his question.

The only way that Members of this House and the public can be assured of the facts and arrive at decisions themselves is by having freedom of speech to be able to say things, but also the freedom to learn things and to be uncertain about things. Part of that is ensuring that people can take information from a wide variety of sources. We have reliable and honest journalism of high standards, for which the BBC qualifies, as does the House of Commons Library. I say to all people listening to this debate that we value these things greatly. They are part of our democracy and they should provide certainty for Members in this place and the public. The hon. Gentleman might like to make use of some of those services.

Graham Stringer >

(Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)

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In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith) about the murky dealings at Teesworks, the Leader of the House read out a list of Government spending agreements to the north-east. I am sure that those spending agreements are welcome to those living in the north-east, but that is not the point. The point is that we need a proper investigation into what has been going on in Teesworks with public money.

Yesterday at Prime Minister’s questions, at column 281 of *Hansard*, the Prime Minister said that the Levelling Up Secretary had “already announced an investigation”. No such investigation has been announced to the House, either in a written or verbal statement. We need either a statement on the Floor of the House or a debate so that we can question any terms of reference of the investigation and what was not answered by the Prime Minister: the involvement of those hon. Members of this House who have a financial relationship with people involved with Teesworks, and whether they have influenced their decision.

Penny Mordaunt >

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These are important matters. I will ensure that the Secretary of State for Levelling Up has heard his comments. The hon. Gentleman will know that we will not have long to wait for the relevant departmental question time on 5 June, where all these matters can be raised. I am sure that once terms of reference and how such an investigation would be administered have been decided, the Department will update the House at the earliest occasion.

I was keen to get on record the investment, both public and private, into that part of our country, which has been neglected for a long time, because we need to retain business confidence. When we discuss these matters we should be led by the facts. All parties are calling for focus and scrutiny. I hope that will be delivered, and I hope that business confidence will be retained because that part of our country needs regeneration and opportunity, and that is what we are determined to deliver for it.

Kirsten Oswald >

(East Renfrewshire) (SNP)

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Can we have a debate in Government time about how MPs, in dealing with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Home Office, are expected to support constituents in the face of obfuscation, confusion, delay and worse, including the wrong person's passport being sent out, when all those constituents are trying to do is to get their wee baby home from Pakistan to Scotland? I am really scunnered about this. Can the right hon. Lady tell me how support can be better provided in such cases, where there is clearly additional vulnerability and real pressure on those involved? Can she suggest any additional avenues that I can pursue to help my constituents, as I have already gone down all the roads that one would expect?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I am sorry to hear that the hon. Lady's constituents are having difficulty in getting the relevant support. She says that she has accessed all available opportunities to assist. Has she made use of the surgeries that the Home Office provides and the consular service that the Foreign Office provides? Perhaps if she gives my office a little more detail, I shall see what the best route will be, but having dealt with officials in those Departments who are standing up those services, I know they are doing an amazing job and that they would want to help her constituents.

Christian Wakeford >

(Bury South) (Lab)

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The city of Manchester has a rich and vibrant history, in which those of different faiths and backgrounds have lived together, as well as stood together through difficult times and times of division, so I am concerned that Roger Waters is due to play at the AO Arena in Manchester next month. Mr Waters performed in Berlin this week and used the name of Anne Frank to stoke division, performed while dressed as an SS soldier and used the star of David on a giant pig to insinuate that Jewish people run the world, forcing the Jewish Representative Council of Greater Manchester to issue a statement condemning his divisive actions. Will the Leader of the House agree that such concerts have no place in our society and should not go ahead? Will she agree to a debate in Government time on the record levels of anti-Jewish hatred in this country?

Penny Mordaunt >[Share](#)

I think the whole House was shocked by what the hon. Gentleman said. I shall make certain that the Home Office has heard the hon. Gentleman's concerns. This House has made great efforts, particularly in recent years, to ensure that the scourge of antisemitism is addressed and stamped out from our country. I shall make sure that all relevant Departments have heard the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

Jim Shannon >

(Strangford) (DUP)

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I have the strongest legs in the Chamber, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Leader of House always responds well to the questions that I put to her. Earlier this year, the Ukrainian Institute for Religious Freedom reported that

“at least 494 religious buildings, theological institutions, and sacred places have been destroyed, damaged, or looted”

by the Russian military as of January 2023. Russia’s war against Ukraine continues to rage. Will the Leader of the House enable a relevant Minister to issue a statement in response to Russia’s having recently shut down an evangelical church in Ukraine: the latest incident in Moscow’s systematic campaign of religious persecution against evangelicals in occupied Ukraine?

Penny Mordaunt >

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Attacking places of worship and religious buildings is a war crime. Russia has a long-standing record of domestic repression of religious belief, and that has only increased since its illegal invasion of Ukraine. The hon. Gentleman will know that we have welcomed the findings of the review to take forward the recommendations made in the Truro review, and we will continue to ensure that progress is made on freedom of religious belief, which is central to our wider work on human rights.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for continuing to raise these important issues. He will know about the work of the special envoy on freedom of religion or belief and the Foreign Office, which supports her. He will be able to scrutinise that on 13 June, at Foreign Office questions.

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Eleanor Laing)

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I have been very lenient in letting questions to the Lord President of the Council run, but they have been far too long. I give notice to the Chamber that I will not be so lenient in the next three statements, because we have a lot of business to transact today. I want to ensure that everybody has a chance to contribute in a timely fashion, so we will not have any statements at the beginning of questions; we will just have questions.

Anna Firth >

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On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. At Prime Minister’s questions on 24 May, in reference to the Government’s apprenticeship levy, the Leader of the Opposition claimed

“that almost half the levy is not being spent”.—[*Official Report, 24 May 2023; Vol. 733, c. 282.*]

In fact, in the year 2021-22, 99.6% of the levy budget was spent in England, according to Department for Education data. I am sure the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) did not intentionally aim to mislead the House, but have you had any indication from him or his office, Madam Deputy Speaker, that he intends to come back to the House to correct the record and provide clarity to right hon. and hon. Members?

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Eleanor Laing)

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I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. As I am sure she appreciates, it is not a matter for the Chair. What any Member says in this Chamber is a matter for that Member. The hon. Lady has put her case very well as to why the statistics, as she interprets them, are different from the statistics as interpreted by the right hon. and learned Member to whom she refers. Did she give notice that she wished to make a point of order?

Anna Firth >

Yes, I did, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Eleanor Laing)

I am grateful for her confirmation. It is a matter of interpretation of the statistics. They are not for me to interpret, but I am quite sure that the hon. Lady has made her point well and if there is a need for correction of the record, honourable behaviour in his House will lead that to happen.