AM: Are you going to be meeting Mark Zuckerberg?
JW: I hope so, but it will be up to the companies themselves to decide, obviously, who they want to put up to talk to me. But what I’ll be talking to them about is what the UK government thinks is necessary to keep its citizens safe. Now, I want to make sure that what we put forward is effective in that regard, and I’ll be talking to these companies about how we do that. But I’m not asking their permission to do it, I’ll be talking to them about exactly how we make it effective.

AM: But you don’t know at this stage who you’re going to meet?
JW: Well, I believe that we will be meeting very senior people from all of the companies that we’re going to talk to, and at the moment I expect to be speaking to Mark Zuckerberg as well. But in the end it’s up to those companies to decide how much they want to engage with this process. But the British government will come to its own conclusions about exactly what’s necessary to keep our citizens safe. And there’s no doubt that we can’t any longer, I think, rely on the internet companies to do this for themselves. We need to take action as a government and we intend to do that. But I want to make sure we get the design right.

AM: Well, let’s look a bit at what that might mean. Damian Collins, your colleague who chairs the Culture Select Committee, has said that basically there needs to be a new independent regulator which does for social media platforms what other regulators do for newspapers or, indeed, broadcasters. Do you agree?
JW: Well, you will understand, Andrew, if I don’t set out for you exactly what’s in the White Paper now.
AM: Why not?
JW: Because I want to make sure that the design is right. And let me tell you why. I think it’s very important in the interests of Molly Russell’s family, whose death you mentioned earlier, and in the interests of all those many parents — of which I’m one, by the way — who worries about what their teenagers may be doing online. That we get the design of this system right. In order to do that I have to make sure I’ve worked through the questions we need to ask ourselves, the mechanisms we need to put in place, and the consequences that will follow if online companies don’t meet their responsibilities. When I’ve worked all that through I’ll set them out in a White Paper and then we’ll want to hear what people have to say, and I’m very happy to talk about it more at that stage.

AM: But if can’t talk about a regulator, presumably you can tell whether or not you believe that criminal sanctions are appropriate?
JW: Well, look, what I can tell you is this: I think what’s important is that we have a system in place that sets out clearly what the responsibilities of online companies are, sets out how we expect them to meet those responsibilities, and sets out what will happen if they fail to do so. And the White Paper will do that.

AM: Criminal sanctions?
JW: Well, we will consider all possible options for penalties, and it’s important, I think, that those companies that we will be talking to and those companies from whom we’ll expect a positive response to this understand that there are meaningful sanctions available to us if they don’t do what they should. That’s what I think we owe the families of those teenagers.

AM: A lot of your predecessors have come on programmes like this and said much the same thing, and nothing has changed. How will you be judged as a success or failure in this?
JW: Well, I think we’ll be judged by what we produce and how it works, and that’s one of the reasons I’m taking my time over it. I make no apologies for that. I think what people want to see is a system that will work. So that means making sure that we have thought through the design, making sure we have thought through the penalties, making sure we have thought through what agency should be responsible for holding these online companies to account. Because when we’ve developed this proposal and when we’ve seen it operate, that’s really how we’ll be judged. Whether it in fact succeeds in making the internet a safer place. Because that’s what people expect of us.

AM: Alright. Brexit question: is it still the government’s position that the withdrawal agreement needs to reopened?

JW: Well, we’ve made it very clear, and parliament’s made it very clear, just as importantly, that changes need to be made to the Northern Ireland-Republic of Ireland backstop.

AM: The prime minister has said – she told the House of Commons: ‘it will involve reopening the withdrawal agreement.’ Is that still the case?

JW: Well, the withdrawal agreement sets out the current arrangements for the backstop. So inevitably, if you want to change the arrangements for the backstop then we need to address what it says. There are a number of different ways, as you know, which we might do that, and those are the conversations the prime minister’s having at the moment.

AM: You won’t say that you want to – you insist on reopening the withdrawal agreement?

JW: Well, what is obvious is that parliament, and I think probably people well beyond parliament, are concerned about the potential indefinite nature of the backstop.
AM: I understand all that. There is a very specific issue. Whether or not –
JW: We've got to do something about that. If this is the only way of doing it, then that's the way we will pursue. If there are other ways of doing it that are just as effective that perhaps we haven't explored then we will do that too.

AM: You think a legal codicil or something could be as effective?
JW: Well, as I say, I don't think it's the mechanism that matters, it's the objective. If you can get to a place where the potential longevity of the backstop, the potential that the backstop lasts forever can be adequately dealt with, that's what we're all seeking to do. That's what parliament's been very clear that it wants. It will back this deal if we can do something about the backstop. The mechanism is what we're discussing at the moment. But parliament needs to give the prime minister the space to go and have that conversation with Brussels, to see what we can achieve, and if we can do something about that, then I think it's very clear that parliament will be prepared to support this deal. Very important that it does so, because as you've just been hearing from Airbus and what we've heard from others, getting an end to the uncertainty we have at the moment is fundamentally important. Getting a deal will achieve that, and that's what we should all want to do.

AM: Were you worried about what you heard from Airbus just now?
JW: I think we've all been worried about what we've heard from businesses that are concerned predominantly about uncertainty. And that word was used this morning. The biggest employer in my constituency in Warwickshire is Jaguar Land Rover, they're concerned about the same thing. But actually they have issued an email to all of their employees saying, 'please write to your Member of Parliament saying please back this deal so that we can put an end to that uncertainty.' We are all in favour of ending
uncertainty. The only way to do that is to resolve this question. Either by staying in the European Union, which is not something that I believe is in accordance with what the people have decided they want in the referendum, or by achieving a deal. And it’s achieving a deal that we are entirely focused on.

AM: Okay, another issue. President Trump has said this morning that Britain, like other countries, has a duty to take back Islamic State fighters and put them on trial and deal with them ourselves, or he will release them. What’s your response?

JW: Well, as you know, Andrew, I spent four years as Attorney General. Which is why you’re asking me. And I think it’s clear that if you’re dealing with a British citizen who wants to return to this country, and they’re not a dual citizen, so their only citizenship is British citizenship, then we are obliged at some stage at least to take them back. That doesn’t mean that we can’t put in place the necessary security measures to monitor their activities and make sure that they are not misbehaving. It doesn’t mean either that we can’t seek to hold them to account for their behaviour thus far. But that is a hugely complex problem and it doesn’t just involve the United Kingdom, it involves many other countries too.

AM: It’s also a sort of moral and human problem. Let me ask you about Shamima Begum, who’s very heavily pregnant and as a formal legal man yourself, is her baby British?

JW: Well, I think that is a difficult question. As you said, it’s not straightforward. But what really matters, I think, is to determine what should happen instantly and urgently to her, because we do have to be concerned about the health of that baby. We have to be concerned about her health too. But in the end she will have to answer for her actions. So I think it’s right that if she’s able to come back to the UK that she does so, but if she does so she will do it on the understanding that we can hold her to account for her behaviour thus far. I think that’s the right way to do this.
AM: You’re not going to help her to come back, in other words. We’re not going to send British officials to the camp to get her back?

JW: Well, I think that’s a very different question. What I do think is that British citizens who only have British citizenship are entitled to come back to the UK. That’s a matter of international law. But as a matter of international law too, and domestic law potentially, people also have to take responsibility for their actions, and she will be no exception to that.

AM: Back to the culture brief: do you think the BBC should be responsible for honouring the Conservative Party manifesto when it comes to over-7 year olds and licences?

JW: Well, it’s not so much honouring the Conservative manifesto, it’s honouring the arrangement that was made in the Charter review of 2015, when the BBC accepted that they would take responsibility for this concession. And that means financial responsibility too. So it seems to me that is an understanding that was reached a long time ago, the BBC will have had many years to prepare for this, and of course have very substantial licence fee income to pay for it. So our expectation is clear, we expect them to continue with that concession.

AM: It is a vast amount of money. The BBC says it’s equivalent to the total budgets of BBC2, BBC3, BBC4, the News Channel, CBBC and Cbeebies. Would you be prepared to see those go to pay for the licences?

JW: Of course I don’t want to see those things go. I expect the BBC to continue to provide a good product to licence fee payers, as they’ve managed to do thus far and I’m sure will manage to do in the future. But the figures that you quote, the expectation as to how much this will cost, will I’m sure have been something the BBC have worked out in 2015, and they made this understanding on that basis. Now, I do think it’s important for the BBC to consult, as they have done, to think about all the possible ways in
which they might continue to fulfil this obligation. I support them in that. I will wait to see what conclusions they come to and I will respond, as you and others will too. But I do think that what they expected and what they have signed up to was clear in 2015. It’s clear now, and we continue to expect them to meet that expectation.

**AM:** Kids on the street protesting about climate change. Heroes or truants?

**JW:** Well, look, I think it’s great to see young people who care passionately about political issues of all kinds. Of course we ought to make sure they’re safe doing it, of course we want to make sure they don’t lose out on education as well. I encourage enthusiasm, I hope that enthusiasm can be compatible with people getting a proper education.

**AM:** Heroes or truants?

**JW:** Ah, well, look. I mean, they could conceivably be both couldn’t they? But I think it’s important that we recognise passion, it’s important that we endorse that enthusiasm, but we also say to young people it is important that you get a good education too. School matters, you should stay there for the duration.

**AM:** Jeremy Wright, thanks very much indeed for talking to us. (ends)